



# The Duke of Earl

by James Strauss

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# Chapter One

Darren worked every Saturday morning at the Cannon Club to clean the place for evening dinner. The Officer's Club was not large so he was the only busboy, just as he'd been the only slop boy the year before. The promotion had not come easy as Sergeant Cross, the Club's manager, found him to be too good at cleaning plates and taking care of the kitchen. His promotion only resulted from the prior busboy breaking his leg playing football and the obvious fact that Mr. Wu, the chef, could not stand him.

While slop boy he'd talked non-stop to Mr. Wu, who never answered except to grunt like the three-hundred-pound pig he gave every appearance of being. Because he wouldn't talk, Darren spoke for him, doing his best Charley Chan impersonations. The Chinaman had no sense of humor. When no one else was in the kitchen, Wu would throw a baked potato across the room to smack into the concrete wall to encounter the concrete wall just near Darren's head. Darren was too quick to ever be hit, although he always had to clean up the mess. Sergeant Cross walked in at the one time Wu threw a butcher knife.

Darren thought he was about to be fired over the incident, as chefs like Wu were extremely hard to find and hire...

"Your Dad got you this job," Cross told Darren, pursing his lips in obvious frustration.

"For some reason, you can't get along with Wu, who's normally the most peaceful of creatures. So, since I can't really fire you, you're promoted to busboy. Stay away from Wu. No more pay. You work for a portion of the tips. All tips go into the hopper. Even split between all wait staff."

Darren had no idea at the time whether he was really being promoted or not, until the first distribution of money. His take-home pay was double what he'd been getting as a slop boy.

Jimmy Dorrenbacher walked through the double doors of club calling out Darren's name. Nobody else except Darren was there on Saturday mornings. Dorrenbacher thought the other employees of the "O" Club were idiots, unaware that calling out Darren's name when nobody else was there seemed to make him part of that group. He'd once gone on about how the club was in a different dimension. The local waitresses believed that ice expanded as it melted and flowed water onto the tablecloths, so all the glasses on customer tables had to be filled only half-full.

They also thought that real butter was derived from oil, and then colored. Dorrenbacher had once convinced them that eggs cracked slightly before boiling peeled easier. Forever after all eggs were cracked first, causing Sergeant Cross to get upset because the club's egg usage went way up. When Cross lit into the wait staff about it Darren told him it was Wu's idea. Cross never corrected or spoke to Wu, for reasons unknown, so the practice continued, much to the amusement of Jimmy.

"We're celebrating my promotion," Darren told his friend. "I've got three bucks. We can rent a real surfboard for two hours and then hit the drive-in for Green Rivers, and have enough left for a movie." King's pharmacy on Diamond Head Road served draft Green Rivers. Darren took his with ice while Dorrenbacher, believing he got more Green River for the same price, took his without.

They blasted down Monsarrat Avenue toward Waikiki in Jimmy's dad's Corvair. It was the latest convertible model and the only car on the road with a real factory supercharger. The single speaker radio was at max volume, playing "*Walk Like a Man*" by Frankie Valli. Both boys sang all the way to the bottom of the hill in their best falsetto, finally coming to a stop at the light leading to Ali Wai Boulevard.

“I wonder why we never seem to be able to pick up any girls with this great car?” Jimmy asked.

Darren occasionally thought about that himself. Maybe girls found the laughing and singing a bit too much. He didn’t share his thoughts on the subject with his friend, however.

They made their favorite circuit down the Ali Wai until having to double back on Kalakaua near the McCully bridge. Parking was easy since Darren’s Mom worked inside the Moana hotel complex. The doorman took the Corvair and brought it back without charge any time they showed up. They went inside to change into swimsuits and didn’t interrupt Darren’s mom at work.

The big vertical racks holding the rental surfboards were not far down the sand from the hotel. It was late in the morning so all the ‘guns,’ the really good boards, were gone. They took out an eleven footer, as the ten’s were too hard to catch a wave with. It took both of them to carry it along the sand to Kuhio beach. There they launched and paddled out, Jimmy on his chest at the front of the board with Darren’s shoulders resting on the back of his ankles. Together they made the board streak through the water faster than they could ever walk it in the sand. They paddled all the way to Queens Surf. Queens was pounding, a south swell coming in through the Molokai Express that ran between the island of Oahu and Molokai. Queens was almost never running more than four feet but that day it was running a good six.

The size of the waves scared Darren a bit, as when the larger waves swept up he paddled hard to catch the break and then looked down to figure out where, riding the side of the breaking wave, he would attempt his turns. The water was sucked out of the rough ugly reef and up into the body of the wave. Looking straight down onto the bare cutting surface of the reef was frightening; no matter how many times he rode in just above it, which wasn’t many. Darren was exhilarated, not seeming to notice how often Darren choose to rest by treading

water outside, until, following one monster wave at least eight feet high, he didn't come back out at all.

Darren used the breaststroke to swim out and around the break, slipping inside the reef through one of its many openings. He saw Jimmy pushing shoreward against the side of the board. Changing to the crawl it didn't take long to close the distance. His heart sank, as he got closer. It was immediately obvious why Jimmy was pushing the board instead of riding it. In one hand he held the last foot of the board to which the long skeg was attached. He'd hit the edge of the reef and broken the board riding the big wave.

"Oh no," Darren gasped, taking a place next to Jimmy. "A new board is a hundred dollars or more. My God, what are we going to do?"

"Fix it," Dorrenbacher replied, his eyebrows knit with intent as if he was in deep thought about the project instead of trying to get to shore.

"Fix a fiberglass board? With redwood running down the center? On what planet? In what life?" Darren couldn't believe his friend, although a genius at repairing model airplanes and bicycles, could do anything with a fiberglass surfboard.

They hauled the board into the beach toward Diamond Head, distant from Kuhio Beach and inside Kapiolani Park where no surfers ever hung out.

"You stay with the board," Jimmy instructed,

"I'll get the car and pick you up. We'll take it home and go to work.

It'll cost us a couple of hours extra to keep it overnight, but we need the time for the stuff to cure. Tomorrow morning, we take it back and try to slip it in," Dorrenbacher went on, running off toward the hotel.

"Slip it in? Are you out of your mind? Cure it?" Darren whispered to himself, sitting with the board, wondering if Dorrenbacher had gone completely around the bend. If they had

to pay a hundred dollars for the board it would deplete a huge chunk from his college savings.

A chunk he could never make up, and his father was certainly not going to either.

The ride back to Fort Ruger was without radio or talk. Once at Jimmy's house, they hauled the two pieces of the board inside the garage, closing the door to prevent prying parental eyes. Tools, buckets, airplanes under repair, and different paints and glues littered the walls and work areas. No cars ever entered the garage. Dorrenbacher had taken over the space for his science experiments and mechanical projects many years earlier.

Jimmy cleared a space on the floor, laying down a piece of clean canvas, before setting the broken board gently upon it.

"Now we go to work. We will use a hairdryer for the preliminary drying and heating. The epoxy sets faster and harder when warm. Then we re-work the damaged area for best adhesion, keeping what we can of the redwood stake. Bracing is important so we'll use padded wood clamps. It'll take half the night to set as dry as we need it. Then I'll get up and do the sanding. By morning it'll be ready for a clear coat or two, and then we'll take it back." Dorrenbacher's work plan was laid out in rapid-fire detail as if he'd been arranging the whole thing in his mind on their silent ride home.

Darren marveled. The plan was impressive. It would never work, but it was most impressive. He couldn't help but throw himself into it, knowing all along that the real problem they'd have was much better described by the three words Jimmy'd spoken earlier: "Slip it in."

Darren worked until dinnertime and then took off with Dorrenbacher not seeming to notice his departure. The board was clamped, a one-gallon container of epoxy almost exhausted and two hairdryers burned up before he left.

Sunday morning was a required family breakfast event so Darren didn't make it over to Dorrenbacher's until ten. Each



hour was another dollar on the rental so he ran the distance, jumping the fence to the base and then slipping straight into Jimmy's garage. The board was standing against one wall, Jimmy next to it, smiling.

Darren stared down at the broken end, or what had been the broken end. The board appeared completely as before the accident, except the epoxy color was a gray off-white color while the board was a warm cream. Somehow the redwood strake appeared continuous.

"What do you think?" Jimmy asked, expecting high praise.

"You're a genius," Darren replied. "The board's perfect, but we'll never get it by them on the beach unseen. We can't slip it in. We need something better. We need a story." Darren sat on an overturned pail to think.

"What do you mean? What possible story can we tell except we took the board out and broke it and owe them hundreds of dollars?" Jimmy asked, taking another pail and joining his friend. "What else can we tell them? Someone else broke the board? It was broken when we got it? A meteor flew down and hit it?"

Darren stopped him with one upraised hand. "I've got it. We can't deny anything. We did it. They'll know we did it. My mom works at the hotel, so they'll know her and us. We have to admit it and then increase the value of the board so we don't owe anything."

"And people say I'm the crazy one," Dorrenbacher said, more to himself than Darren.

"Do you have a heating iron, like to burn leather? It's got to have a very sharp point and heat hot enough to melt resin?" Darren asked.

"Yeah, of course," Jimmy answered. "Hell anything hot at all will melt resin. I'll dig it out. What are you going to do with it?"

"I'll be right back. I've got to run home. I've been studying something about surfing, and I think I've got it. Find

the iron and I'll be back in fifteen minutes." Darren took off without waiting for his friend to reply.

He was back in less than the time he'd allowed, out of breath. He took the iron out of Jimmy's extended hand. "Okay brace the board on its side. I need it completely motionless. I'm going to burn near the skeg, by the work we did."

Jimmy padded the floor, got the board down and then used his arms and shoulders to secure it to the floor. He asked no questions, merely staring at his friend in curiosity.

Darren worked away for ten minutes, consulting the slip of paper he'd brought from home. When he was done he sat back, put the iron down and got picked up some fine sandpaper. He sanded away, occasionally picking up some dust from the floor and rubbing it into the burned area he was working on.

"There, done." Darren sat back. "Let's go. The clock is running."

"What were you burning?" Jimmy asked but made no move to look at what Darren had done.

They padded the Corvair's back seat as best they could, jammed the board in, and set off toward Waikiki. The radio played but they didn't sing along this time.

They arrived at the rental station just before eleven. The main attendant spotted them coming and walked straight over.

"Little late. Almost called the police, but remembered your Mom works inside," the big Haole man said.

As soon as he saw Darren's expression however, he went on, "Don't worry, I didn't say anything." The man examined the board. A frown appeared on his forehead.

"You break our board. You break board, you buy board. Three hundred for this special classic." He knelt down and ran his hand over the repair. "Good job here. Strong. Smooth. You pay one-fifty and we keep the board. Still get a quarter an hour."

"We found something when we fixed it. I'll show you. We might want to keep the board and pay you the three hundred.

I don't know. Here, look at this." Darren ran his fingers along the edge right near where they'd worked.

The attendant leaned further down, twisting his head sideways. "Duke Paoa Kahinu Mokoe Hulikohola Kahanamoku," he read slowly, his voice dropping to a whisper. "Duke Kahanamoku. I didn't even know he had those other names." The man stood up.

"Who's Duke Kahanamoku?" Darren asked the man innocently.

"Never mind. You go. We even. You owe nothing. I keep the broken board. Your mom works here. No charge for you. Come next few days, I let you take out a couple of boards for free, just for fixing the board and coming back." Without another word the man gripped the board under one arm and walked away.

"The Duke? You carved The Duke's name into the side of the board? I can't believe it. And you don't know who The Duke is? Only the man who started surfing, that's all."

He stared at Darren, his expression of surprise until he saw Darren start to smile.

"You devil, and he believed you. The Duke!"

## Chapter Two

Shimmying is what Jimmie called it. Darren slowly worked his way across the cinder block wide expanse of stone they called the anvil. Diamond Head.

The mountain. A small stretch of it required passing across a twenty-foot section of stone that fell away on both sides. On the interior of the crater, which Diamond Head formed, it was a drop of fifty feet into bushes. On the exterior side, the drop was four hundred feet straight down into a collection of jumbled boulders and riprap.

Jimmy Dorrenbacher had no fear of heights, not like the paralyzing fright Darren possessed. Once Darren was safely across, Jimmie walked like a ballet artist over the entire expanse, laughing lightly as he came. Darren didn't understand how he did it, as just one glance down caused his own gorge to rise up from deep in his own belly.

Jimmy was Darren's best friend and the smartest person he'd ever known. He went to Punahou, the high class private high school on the island and, although only a young senior in high school, he was already accepted by both M.I.T. and Caltech in their highly touted engineering programs. Darren would be lucky to get into St Norbert College up in northern Wisconsin, and then only because his uncle was the head of the Music Department.

They made it to the very top of Diamond Head together. The highest point of the crater rim wasn't rock. It was concrete. A pillbox had been built during the world war to allow full visibility and surveillance of the beaches by alert Army spotters. The post was abandoned right after the war, along with the cave storage areas dug deeply throughout the crater complex.

After one or two explorations the boy's attention had gone back to the top of the pillbox.

They climbed the mountain every Sunday. At eleven there was a special classical music station broadcast over the radio. They set up the battery-powered machine and tuned in every week. The show always opened with *Claire de Lune* by Debussy, one of their favorites. On each Sunday they followed the same routine. Climbing, hauling the radio and paper-sacked sandwiches along with them. They set up, surveyed the huge beauty of the Pacific Ocean along with the entirety of Honolulu below them, and then complained bitterly about being stuck on such a small island while other kids had the whole run of the United States to explore and play in. Every Sunday they hoped and prayed that their island imprisonment would come to an end soon.

Surfing was the only thing either boy thought they might miss after the got back inside CONUS (the continental U.S.). Darren stared down to take in the break at Canoes, the surf break furthest out from where they sat. It broke along the shore out toward the great saltwater pool complex. Next in was Queens Surf, another break paralleling the shore. Closer in was Kuhio and then Threes, which broke just off Waikiki Beach on a good day. It was a legend that Duke Kahanamoku had ridden from Queens all the way to the beach, to arrive standing up on dry sand when he was done. Over a mile and a half of pure clean surf riding. Neither boy had ever made it past Queens. Conditions had to be exactly right. The board had to be perfect. The surfer had to be an expert.

"Do you think we can run the coast today?" Jimmy asked Darren, chewing on a leftover teriyaki sandwich.

"Nope. Conditions are too low. Look at Queens, the break isn't even over the reef. The high tide won't change that much later. If we can't get a great launch off Queens, then nothing works. Not to mention the crummy rental board we're always stuck with.

The boys never had enough money. Jimmy worked at the coin-operated laundry on Kapahulu, and Darren was a busboy at Fort Ruger's Cannon Club. They saved almost every penny they earned for college. A decent surfboard was a dollar an hour to rent. They always took the twenty-five cent beat up special and shared it. One boy treaded water, waiting for other to return with the board after riding as far as he could. They were considered 'Gremmies' by the other local surfers. Beginners. Surfers to be avoided at all cost. On their first day together at Queens, they had been approached by a group of the locals. They had been threatened.

When the big nasty Kanaka leader had threatened to kick Jimmy's ass Darren had stepped forward.

"Not him. Me. I'm used to having my ass kicked. Really. They did that in school all the time, then dunked my head in a toilet. They called it 'swirling.'

"Is there a toilet around her I'm ready."

The guy had looked Darren up and down for almost a full minute.

"You loco. You crazy Haole. We not want nuthin' to do with crazy Haole."

They had been left alone after that.

The hours passed and the music program ended. It was time to depart. Their families would be expecting them back, never having any idea where they'd gone off to. They came to the stone anvil. Darren always went first. He huddled down to make his way across like a slow caterpillar.

"You know what impresses me, Darren?" Jimmy asked of his best friend.

"No," Darren replied, his full attention concentrated on starting out across the thin stone bridge.

"You're scared to death, but you come up here every Sunday. You never fail to cross this stretch. Why do you do it?"

“I don’t know. I like sitting at the top. I like listening to the music. I like that we are together in doing it,” Darren responded.

“Yeah, but you could go through the tunnel, get to the inside and climb up the bushes to get up to the top of the point. You don’t have to do this crossing, which is so hard for you.”

“I don’t want you to cross alone,” Darren said, his voice strained, his full concentration on getting across the dangerous stretch of the mountain.

“Now that’s what I mean. That is impressive. Uncommon. You’re not a regular kid. I can run across this thing as many times as I want and never come close to falling. You don’t see it. You care. My parents are right about you,” Jimmy said, humor in his tone.

Darren stopped his inching forward progress to look back. “Your parents said something about me? What was it? What’d they say?”

“They say you’re my affinity twin. That twins exist in the universe and every once and awhile they find one another. You’re my affinity twin.”

Darren went back to shimmying along, one inch at a time, looking only down at the stone right under his nose. Drops of perspiration dripped to the whitish surface as he moved across.

“You’re my best friend. I don’t know what an affinity twin is. We just seem to have a lot of fun together.” Darren squeezed out the words, closing on the other end of the anvil. All of a sudden, he felt a great pressure on the small of his back. Jimmy’s right foot landed in front of his nose, as the other boy scampered over him and across to the other side.

“Idiot,” Darren breathed, wondering what created the fearlessness so generic to Jimmy’s entire character.

## Chapter Three

Darren and Jimmy never climbed Diamond Head during the week, as there was simply too much else to do, what with school, homework and real work, but weekends were special.

A small Army facility was located deep down in the bowl of Diamond Head crater accessible by a tunnel located behind the PX in Fort Ruger itself. But the iron grating leading to its entry was either chained or gated at all times. The boys scouted the tunnel entrance many times, because the climb up the outside wall of the mountain, even on the low side, was arduous and painstaking. And terrifying for Darren. He was never sure whether he was more afraid for himself, in crossing the iron anvil, or for Dorrenbacher who seemed to have been born without a fear of heights.

The Tuesday climb was extraordinary, not only because it was during the week, but because it had to be made after getting home from school and before the target time Darren provided to his friend for getting home. The reason for their climb remained a mystery, as Darren wanted to surprise Jimmy with something his voraciously curious mind had never encountered before, nor would likely ever encounter in the future.

They normally began their climb from the Cannon Club, located halfway up the low side of the crater wall to take in the breathtaking views of Waikiki at dusk while they climbed. The swimming pool, adjoining the club, and dug deep into the crater wall, allowed them to take a quick dip to cool off before dressing, and getting ready for the exertions of the adventure.

The Sunday before, when they'd taken their customary break before climbing, they'd run into an unexpected problem. The problem was named Star Black. She'd been at the pool, acting all cool in her sleek beauty, knowing that both boys were attracted to her, but that Jimmy was hopelessly in love. All he



could do was stare at the sinuous college-bound girl, as she performed perfect dive after perfect dive from the one-meter board. Darren knew she was aware of Jimmy's attention because she smiled right back at his stare as if daring him to approach her. Jimmy was so frozen by her stunning presence that he could not be motivated to leave right away.

Star Black was a service brat like they were. Her father was Army and specially housed down at the lowest edge of the base. He was part of something called the Special Forces, rumored to be either a hyper-secret commando squad or a unit in training to run commissaries and recreational facilities, one or the other, but nobody knew for certain. Nobody could figure out which it was, but the tough-looking men who trained there all gave the appearance of being anything but lifeguards or retail clerks. Star's father was enlisted. The kids of the enlisted men didn't hang around with the officer's kids, and Jimmy's and Darren's dads were officers. Jimmy and Darren both had determined that her cold but beautiful presence had to have something to do with the distance she kept from them.

Star was different. She came and went at will, using the "officer's only" facilities, which extended down to the children of officers. She was never stopped or questioned, possibly because she looked for all the world like a full-blown movie star. It might also have been because she was tough as nails, and could outswim, outrun and out throw any of the kids who played sports on the base, male or female. She was also number one in her graduating class at Punahou, the classiest private school on the island. Both boys knew that to be the absolute truth because she'd beat Jimmy out to be valedictorian of the class.

Star waited until both boys were both in the deep end of the pool before she dived into the shallows and traveled underwater three full lengths of the pool. She came up like a rising porpoise not two feet from them. Both boys almost sunk under the surface, as their limbs froze before they recovered. Star smiled her paralyzing smile.

“You two are up to something. Every Sunday you come here, go for a swim and then hike off into the brush with your radio. What are you doing in there? What’s going on? I want to go with you the next time.” She smiled again when she finished, waiting like a beautiful praying mantis about to consume them with one gulp. They’d never heard Star say more than a few words before. She didn’t run in their circle in school, socially or even when she visited the club.

Darren watched Jimmy’s mouth begin to open and knew he was going to blab everything. He punched him in the side under the water.

“Nothing,” Darren answered, ignoring her request to join them. “We just go off into the bushes and listen to the radio. There’s a great classical program broadcast every Sunday morning.”

He smiled back at the beautiful female apparition, knowing that she knew he was lying. It was in her doubting eyes.

“I’ll keep a lookout for you then...until next time.”

She dived and was gone, appearing seconds later to rise from the pool as if by some hidden elevator. There was no stop, grab the side of the pool and hoist up, not with her. She simply slid upward out of the water to a standing position at the pool’s edge. Both boys could only stare as she towed off, and then walked away as if they weren’t even there or she hadn’t made the request that she had.

“What’re we going to do?” Jimmy asked, his eyes still staring toward the last position Star had occupied before she departed.

“Nothing,” Darren replied. “She’s a girl. A different girl, but a girl, nevertheless. Ask her to a dance, or a movie or even to go for a drive, but she has no place on our special outings.”

On Tuesday she became an unavoidable problem. After their swim, they changed and started into the brush, just as before, knowing they were on a deadline to reach the summit and get ready for the event Darren had promised that Jimmy would

observe. For this climb, they carried no radio to slow or weigh them down. Not fifty feet up the winding path to the rim Star stood out from the near-desert bracken of the mountainside. She wore a complete brush outfit, consisting of a long sleeve shirt and trousers, as opposed to the boy's "T" shirts and shorts.

"I'm coming," she stated, placing her hands on her hips.

Both boys stopped in front of her. Neither said anything. There was nothing to be said. They either had to call the adventure off or let her trail along. But they could not call off the adventure, Darren knew, because there would never be a display like the one they were set upon viewing

"Okay," he agreed.

The boys then walked around Star and proceeded up toward the rim.

"Where are we going?" She asked, their pace no challenge to her capabilities. Both boys moved up the path faster than they'd ever gone before. Star stayed right with them, seeming to expend no extra effort to do so.

Darren stopped and crouched down just before reaching the rim.

"We're headed to the very tip," Darren finally answered. "There's a pillbox there. It's Tuesday so the Army's on duty down inside the bottom of the crater. If they see us, they'll chase us off. If we go along the rim, like we do on weekends, they might not spot us. So, we need to figure out how to get to the tip without being spotted."

"If we go over the rim to the inside the brush starts about twenty feet down. It'll be hard going but we can break a trail through the brush. We avoid the rim and they can't see us from below unless we expose ourselves. When we get below the point, we'll find a place to climb up," Star said, squatting to join Darren on the path.

Darren considered, wondering about how Star knew what was inside the crater, but then realizing it didn't make any difference. Her plan was the only plan they had that might work.

The Army was never there on the weekends, so the problem had never arisen before.

The hike and climb took more than an hour. The last part of the climb was made up over the bare rock. There was no way to tell if they'd been spotted from the Army command post down in the caldera, but so far there'd been no activity from down there at all.

"Time check," Dorrenbacher said, looking down at his watch.

"Five fifty-five," Darren answered.

The three of them sat atop the pillbox, knees pulled up and staring off to the right of Waikiki, in the direction Darren instructed.

"Seven minutes to go, exactly," he added, taking a folded-up piece of paper from his pocket. He kept it clutched in one hand.

"What are we waiting for?" Star asked. "It's truly wonderful up here. Thanks for bringing me along." She smiled her dazzling smile.

Darren watched Jimmy meltdown completely. He frowned to himself. How were they going to get rid of Star in future returns to their special spot? She was beautiful, but remote and intrusive. He knew Jimmy wouldn't understand at all if he approached him about the subject.

"He won't say," Dorrenbacher said. "He's got some special information from his Dad, who's in the Coast Guard. That's it. But I trust that whatever it is will be worth our efforts to see,"

Jimmy went on, as Darren remained silent, surprised that Dorrenbacher had so much confidence in him.

"Dad didn't tell me anything," Darren offered. "I found some papers in the special drawer where he keeps his orders. I check it all the time to see if we are going to move back to the mainland anytime soon." He was about to share the data from the piece of paper when Jimmy held out his watch and started to

count down from sixty. The three stared at the horizon Darren indicated they watch but nothing happened at the appointed time. Jimmy looked over at Darren with a skeptical expression. The event took place at that instant.

A white light flashed from the horizon and passed over them, taking the island from evening to mid-day. The effect lasted about five seconds. It was followed by a blue light of the same intensity and length, and then green, yellow and then deep red. The eerie effect seemed to take much longer than it did until the red faded away. On the horizon a yellow orb slowly rose up, starting at the size of a rising ping-pong ball but slowly growing into the size of a blazing white basketball.

As one, the three climbed to their feet. The effects were so stunning and foreign that fear registered on all their faces, including Darren's.

"What is it?" Jimmy asked, his voice low and trembling.

Very slowly the intense yellow sun on the horizon began to fade before Darren unfolded the piece of paper and began to read.

"Project Housatonic. Johnston Atoll located eight hundred and sixty miles due south of the Hawaiian chain. Nuclear test number thirty-three of the Dominic series. Eight point three megatons, airdropped from an altitude of thirty thousand feet. Project purpose to gauge damage to a flotilla of ships gathered across sixteen square miles of the sea below."

"Almost a thousand miles away. Wow!" Star remarked.

"Is your Dad out there on one of those ships in the flotilla?" Jimmy asked, both he and Star turning to look at Darren directly.

The light from the nuclear explosion faded to a soft glow, little more than a brilliant bump on the horizon, although still brighter than Oahu's late day sun.

"Yea, I suppose so," Darren replied, wondering why he hadn't thought about that until Jimmy mentioned it, a thin shiver of raw fear passing through his center for the first time. He

stared out over the city of Honolulu, realizing that there were no lights, although full darkness was not far off.

## Chapter Four

Darren was as little prepared for the awesomely frightening nuclear display as Jimmy had been. Star Black had taken it best, although her comment when they got down from the mountain neither understood “I don’t understand what’s such a big deal about it, after all, it was just a big light show.” The ‘light show’ had gone on for nearly half an hour, the city lights of all Honolulu going out, as if with the coming dawn but not from that at all. That there had been no sound from the event made the whole experience of witnessing it more than a bit eerie.

Somehow, however, Star, likely because of her forcing herself upon them and the bonding effect of experiencing the unnatural light show together, had inadvertently become a de facto part of their group. The boys’ very mild and passing comment about making their regular climb they’d already planned for the following Sunday had not gone unnoticed either.

“Sunday. What time?” Star asked as they made their way back along the Ewa, or western, lip of the crater. Star Black showed about the same level of fear over crossing the ‘iron anvil’ part of their passage as Jimmy did, both crossing without shimmying over like Darren was always forced to do...

“Ten,” Jimmy replied, not looking at Darren as they walked, and therefore not giving him an opportunity to offer a reasonable argument against the aggressive girl’s attendance.

They climbed down the mountainside into the back portion of the Cannon Club, leaving Star to move toward the pool. After that they both went toward Darren’s house, located at the very back of Fort Ruger, befitting his father’s relatively low status of warrant officer. Whereas Jimmy’s father, a major in the Army, thought of Darren’s dad’s warrant rank as being the best rank of both worlds. Darren’s dad believed the designation was not ‘real’ at all, in the extremely rigid rank structure of the

military, but only made up to keep certain experts in the service at higher pay than enlisted schedules allowed. Warrant officers escaped criticism for most things regular officers would receive as a matter of daily or weekly assignments. Warrant officers didn't command, they simply performed analytical duties.

"Is she going to be coming every Sunday?" Darren asked his friend, as they approached the house, his dismal tone betraying his feelings about the idea.

"I don't know," Jimmy replied. "The world is changing. Life is changing. We both just watched it with our own eyes. Maybe we need to, or are going to be required to, change along with it."

Jimmy didn't look at Darren as they arrived at his house.

It was unlike his friend to be anything but bright and bubbly, which caused Darren to exercise more care in talking to him than he normally would.

"Life is changing but we don't have to change too quickly," Darren said, after a few silent moments. "We'll both be in college soon. I got accepted at St. Norbert in Wisconsin," Darren went on, wondering why the information he'd been carrying excitedly since the day before seemed so mundane considering what they'd just witnessed in the sky, the attachment of

Star Black to them as something of a superior friend, and the unspoken fact that they would soon be parting, perhaps never to see one another again.

"You got in?" Jimmy gasped out. "You? With your dunce cap grades. You got into a top-rated liberal arts college? How did you pull that off?"

Jimmy's mouth hung open in surprise after saying the words, his eyes round with wonder.

"My uncle's head of the music department," Darren replied, "He got me in. I must work three jobs to pay tuition, though. I only saved enough of the money to get me in for the first semester, and what have left after that won't last long. I'll



be washing dishes, running the switchboard, and then cleaning sidewalks and parking lots.”

“You’re going to college on the Mainland. There’s no justice in the universe,” Jimmy said, his mood worsening, even though that didn’t seem possible.

For some reason, the stunning display of being able to witness the effects of a nuclear explosion hadn’t affected Jimmy in any way Darren might have been able to predict.

“Gee, thanks for the encouragement and support,” Darren replied, his own mood sinking nearly to the low level of his friends.

“That’s not it, and you know it,” Jimmy said. “Mom won’t let me leave the island, at least not without her leaving too. Dad won’t pay the money, although I can get a scholarship almost anywhere if I apply. I still must pay for books and junk, though and I don’t have a job like yours. The University of Hawaii isn’t accredited yet. They’re working on it. I must go to an unaccredited college. Unaccredited, maybe never to be accredited. I’m happy for you though, and I hope your Dad is okay.”

Darren winced at the mention of his father. There would be no way to know what had happened out under that fireball until somebody either called or he came home aboard the ship he’d left on if there still was a ship at all.

“Well, I do have some good news that’ll make you smile,” Darren said, as they began to walk together to the back of the residence.

“Anything and I mean anything,” Jimmy said, not looking at all like anything could cheer him up.

“Last year I took Judy Levy to the prom. She wants to go steady. I didn’t answer her but I’m invited to her house on Saturday morning. She said you can come along,” Darren offered.

“Why would I want to go to her place, other than the fact that she has those big, well, you know, and she goes to Punahou,

not Maryknoll. How do you, of all people, know her. She's taller than Star and you're..." Jimmy didn't finish the sentence.

Darren let the unspoken slight about his just a little over five-foot height go without comment. "She likes my military uniform, and Maryknoll puts on these formal military balls all the time. The girls love to get a date to go to them. And Saturday's invitation has nothing to do with attending because of her stunning appearance. Her sister's even prettier and was runner-up in the Miss Hawaii contest. She's dating the star of a movie filming out here called "Girls, Girls, Girls."

"Big deal," Jimmy sighed out, his tone acidic. "A movie star. Really. That's supposed to cheer me up? You're losing it. I'd rather attend one of my mom's church socials. At least I get to play the organ for those. "

Darren reflected on just what a musical genius Jimmy really was. He could play more instruments than Darren cared to count.

"I suppose you're right," Darren responded, making his tone as casual as he could. "The rays from the nuclear explosion affected me, like the bite affected Spiderman. Don't you want to know who the star is?"

Jimmy didn't reply, instead of turning to make his way onto the cheap wooden porch that lined the back of the Army housing quarters. It's full view of the Koko head crater and Hawaii Kai in the distance ignored by almost anyone using the porch, including the boys.

"Elvis Presley," Darren whispered, almost inaudibly, then started walking quickly towards the wall surrounding the base, heading for his own home on 16th Street a few blocks away.

"Elvis," Jimmy shouted, racing to catch Darren. "Elvis Presley? You've got to take me. What will I wear? Can I bring my guitar? What about Star? If I bring her she'll be mine for sure!"

"See you Saturday," Darren said, laughing as he easily scaled the twelve-foot lava rock wall.

“Where? When? What should I do?” Jimmy yelled up Darren.

“Judy lives right here on the base with you. Her dad’s Colonel Levy, United States Air Force. You’ve walked by her house a dozen times, or even more. It’s the biggest house on the base.

“What time and where,” Jimmy shouted, as Darren leaped from the top of the wall to the other side.

“Ten,” Darren laughed, happy that Jimmy’s depression had been so instantly lifted. “I’ll be at your front door at ten minutes to.”

Darren heard his friend literally dance away from the other side of the wall, laughing and singing a number that Gene Kelly had sung in the movie “*Dancing in the Rain*.” He smiled to himself. There was some good in the universe. His smile was short-lived, however, as he thought about his dad and the stunningly huge effects that had been created by the exploding nuclear warhead. Johnson Atoll was so far away. What must the explosion have been like to those much much closer to it?

The big morning came. Darren showed up early at nine but waited outside on the back deck while Jimmy finished his chores. The brass had to be polished once a week, the wood floors scrubbed and the wash sprinkled and refrigerated for Sunday’s ironing. Both boys had similar chores although Jimmy’s Dad had never been a Chief Boatswains Mate in the Coast Guard so he was much more gentle in dispensing criticism of the work. The quarter a week Darren was paid as an allowance since he could remember had meaning but not nearly as much as the forty dollars a week he earned at the Cannon Club since his recent ‘promotion,’ from working as a dishwasher to busboy. Family tradition and hard disciplining from his parents had no bearing on his newfound income, however, except for the fact that his dad had gotten him the job in the first place.

“Thank God you didn’t bring Star,” Darren said to Jimmy as they walked the short blocks to Judy’s house.

“I tried, but she said she could care less about meeting a sleazy, low-class former southern truck driver.” Jimmy looked over at Darren when he said the words, as if in apology for anyone who could possibly describe the man he himself felt was among the greatest entertainers to ever live.

“Elvis was a truck driver? I thought that was Mario Lanza,” Darren commented, as they arrived at the front door of Judy’s house.

Jimmy didn’t answer, his full attention on the house before them.

The main door was open. Only the screen door was shut, although it was ajar. Darren remembered his instructions not to knock if the screen door was ajar, but to simply enter and proceed to the living room. Gently and quietly both boys opened the door and stood in the silent hall. They took off their flip-flops carefully, as if altar boys preparing for church service, and then crept along the polished oak floor to the opening at the far end.

## Chapter Five

There was only one person sitting in the room when Darren and Jimmy entered from the hall. Jimmy brushed against a lamp and had to settle it back on its table with both hands shaking in nervous anticipation about what he had glimpsed. A man sat at the far end of an overstuffed couch, next to the fake fireplaces set into the upper officer's quarters on the base. Judy's father was a bird colonel. Jimmy had started the ever-persistent rumor that the fake chimneys rising from the houses were put there by workers with a sense of humor. The chimneys represented middle fingers raised to all of lesser rank.

The man on the couch was Elvis Presley. Not the polished costumed Elvis as seen on television, but the man himself, nevertheless. He had the vague angled Elvis smile on his face and the jet-black hair, but that was about it. He wore jeans and a mainland sport shirt, unlike almost all tourists who came to the island. Jimmy and Darren both wore the much more common island "uniforms" of shorts and washed-out aloha shirts, with bare feet. Sometimes they wore flip flops or go-ahead, as the natives called them because nobody could walk backward in flip flops.

"He...hel...hello boys..." Elvis stammered out, reaching for a guitar leaning against the arm of his couch.

Both boys stood frozen, unable to move or say anything in response. Elvis sat before them. Elvis Presley. And he stuttered. Elvis Presley stuttered. They were both dumbfounded.

Judy Levy came into the room with her sister Alice. Both were beautiful, but Alice was unbelievably stunning. They were dressed as if they were going out on formal dinner dates.

“Did you guys say hello to Elvis?” Alice asked, sitting next to Elvis on the couch. Judy took a place sitting at the other end of it.

Darren and Jimmy both nodded to each other with big smiles, although neither had said a word since stepping into the house.

“Why don’t you guys sit on the rug by the fireplace,” Alice said, pointing across the room. “Elvis will play a few of his songs for you.”

They moved and sat down in unison, backs to the fireplace, cross-legged, as if responding to the order of some unseen drill instructor, rather than the beautiful woman who then took Jimmy’s place on the couch.

Elvis played a few notes on the guitar, adjusted the strings while staring intently down at his fingers, before truly beginning. He played two riffs and then sang *Love Me Tender*, one of his signature songs.

Darren and Jimmy sat as if hypnotized, unmoving and barely breathing. Elvis ended the song with sign of sadness, but then, when the final note died away, he put the guitar down and laughed.

“Aura Lee,” he said, looking at both boys with merriment in his eyes. “Real songs from...the...Civil War,” he managed, getting the words right but rushing the last two as if he was relieved, he’d gotten them right, and also keeping his voice at an expressive level that more like soft singing than talking.

Judy and Alice talked to Elvis but neither boy would recall what they said, or even if Elvis answered. After two more songs, *Return to Sender* and *Girls, Girls, Girls*, from the movie Elvis was starring in, Judy walked over and reached down to take Darren by the hand, letting both boys know the session was over and it was time to leave. They thanked Elvis but he ignored them, continuing to work at tuning the guitar.

“They’re filming down near the Moana Hotel at the volleyball courts next Saturday,” Judy said at the door. “Alice

said it would be okay if you guys came by. A lot of important people from Hawaii will be there.”

Judy smiled possessively at Darren while she talked as if she was offering the visit to the movie set with the idea of getting something very important in return. Darren shivered a bit, but not visibly.

They headed toward Jimmy’s house, floating more than walking. Even though Elvis had never been a favorite of Darren’s he realized that the short performance in the Levy living room was something extraordinary and was very special indeed.

“He laughed after he finished each song,” Jimmy said, his voice hushed in amazement, “and it was like there was a part of him in each song. Like he was living it more than singing.”

“He stutters, or stammers or whatever they call it,” Darren said, in wonder. “Elvis Presley stutters but nobody’s ever said anything. Not on television or the radio or anywhere. That’s amazing.”

That night Jimmy and his parents came to the Cannon Club for the first time since Darren had been working there. Darren was able to convince the hostess to give them the general’s table located at the outside corner of the place. Midway through the dinner Darren was able to steal Jimmy away from the table in order to show him Wu, the Chinese Chef from hell, chopping up chickens on the big cutting board in the center of the kitchen. Jimmy had never expressed anything but skepticism for Darren’s stories about the man’s violent attacks. They went through the swinging double doors together.

Wu stood behind his stoves, counters, and racks of inscrutably derived ingredients for his Anglo-Asian meals. Both boys stopped in front of the counter, behind which stood Wu, nearly as wide as the stove just behind him pushed up against the wall. Wu’s face held no expression. He stared intently at one boy, and then the other.

“Hey Wu, how you? Makee good cookee aw a time,” Darren said. You cook, you fat, we look, what dat?” Darren went on teasing the man.

He was rewarded with no change of expression at all. The Chinese chef simply stared, but as the boys were about to turn and leave the way they’d come in Wu’s right hand moved faster than the eye could see. An aluminum foil-covered baked potato struck Jimmy in the center of his forehead, splattering everywhere and driving him right across the room and into the far wall of the kitchen.

“You’re nuts Wu, just nuts!” Darren yelled as he raced to help his shocked and injured friend. He didn’t miss Wu heading for the ovens containing more baked potatoes, however. He grabbed Jimmy by the arm and dragged him through the kitchen toward the back alley, dribbling chunks of hot potato as he went.

“C’mon, Jimmy. We’ve got to get you cleaned up or your parents will notice. There’s a hose out back. They staggered together through the door.

It took several moments to wash the debris from Jimmy’s hair and survey the damage. The alley was near dark, with only a single bare bulb illuminating it.

Other than a red circle the size of an orange in the center of his forehead, Dorrenbacher was uninjured. Darren knew the other boy’s mental faculties were in order because of the depth of anger radiating out from his eyes.

“I didn’t do a thing,” Jimmy hissed out. “He hit me. I can’t believe that low-life cretin of a low-life cook hit me with a potato.” Jimmy staggered around the alley, pressing a damp rag to his head. He came to a stop and looked down, dropping the rag to his side. “Who comes out in the alley to get supplies from the lockers here?” he asked.

“Wu,” Darren replied, looking at the long row of eight-foot-tall, refrigerated lockers. “Nobody else, other than me and Sergeant Cross. Cross has a key to the lockers. He’s always



afraid of getting caught missing something. His commanding officer sends people to inspect once a quarter, or so.”

“Help me with this,” Dorrenbacher ordered, leaning down to grip something.

“What are we doing?” Darren replied, bending down to help his friend.

“We’re pulling up the grate. The hole looks about right for Wu to fit into. When he goes down they’ll have to pry him out of there using crowbars, or carve him up with butcher knives,” he said, starting to laugh a low evil-sounding laugh.

“You’re crazy. Wu saw us come out here. He’ll tell Cross. I’ll get fired!” Darren argued, nevertheless pulling as hard as he could against the resistance of the heavy iron grate.

They worked for five minutes to get the grate out and then move it far enough along the length of the concrete so as to be invisible in the poor light. Darren took a last look at the rectangular hole, the alleyway too dark to really see it, much less recognize that it lacked a grate. Jimmy went back to his table and Darren worked to bus backed-up tables.

Jimmy’s parents didn’t notice the mark left by the impacting potato. Dinner dragged on and on, until Jimmy’s dad complained about something to the hostess. Darren flitted in and out of the kitchen, moving as fast as he could to avoid any further confrontation with the mad chef...until Wu wasn’t there anymore.

Evelyn called to Darren, as he was leaving the empty kitchen to bus a table.

“Where’s Wu?” she asked. “He’s been gone too long. Go out back and see if he’s getting something from the lockers. People are starting to complain.”

“Oh God,” Darren whispered, slowly making his way toward the door to the alley, as fear began to build inside him. “Oh God,” he said to himself again, as he noted the barely visible black hole in the concrete and no open lockers. Wu was nowhere to be seen. Very slowly Darren approached the four-by-

four foot square of blackness. Hesitantly, he peered over the lip but only blackness met his gaze.

“Wu?” he whispered, with both hands cupped over his mouth. A low mournful moan came back up out of the hole. Hoping he’d heard wrong Darren tried one more time. The same pitiful sound came back. Darren ran for the kitchen, and then out through the serving area to the customer tables.

“Jimmy, can you help me in the kitchen for a second?” Darren asked, standing at the Dorrenbacher table, trying not to show the agitation slowly rising to the level of panic.

“Better help your friend son, or he may just leave a wet mess right here,” Major Dorrenbacher said, his humor so contained he didn’t smile at all when he spoke.

“Wu’s down the hole, just like you planned, except he went all the way down,” Darren said, as forcefully and quietly as he could. They walked quickly toward the back of the restaurant. “I don’t know how deep the hole is but I think Wu’s pretty far down.”

They arrived at the black maw. Jimmy got the same groaning result Darren had. “He’s down there alright. This was a bad idea of yours. We need a rope. If he’s not stuck, fat pig that he is, we can lever him up with one of those long poles over there, but we’ve got to move quick. Somebody’s going to miss him soon.”

Darren found a thick rope near the side of the building, used to prevent trucks from entering the alley after hours. He removed the sign attached and rushed back to where Jimmy knelt at the hole holding the end of a twenty-foot metal pole. He mouthed the words Jimmy had spoken: “bad idea of yours.” It had all been Jimmy’s idea, but that had changed in the other boy’s mind as the import of what they had done struck home.

Jimmy put the pole down. “Give me the rope,” he instructed, taking the thick hemp and moving his hands quickly around and around until he had a noose. “We’ll drop it down, get Wu to grab hold, and then slowly pull him out.”

He dropped the noose down the hole, having adjusted the 'loop' portion so it was about three feet in diameter. They knew Wu received it because they heard it hit him, and then his gasp of shock and pain.

"Wu," Jimmy yelled down the hole. "Grab the rope and hold on or put it under your arms. We're going to pull you out."

Darren was amazed at Jimmy's competence under fire. The knot had been thrown into the rope in seconds. They'd only been in the alley for minutes.

Jimmy wrapped the rope around the pole three times and handed the end to Jimmy. "I'll use the pole as a lever about four feet from the hole. Every time I push up on the pole, we ought to get Wu about a foot up the drain. Take in the slack each time and friction ought to keep him coming up, as long as you keep pulling with enough strength. Got it?"

Darren nodded. Dorrenbacher worked like a piston. His body bent and straightened with some speed. It took thirty pulls to bring Wu to the top of the hole. Jimmy almost dropped the pole, and Darren the end of the rope, when the disheveled chef finally appeared. The noose was tightened around the Chinamen's neck, and he was hanging onto it with both hands. Jimmy pulled upward one more time as Wu struggled to remove himself from the drain.

Both boys dropped the equipment. Jimmy started to laugh. Wu was covered in black and brown junk of the most awful kind. His hair was a mess and his expression murderous. He got out of the hole and crawled toward the kitchen door, trying to loosen and remove the choking noose from his neck.

The boys ran, leaving Wu to struggle. Once inside the door, they went no farther. They were bent over laughing when the hostess came in. Tears streamed down Jimmy's face. He fought to wipe them away.

"Where's Wu? Did you find him? Is he out there taking a break?" she asked, heavy scolding in her voice. "I'm going out

there myself.” She opened the door and then saw Wu. The Chinaman was like an apparition.

Goop flowed from his entire body. He stood but wavered slightly back and forth as he moved slowly to enter the kitchen.

“You’ve been back there drinking, haven’t you?” the enraged hostess yelled. “Get your act together right this minute or I’m calling Sergeant Cross. I mean right now.”

Both boys fled to the serving area. Jimmy brushed his hair back and straightened his shirt and trousers.

“Elvis was great, but I’ll bet he’s never sent a Chinaman to hell and brought him back in less than twenty minutes,” Jimmy said as if it was something they did all the time, and somehow Elvis was the lessor for not having participated.

## Chapter Six

Sunday dinner at the Cannon Club was the big event of the week. Darren went in early, more to figure out how to accommodate, or at least survive, the rage Chef Wu would be expressing, than anything else. There was always cleaning to be done so nobody ever argued about the hours, but then Darren's compensation was based almost completely on tips anyway.

With great trepidation, and waiting until Evelyn, the hostess, was inside the kitchen, did Darren gingerly push through the swinging double doors and enter after her. Wu stood as he had the evening before, wearing his pristine white uniform and ridiculous chef's hat that made his squat round head look like a mushroom. The short, but extremely stout, man gave no indication of what, if any, emotion he might be feeling. His face was as impassive as that of any great poker player.

Darren attempted to creep past the hostess to access the shelves where water glasses and plates were stored but he didn't get far.

"You, Darren boy. You, I talk to you," Wu said, his voice harsh and gravelly.

One stubby arm extended out from the short but very powerful man. A single finger pointed and pinned Darren to his spot before the dish rack.

Darren turned white, balancing his weight equally on both feet with knees bent, ready to dodge in any direction should an object fly from Wu's other hidden hand.

The hostess disappeared through the doors to the dining room, leaving the twin panels swinging back and forth, squeaking gently until they finally stopped. The kitchen grew

almost totally silent, with only the quiet hiss of gas flowing steadily from under the twin cooking grills.

“You, and other boy, you save Wu’s life,” the Chinaman said, slowly dropping his arm back to his side. Wu then bowed at the waist; his bow so deep that his head nearly touched the hot grill in front of him.

“I honor you,” Wu whispered, his voice almost impossible to hear with his face pressed down only inches from the grill. “I respect you. You friend to Wu. No one has ever saved Wu’s life before.”

Darren was dumbstruck. He found it hard to believe what he was hearing. Wu had come away with a completely different interpretation of what had happened the night before, which only began to make sense after Darren started to think about it. Wu had no inclination that the boys had removed the grate in order to have him fall down the shaft underneath it.

The chef had no idea that they’d only saved him because they were afraid of getting caught by Sergeant Cross, or worse.

“You are a great chef Wu,” Darren said. “We appreciate your genius in the kitchen so we can all have jobs.”

He watched Wu’s head slowly rise up. The man’s beetle brows knit together, as if in surprise or wonder, or possibly with the anger in understanding what had truly happened.

Darren wondered if he’d overdone his compliment, but Wu only bowed again.

“Good friend. Good friend to Wu. Other boy too,” the chef said.

Darren worked his shift, realizing for the first time since starting the job the summer before, that it was much easier to work with the chef’s support and friendship than it had been before. He wondered if his own situation back at Thornton Fractional High School, back in Calumet City, where he’d been brutalized by bigger students, had influenced his own conduct with the Chinaman. His teasing had been non-stop, followed by

violence or attempts at violence. He hated to think that he might have had a role to play in Wu's prior bad conduct.

Saturday morning came early for both Darren and Jimmy. They were not going to miss anything by being late for the beach film shoot at the volleyball courts near the Moana Hotel. They considered themselves personal friends of Elvis Presley and nothing could have kept them from showing up to be a part of the film set.

Judy was going to be there just before ten, and escort them through security. Darren had avoided seeing her through the week, knowing he had less chance of screwing up his first-ever visit to a movie set than if he saw her.

"What have you got against going steady with Judy?" Jimmy probed as they blasted down Monsarrat Ave toward Waikiki. The turbocharged flat six-cylinder of the engine screaming in protest, as Jimmy refused to shift until the thing was running beyond the redline.

"She's pretty and has this wonderful body, and she had us over to meet Elvis."

Darren would have preferred turning the radio up and singing at the top of his lungs, but he could not avoid Jimmy's questions for long, that he knew.

"I've been up to her bedroom," he confessed, deliberately changing the subject to one that Jimmy could not possibly avoid.

The Corvair Monza Spyder swerved, almost hitting a parked car, as Dorrenbacher jerked the steering wheel, and nearly losing control. He caught the mistake and got full control of the wheel again. They continued driving down the side of Diamond Head on Monsarrat Ave way over the speed limit.

"Bedroom?" Jimmy finally got out. "You've been to her bedroom? In her bed? Have you..." but he didn't finish the question.

"No, not in her bed, well, maybe sitting on the edge of it, but nothing else," Darren replied. "What I saw while I was sitting there bothered me though."

The wind swirled around the inside of the convertible and music from the radio made further speech almost impossible inside of the car until they got to the red light located at the bottom of the road next to the library.

“It was her mirror,” Darren said into the comparative silence.

“Mirror?” Jimmy gasped; his voice filled with shocked amazement. “What could her mirror have to do with anything? Have you lost your mind?”

Jimmy turned right and headed the Corvair down Ali Wai Boulevard at low speed in the traffic, as he talked. “Mirror, mirror on the wall...that sort of thing?” he kidded.

“No,” Darren responded, “nothing like that. It was the photos.”

“Tell me,” Jimmy ordered. “Are you going to make me drag this out of you word by word? You were on her bed and you were looking at her mirror instead of her. Go on.”

“She has class pictures of every boyfriend she’s had in high school,” Darren said, softly. “Across the top of her mirror. Two rows. Twenty-six class pictures. The week before she took me up there to her bedroom, she asked me for my class picture. It’s creepy. I feel like she’s waiting to go steady so she can glue me up there. I don’t want to be up on that mirror.” Darren looked over at his friend when he was done.

Jimmy said nothing for almost one full minute, making like he was intently driving along the side of the Ali Wai Canal and that act required his full attention.

“You’re right,” Jimmy finally said. “That’s the kind of stuff that’s way beyond weird. Did you give it to her your class photo yet?”

“No, I’ve been carrying it in my wallet. What if she asks me before she gets us onto the movie set?” Darren looked out over the Ali Wai, wondering how he had gotten himself into such a difficult situation.



“Then you give it to her, of course,” Jimmy replied, “Sometimes life requires a sacrifice of us all because we have to get inside to see Elvis perform.”

Jimmy swung the car to the left, accelerating down Metcalf and onto Kalakaua Boulevard. He hit the gas and the engine’s turbocharger wound up, making the little rocketing car sound more like a jet taking off than an automobile. Both boys loved that sound.

“Us, us?” Darren replied, “what ‘us’ are you talking about?” but the Corvair was at top RPM and Jimmy couldn’t hear him.

They parked as always at the Moana Hotel and made their way over to where a crowd had gathered on the Diamond Head side of the hotel.

Judy was there with her sister, right at the makeshift gate. A rope had been strung around a huge area. Inside and outside the rope were throngs of people. Star Black stood next to Judy, resplendent in a one-piece black suit that put every bikini-clad woman in the area completely to shame.

“Hello, Darren, glad you could make it,” Star said. “I wonder why you didn’t tell me about this. Good thing Judy and I are friends at Punahou.” She actually held out her hand so Darren had to take it.

Darren watched Jimmy turn to crimson putty, as his friend became mute and almost cross-eyed at the same time. But Darren didn’t have time to reflect on Dorrenbacher’s hopeless infatuation with Star because he glimpsed someone and something through an opening in the crowd. He brushed past Judy, Star and Alice, grabbing Jimmy by the upper arm and dragging him along.

“What in the hell is he doing here? And what’s he got with him?” Darren whispered fiercely into Dorrenbacher’s ear.

Jimmy finally got enough control of himself to look from Star Black to where his friend was pointing. There was no doubt at all about who the man was or what he was leaning against. It

was Matt, the local Haole who ran the surfboard rental shop. And the object he was leaning against was the repaired surfboard the boys had worked so hard to fix.

“Oh no, if that’s who I think it is,” Jimmy intoned, turning as if to bolt back through the opening through the rope they’d come in from.

“It’s Matt, all right,” Darren agreed.

“No, the other guy. The old, tanned guy. Right there next to Matt,” Jimmy said, not having to point as the tall distinctive figure nearby where Matt stood, immediately standing out from the crowd as soon as he was noticed.

He was big, stringy but looking extremely dangerous.

“We gotta get out of here,” Jimmy whispered bending over slightly to stay low in the crowd. “We gotta run for it,” he said, preparing to bolt.

“Won’t work,” Darren replied, gripping Jimmy’s arm all the harder with his right hand. “Everyone knows us. And we’ll miss all of this. We can’t go. We need a story.”

“A story?” Jimmy exclaimed. “A story? Are you out of your mind...again? Your last story got us into this. Matt’s going to show him the board and then everyone’s going to know everything, and then probably kill us.” Jimmy stopped resisting when he finished, defeated. “I’ll never get a date with Star Black now. Never.”

“Oh baloney,” Darren said. “Star Black isn’t normal. I don’t know what planet she’s from but it’s sure not earth. She actually likes you. I’m a bug to her and she makes me feel like I should be on a wall somewhere with a needle stuck through my center. But unbelievable as it is, she likes you. And she’ll like it if we get tarred, feathered and ridden up and down Ali Wai Boulevard. She’s not quite right in the head.”

Darren looked back to make sure the beautiful, but fearsome, woman was not right behind them. He admired and respected Star but he was afraid of her too.

“Come on, into the belly of the beast. What do we have to lose? We’re screwed anyway.” Darren hauled Jimmy with him through the throng of moving jostling onlookers, only letting his arm go when they stood before the tall imposing man.

It was Duke Kahanamoku himself.

The tall slender native islander looked down at the boys. “Can I be of assistance?” he asked, in perfect English.

No pidgin and no accent whatsoever. It was almost like Cary Grant had asked the question. The boys simply stared until Darren got control of himself.

“We found your old board,” Darren gushed out. “We’re the guys who broke it, repaired it and then found your name on the side. We gave it back to Matt and he thinks it’s valuable because it was yours. If it’s valuable, then we don’t have to pay him two hundred dollars.” Darren stopped, wondering where the idiocy he was spouting had come from.

The Duke stood motionless with no expression on his face. Matt wedged through a couple of people nearby to stand next to Darren with the surfboard dragging behind him.

“I got your old board Duke,” Matt said, extending a black magic marker, “I thought you’d maybe sign it or something.”

Still, the Duke said nothing, staring at Matt and then turning to examine each of the boys individually. Then a brilliant smile changed his face completely.

An impish glow radiated out from his eyes. He took the magic marker from Matt’s hand, leaned down and signed the board in large flowing script “The Duke.”

Without a word, he handed the marker back to Matt and made his way through the crowd.

“The Duke,” Matt read. “Do you suppose everyone will know, I mean in the future, who “The Duke” is?”

Neither boy answered, both too busy watching the elegant man disappear.

“The Duke,” Jimmy repeated, speaking for both of them.

## Chapter Seven

Jimmy and Darren sat in dejection on the curb in front of the Moana Hotel in downtown Waikiki. Neither Judy nor Alice had come back to the front part of the closed-off rear bar area of the lobby where Elvis was filming. Star Black had been let through without question for whatever reason, but the boys had been barred by the two big Hawaiian security guards who guarded the set area. Palm fronds surrounded the part of the lobby where the set was located. The boys couldn't even see what was going on or try to wave to Judy or her sister. The beach access on both sides was the same way. They'd tried, and even thought about swimming in through the surf, but to no avail. They were out, whether accidentally or on purpose, it didn't matter.

"What are we going to do?" Darren asked Jimmy, his voice and expression glum as they watched the traffic go by on Kalakaua Boulevard.

"Well, the Duke signed the board, so we don't have to come up with two hundred dollars," Jimmy replied. "That's some good news, anyway."

"We were never going to come up with two hundred dollars, and we both know it," Darren said, the 'good' news not impacting upon his dark attitude at all.

"What about Pearl?" Jimmy finally said, after a few minutes.

"We take the car to Pearl, get onto McGrew Housing, head on down to the point just off Aiea Shoals and get the rowboat," Jimmy recited, obviously working out the map of where they might go in his head as he spoke.

"What are you talking about? Darren exclaimed. "We just got tossed out off the movie set and you come up with this weird adventure or misadventure like it was the last time we tried it?"

“We weren’t tossed off the set,” Jimmy replied. “We never got on the set, and last time we got caught sneaking on the McGrew part of the base. This time we have Dad’s Corvair with an officer sticker on the windshield. They have to let us on.”

“So, if we get on, we get the rowboat, hopefully still laying there on the shore, and then what?” Darren said, diddling on the asphalt in front of him with a small piece of palm leaf that had blown out from the lobby protective fence set up around the movie set.

“We finally get to explore the bow of that ship left there, one of the heroic destroyers of the war, and anything else we might find leftover from the attack,” Jimmy replied, excitement evident in every word he spoke.

“The U.S.S. Shaw,” Darren intoned, well acquainted with every bit of every wreck still littering the shores among the main branches and lochs of Pearl Harbor, “And the Shaw never fought at all during the attack or later on when it was raised and then the rest of the ship sent off to Asia somewhere.”

“That’s not the point,” Jimmy gushed out, coming to his feet, as if ready to go.

“What exactly is the point then,” Darren asked, not moving from his seated spot on the curb or looking up to meet the eyes of his friend.

“The point is Elvis Presley,” Jimmy replied.

“What?” Darren said, finally looking up with round eyes at his obviously insane friend.

“We get something off the wreck, like the ship’s compass or something, and then we get it to Judy, who gets it to Alice, who gives it to Elvis and then we’re back in,” Jimmy recited as if he’d prepared the whole speech earlier.

“How do we know, if that series of impossible transfers actually takes place, that Elvis would care or appreciate what we gave him, and besides, there’s only the bow of that ship left there, forward of the bridge where the compass would have been.”

“We don’t know, but we don’t have to,” Jimmy said. “We don’t care about the compass, we’ll find something and at least we’ll have a plan, other than you giving Judy one of your class pictures and her putting it up on her mirror.”

Darren came to his feet and stared at his friend, his expression serious and his eyes unblinking.

“You think it was that?” he asked the other boy. “You think she’d be that rotten and cold, to do a thing like that to us? Not the Judy I know, not over a stupid picture she’d just tape to her mirror, like the others.”

“You’ve got a lot to learn about beautiful women, I think,” Dorrenbacher replied. “Now, have you got a better plan?”

“I don’t like your conclusion about this and I sure don’t believe you know anything about beautiful women. I’ve never seen you with any women except your Mom.”

“It’s logic, simple logic,” Jimmy replied. “Are you coming, or do I have to do this myself?”

“You can’t row a boat decently and you don’t know where the wreck is exactly, not like it’s laying right there on the shore,” Darren said. “But okay, it’s a plan and it beats waiting out here for everyone to come out and laugh at us.”

The got in the Corvair, the Corsa’s little six-cylinder engine firing up with a whining roar, making the car sound more like a small jet aircraft on the ground instead of the sub-compact vehicle it really was.

Dorrenbacher rocketed the car out into the traffic and then all the way to the left lane of Waikiki’s main street.

“What if the row boat’s not there?” Darren yelled over the sound of the air rushing over and around the convertible’s windshield, as the Spyder continued to accelerate.

“So what,” Jimmy yelled back, his eyes never leaving the road ahead, bobbing and weaving the car through the traffic like the other cars were standing still and waiting for him to do exactly that. “We’ll think of something, we always do.”

“I have to be at the club at three to get ready to go to work,” Darren said, his voice quieter as if he was talking to himself.

“Your new best friend, Wu, will cover for you if you’re a bit late,” Jimmy replied, heading the vehicle up Montserrat toward the entrance to H-1, the expressway that would take them straight to Pearl Harbor in minutes.

“What if Judy remembers and comes out to get us?” Darren intoned, regretting his decision to go along with his friend.

“She’s not coming out, not until you produce one of your pictures, so stop being a blockhead,” Jimmy said, laughing, before accelerating hard onto H’1’s onramp. “Elvis belongs to her, and her sister and they will use him to whatever advantage they can.”

“I don’t think this thing was made to go over eighty miles an hour,” Darren complained, hold onto the side of the door and his seat for all he was worth.

“Not a problem,” Jimmy replied, “We’re going ninety-three, as fast as it will go without getting an overdrive unit.”

McGrew was easy to reach, as the freeway exit to Pearl was passed and the sign for Aiea Heights Boulevard came into view. Jimmy swerved the convertible off onto the exit ramp and the braked hard.

The base guards were Marines. Jimmy pulled the car up to the guardhouse, where a corporal stood at parade rest, waiting for them to move far enough ahead so he could speak to the driver.

“Uh, oh,” Darren whispered, knowing there might be trouble since the Marine had not waved them through immediately after seeing the blue officer sticker glued to the driver’s side windshield.

The car stopped, its engine still whining but not objectionably so. A light smoke came up from under the car, smelling heavily of brake dust.

“You boys might want to hold the speed down when you drive through this housing area,” the corporal said, his voice stiff, adult and formal, although he didn’t appear any older than either Darren or Jimmy in age.

“Yes, sir,” Jimmy replied, using just as serious a tone as the Marine.

“I’m not a ‘sir,’ sir,” the Marine replied, “I’m a corporal.” With that, the corporal saluted stiffly, quickly followed by the two other Marines standing nearby.

Jimmy looked at the saluting Marines but did not drive forward.

“Drive,” Darren whispered, urgently.

Once they were on the base housing main road and headed down toward the water, Jimmy slowed the Corvair to a crawl.

“Whew,” Jimmy said. “I thought for sure they’d ask us what we were doing here.

“They can’t,” Darren replied, “unless they saw us as a security threat. As far as their concerned we are officers, and officer’s families count the same.”

“I knew that,” Jimmy said.

The rowboat was laying upside down on the shore like Darren had seen it many weeks before when his dad had toured him through the whole of Pearl Harbor for maybe the fortieth time. His dad had delivered the same explanation for each wreck and what had happened each moment during the attack on that day so many years in the past. Darren wanted him to simply make a tape of the speech so he would not have to listen to the presentation time after time, and he would then be able to turn the volume down. But his dad was nobody to be messed with. He had no sense of humor and his own Coast Guard service during the attack was never discussed. His father had once told him, drunkenly, that he’d been a Seaman First Class aboard the only Coast Guard ship (the Kukui) present in the harbor during the attack. One of dad’s responsibilities was to maintain the ship’s weapon system. The only weapon the ship had was a .50



caliber machine gun located near the very stern of the vessel. On the morning of the attack, the Kukui had sailed for the harbor entrance, but when the canvas was pulled from the weapon, in order to bring the machine gun into action, the gun was completely rusted and unusable. His dad was never written up for negligence, but he and the Kukui crew, had to sit on their ship, and successfully escape to a position just outside the harbor, and watch all the other ships being attacked, and sunk at their moorings inside the harbor.

The boys tipped the rowboat over, to find both oars underneath. Someone had written “Ahab” with white spray paint along the stern of the craft.

“What’s an Ahab?” Darren asked of his friend, as they shoved off to head for the wreck located not far across the bay near Ford Island.

“Captain Ahab,” Dorrenbacher replied, sitting near the stern of the boat, as Darren pulled on both oars, centering it until it was pointed directly at the looming island across the narrow bay water.

“Oh,” Darren said, between strokes. “Moby Dick, the whale thing,” he went on. “What happened to Captain Ahab in that book?”

“He died,” Jimmy replied, with a big smile. “He went down with the whale.”

## Chapter Eight

Jimmy pulled on both oars, his skinny body bending forward and then back like a single reed of bamboo in the wind. There was no discussion about whom would do the rowing. Jimmy was so adept and happy at performing the seemingly simple task that Darren made no complaint, instead of sitting relaxed near the small boat's stern, little splashes of the harbor water occasionally striking him. It was like being hit by intermittent clouds of thin spray, and the cooling effect, against the bright hot sun sparkling off the surface of the harbor, was pleasant. Jimmy rowed into a slight wind but adjusted his oars perfectly to make way directly for the spit of land that stuck out toward the McGrew Navy quarters they'd left behind them

"Should we head directly for the wreck, or pull in and the walk on down the spit to where it lays?" Jimmy asked, rowing smoothly, his breath just as even, as if he was only walking along the beach in Waikiki.

"The wreck," Darren replied. If they found anything at all of value, and could pry it off the wreck without tools, then the boat would be right there. Although security at McGrew had denied them entry on the previous occasion, once reaching the harbor water itself neither Darren nor Jimmy had ever been confronted or even interrupted in their wreck exploration adventures. "You know, we're probably not going to find anything there. The bow was blown off the ship. What could have been in the bow that would impress Elvis Presley?"

Jimmy increased the sequence of the whip-like moves he made to drive the boat faster across the surface of the water.

"And we don't have a rope to tie the boat to the wreck, either" Darren went on, as Jimmy steered the craft subtly around the far curve of Ford Island, powering past the ramp that had

once been used to let the big PBY flying boats come up out of the water and into the sheds for repair, refueling and rearming.

The flying boats were long gone, but the redone ramp slanted up, looking like it was big enough to launch a full-sized ship down if one could be made with big enough wheels.

The bow of the Shaw lay exactly where it had been months before. It rested on its side, half in and half out of the water, the inner harbor's gentle waves washing against its torn steel plates but not moving the hulk at all. The sun reflected brightly off the steel that remained, mostly bare, even though the ship had been blown apart some twenty-one years before.

Jimmy looked over his right shoulder, as they approached the portion of the wreck still in the water. Without saying anything, he steered the boat around to one of the gaping holes in the hull, and then pointed the bow right inside, bringing both oars in as the boat neatly slid into the hole.

"We don't need a rope," he murmured, climbing over the boat's low bow and stepping into the foot deep water.

Darren eased forward, realizing he only had his go-aheads on, and they would be all but useless once wet. The poorly made rubber flip-flops not only wouldn't allow rearward travel they also made it nearly impossible, when they were wet, to keep the soles of ones feet in them when moving forward. Taking a chance, he pulled the shoes off and left them inside the boat. The interior of the Shaw's hull could be filled with sharp jagged edges right under the surface of the impenetrably dark water inside the hole, but he'd be better off trying to feel his way gently along rather than taking the chance of a fall because of the shoes.

Jimmy crept, bend over slightly, into the near darkness of the hull's interior. Almost too dark to see even though they were only in the bow of the ship. It was so large that they were dwarfed by its size. They searched for what seemed almost an hour. Darren was ready to give up. The bow appeared to be totally empty, even the chain and anchor, which should have

been located somewhere inside the open spaces, although too heavy to carry or move, were gone.

“They cleaned this out pretty good,” Darren said to Jimmy, who was squatting down trying to open something too dark for Darren to quite make out. “What is it?” he asked, bending down, keeping his feet carefully away from whatever, it was Jimmy was working on.

“I broke the blade on your dad’s pocket knife, but I think I got it,” Jimmy replied, closing the knife and shoving it back into his front pocket.

“You took my dad’s Kutmaster?” Darren exclaimed. “You broke my dad’s Kutmaster? Are you crazy? Where did you get it? When did you get it? We are dead. My dad love’s that knife. He polishes and oils it all the time. That knife was from the war.”

“We’ll find another one, trust me, and I’ve found the treasure we were looking for,” Jimmy said, turning to smile at his friend, before lifting his prize out of the slime-covered metal box it had been encased in.

Jimmy stared, trying to make out the big dark and dripping object.

It looked like four or five pipes, each the length of Jimmy’s forearm, held together by something attached to their bottoms.

“What is it?” Darren could not help asking, although the broken knife was going to be a serious problem at some point not far into the future, and he could not be as enthusiastic about anything as he’d been when they’d started the adventure.

“It’s big bullets for one of those anti-aircraft guns,” Jimmy replied, holding the heavy mass out away from his body, as if to hand it to Darren.

“40 millimeter, Bofors,” Darren recited, recalling images of the rounds from one of his father’s Navy weapons books. “They were standard issue aboard U.S. Navy ships

during the war. Coast Guard had some too, but not dad's ship. It only had his fifty-caliber."

"These are made of lead with brass cases," Jimmy whispered, working his way back to the bow of the Ahab. "We'll clean and polish them up until they sparkle. Elvis will think he's died and gone to heaven."

"Ah, Jimmy, I think those are probably live rounds," Darren said, as Jimmy laid the four rounds, held together by a thin strip of metal at the very back of the cartridge cases. "Elvis might just be dead and gone for real if we give him these. See what color the tips are."

Jimmy pulled Darren's dad's knife out and eased the broken blade out of its slot. Darren could only look at the ruined Kutmaster with a heavy heart.

"We're dead, or at least I'm dead," he whispered, as Jimmy went to work scraping away.

"Blacktip, a band of red below that, and here's yellow," Jimmy said, holding the half-blade out toward Darren a hump of dirty yellow material visible on its surface.

Darren realized the paint had softened under the onslaught of brackish water that had to have leaked in and out of the container the round had lain in for so many years.

"Practice, or dummy rounds, are blue," Darren said, "always, so these are high explosive, maybe loaded with phosphorus or worse. We can't give Elvis live rounds."

"Then we'll clean these up, polish them and then empty out the powder from each," Jimmy said, his enthusiasm not diminished in the least from what it had been, since coming up with the idea to look for something to impress Elvis, and then finding what he took to be an incredible treasure.

Darren got aboard the boat, turning to accept the heavy clip from Jimmy. Very carefully, he placed it in the bottom of the boat, fully aware that even old wet rounds held a vital danger should they be treated the wrong way, and there was no guarantee at all that the powder in the rounds was wet.

Jimmy hopped in grabbed the oars and adroitly moved the boat back out of the hole, before sticking the oars deep in the water. He reversed course once outside the wreck and pulled away, the Ahab leaving as it had come.

“What about my dad’s knife?” Darren asked, being unable to think about anything else, almost to the point where he didn’t care if the 40 mm rounds exploded or not.

“The Army-Navy Store at the base,” Jimmy said. “I’ve seen those Coasty knives there before. Your dad’s is a popular model and it’s only ten bucks at the most. I’ve got ten bucks. Heck, if we can’t get these rounds to Elvis then we can sell them for a lot more than ten bucks, even without the powder. We can always come back and take pictures with mom’s camera in order to establish provenance.”

“What’s provenance?” Darren asked, the idea of getting a new knife allowing some life to course back through his body. His dad would know, of course, but the fact that the replacement knife was new might carry the day. His dad knew just about everything if it involved things like guns, knives, hunting, fishing and more stuff like that. Darren wasn’t interested in almost any of what his father was so good at, but he made believe just to have things to do with him. His dad wasn’t interested in anything Darren was, like rockets, science experiments, chess or even model airplanes, but he’d didn’t bother to make believe he liked any of it to spend time with Darren doing any of those things.

“Provenance means proof that the rounds came from the bow of the hull, and that they really are left over from the Pearl Harbor attack,” Jimmy replied, pulling strongly on the oars, as they headed back for the beach they’d left earlier. “That’s what will make them valuable, I mean if Elvis doesn’t want them.”

“Have you thought at all about how we are supposed to meet Elvis Presley again?” Darren asked. “That was a dumb luck one-time thing. You saw what happened when something

formal came up and we were supposed to be invited. We got dumped.”

“Nah, you got dumped,” Jimmy said, with a laugh, pulling away on the oars, as if the discussion gave him more energy. “All you have to do is go back into her bedroom and give her one of your class pictures to put on her mirror, and we’ll be in.”

Darren felt sick to his stomach. He was frightened of his dad, and now he was frightened of once again being in the bedroom with Judy. He knew Jimmy was right, about his dad and the knife, and probably about Judy too. It was impossible to understand how Judy felt about anything because she talked about everything but said almost nothing. Darren stood by the side of the Ahab, looking at his friend, hauling the Bofors rounds to the convertible, before placing them gently over the edge and laying them down on the back seat. They had no rags or any of that, which meant the plastic seats would have to be washed and dried before they could turn the car back over to Jimmy’s father, although Jimmy’s father was so easy going he never got mad about almost anything. The cleaning would be Darren’s job in payment for being allowed to go with Jimmy in the car. Darren flipped the boat, grabbed his flip flops and stuck the oars back underneath, hoping the thing would be there when they wanted to go exploring the harbor again.

“Don’t show the rounds to your dad,” Darren said, getting in the car, knowing he was probably saying something he didn’t need to say.

“Are you crazy?” Jimmy laughed out, “only you, me, and Elvis get to know about these.

“I’ll clean the rounds tonight,” Jimmy said, gunning the Corvair, “my dad has the duty at the base.”

“I have to work at the club tonight,” Darren replied, not wanting to be anywhere near the rounds when the powder if there was any powder, was decanted out of the brass cartridges. He did think absently, as they drove, about what a

great rocket they could build with that much gun powder if the powder was still good.

“Fine,” Jimmy replied, rocketing the car onto Nimitz Highway and then flooring the accelerator, “tonight is my time, but tomorrow will be your time. We’ll get the knife in the morning, and then you go see Judy in the afternoon. By tomorrow evening we’ll have an appointment with Elvis, and you’ll be straight with your dad.”

“Okay,” Darren breathed out, feeling sick to his stomach again. It was as if life was going to be over the next day. All he could do was think about work, Chef Wu, Sergeant Cross and the rest of the crew. He wanted to go to the Cannon Club and simply stay there, but that wasn’t in the cards, he knew.

“Can I have dad’s knife back?” he asked Jimmy.

“Nope, not until tomorrow,” Jimmy replied, downshifting as they hit the curve at the Diamond Head end of the road that ran along the beach at Fort DeRussy. “If I give you the broken knife and your dad figures out it is missing then you’ll blab. This way, you don’t know where it is or what happened to it no matter how much he beats you.”

Darren swallowed hard. The night might be terrible, and everything about the next day could be worse. All he had to live for was work and the daily countdown until he went away to the mainland for college.



## Chapter Nine

Darren slept fitfully in his bedroom at the house on 16th Avenue. His brother had left for the Mainland, and St. Norbert College months before, so he had the whole room to himself. Darren would be going to the same college if he lived that long. The knife was a huge deal, and the fact that Jimmy had kept the thing to pull off their nearly ridiculous Elvis plan had just made things worse. The good news was that his father was a warrant officer and therefore since his duties were much higher than that rank (Harbormaster of all of Pearl Harbor), he didn't use his old boatswain's tools unless there was something special to be carved or worked with. Enlisted men's attire was all set up to carry various things like knives, or fids or other hawser and metal cable working gear, but officer's uniforms were not set up that way.

Whatever Jimmy's whacked-out design was, to somehow, find, get to, and then interest Elvis Presley in anything, paled in comparison to getting another knife, slipping the new one inside the old leather holder, and then getting it back into his dad's top drawer without him knowing it. Somehow, all that was to be done before confronting Judy Levy with an embarrassing apology about something he'd not been responsible for. Then he had to get her to take him back to her room so he could watch her make a lab specimen out of him by gluing his class photo to her mirror. Finally, they had to get back to the Moana, where they hoped to have Judy guide them in to see Elvis again.

Darren's dad had left the house at 0600 sharp. Darren knew that because it was the same every day, including weekends. Reveille. Dad had an old record of a recording of reveille for his RCA and that was turned on just as he left.

Darren's Mom said that not turning it on was conduct alone that would assure her of a divorce if he ever applied.

Darren eased the top drawer of his father's dresser open, not caring about making any noise, as his mother was already in her car, about to leave for Lewis of Hollywood, the hair shop she worked in on the first floor of the Moana. Nobody was allowed in dad's top drawer, not even her. One of the things inside was a loaded .45 Colt automatic pistol. Jimmy wasn't afraid of the weapon. He'd found the Army Manual on it and memorized the information. Then, he'd waited until his dad had gone out to visit the bars that lined up and down Kuhio Street in the busiest part of Waikiki. The street catered almost strictly to the military stationed at bases around Oahu. Darren had disassembled the automatic in about five minutes and then put it back together and reloaded it. It had been surprisingly tough to get the slide back on right, and that had scared him. The gun was about one of the safest ever made, as long as you knew how to operate it. His dad had a brown leather rig for the gun in his closet in case he ever got 'the duty' again. For some reason, the duty, all night long vigilance in an office at Pearl, required a .45 Colt to be strapped to his side.

Darren let out a long sigh. The rest of the drawer was not disturbed, and Darren knew precisely where everything was supposed to be. That meant that his Dad had not figured out the knife was gone unless he was playing a dangerous game of knowing and not telling, awaiting a time (of great pain) later to reveal the stunning violation. But there was nothing to be done for it except call Jimmy and get him over, as long as Jimmy's dad hadn't taken the Corvair, in which case Darren was dead earlier than later. He called Jimmy on the phone.

"When can you get here?" Darren asked.

He could picture his friend sitting in the kitchen by the big flat desk phone, set like a featured prize in the middle of the table, like it was some sort of decorator item. Darren could call in the early hours of the morning because Jimmy's parents both

slept in almost every day. Darren couldn't understand how any military family could live that way, but Jimmy didn't care about sleeping in. Being up early gave him a certain, morning freedom, and also the car. His dad drove one of the ugliest green 1957 Fords ever made, with Army markings on it. He drove it most of the time because the gas at the base was free for Army cars, which made the Spyder available to cruise or drive wherever they wanted as long as the car was always brought back filled with gas. Jimmy had said that his dad would take the car away if they ever crashed it on one of their adventures. That thought terrified Darren because the Corvair was not only a convertible, red and fast, but it might be able to attract some other girl, other than Judy, who he might not be afraid of. But Judy was all he had, and now that she knew Elvis, there was no way out for Darren or the car might be lost too unless Jimmy killed them all first because of his perfectly awful driving.

Darren worked to clean up the house before Jimmy arrived. Once the other boy came in, even for only a few minutes, the pristine surfaces of brass and tin had to be gone over again. Jimmy always marveled about the polish and ran his hands over their shiny surfaces. As soon as Darren's family moved into a house, any house in Darren's world, his dad removed all the clear enamel on metal surfaces. Darren and his brother would have to polish all Saturday morning until every metal surface, from doorknobs to fish tank, art frames and more, would all gleam for Saturday afternoon inspection. When Darren's brother left for Wisconsin, the entire job had fallen to Darren. The only good thing was summertime because the school months called for work on weekends at home. The other good thing was that his dad had doubled his allowance to fifty cents a week once his brother was gone.

Darren was waiting for Jimmy in his driveway, hoping that the boy would not lay rubber on the road in front of the 16th Avenue house, where the mayor of Honolulu lived two doors down and had already complained about the tire marks

twice. Mayor Blaisdell was a wonderful man everyone said, but he had a certain look in his eyes that made Darren fear him more than he feared his own dad.

“We got to get the knife,” Darren said, wanting to get right to it.

“I’ve got the stuff in the trunk,” Jimmy replied, backing the car out of the driveway and heading toward Fort Ruger via Diamond Head. From there they’d hit the Ali Wai and on out to Pearl on Ala Moana Boulevard and the Nimitz. There were only three signals, and it was early morning. The traffic would all be going the other way.

“Come on, we’ll pull into the Ala Moana shopping center and check out the stuff,” Jimmy said, looking for a place to get into the right lane. “I polished those better than even you could, but of course, being military-grade ammo, the brass is probably of the highest quality.”

“No,” Darren said more vehemently than he intended.

“The knife,” he went on in the same unstoppable tone. “We do the knife first, get the hell back, I mean if we find one, then replace it, and that’s it.”

“What’s it?” Jimmy asked, his tone surprised but not pulling the car over and slowing down a bit.

Darren’s short hair blew in the gentle wind and the sun was shining from behind but the wonder of driving on such a great day in a great convertible didn’t reach him.

“There isn’t anything else,” Darren said. “This is the one thing right now, and you have to say yes and not give me any of your usual entertaining garbage.”

“Look, you can count on me,” Jimmy replied, driving the car the speed limit. “I mean you can always count on me and know you don’t want to talk about your dad.”

The trip to the main gate at Pearl didn’t set any records, but they were there in less than half an hour. The time had been just before ten when Darren looked at the face of the giant clock near the top of the Aloha Tower, but that had been miles back.

The Marine at the base gate waved them through by executing a crisp salute. Darren smiled for the first time. Darren's dad's car stickers didn't rate a salute when they went onto the base anymore. The Marines knew he ran the harbor. They always gave a gentle wave to let the people in the car know that they were special.

"Where's the knife store?" Darren asked, not being very aware of the big ship area of the harbor where the shops were. The wrecks and the subs were the most interesting part of the complex as far as he was concerned. Both boys collected the matchbook covers every American submarine always made and gave away for free. The sub crews let them climb aboard and look down the conning towers.

"There is no knife store," Jimmy said, stopping the car at the corner where the commissary was to their left.

"What?" Darren gasped.

"Relax, I got you covered," Jim replied, pulling into the big parking lot where both the commissary and the PX were married together to form one big complex. "Relax, the knife shop is downstairs in the back of the PX."

"Oh," Darren replied, his relief coming out as a sigh.

Jimmy parked the car, as there was almost nobody in the PX part of the lot. Many women were already pushing carts and headed for the commissary, however.

They walked through the double doors, and it was as Jimmy described. A clerk stood just inside the door, holding out a small package.

"I called ahead," Jimmy whispered to Darren. "I said I had you covered."

Jimmy gave the clerk his I.D. and paid with a pocket full of crumpled one-dollar bills.

"How do you do it?" Darren asked. "You call the PX at such an early hour of the morning, and they're waiting for us when we get here? Who can do that?"

“Your dad runs Pearl Harbor, but my dad has some connections too,” Jimmy replied, handing the small, wrapped package holding the knife to Darren.

Darren pulled the brown paper wrapper off and felt immediate relief in examining its contents. It was his dad’s knife, and it was so close in appearance to the other broken one that even his father would be hard put to identify it as different from the well-kept and highly polished knife he’d kept in his drawer or in his pocket.

“Let’s go,” Darren said, holding the object tightly in his left hand.

Jimmy started the car, still obeying all the traffic signs on the base. Pearl Harbor was not like the rest of Honolulu. If you got caught speeding or driving recklessly on the base you went to the stockade, and then very likely lost all driving privileges there.

Once off the base, Jimmy accelerated toward Nimitz, the main feeder running along the water toward Waikiki.

“Can I drive like a real person again?” he asked, as the air coming across the top of the windshield began to grow in intensity.

Darren nodded, looking straight ahead. The fact that they were going to successfully make it, with the new knife and in time, finally beginning to dawn on him.

The trip back was uneventful, except the rising sun was so bright it made driving hard for Jimmy, at least driving to see good enough to really make the Corvair perform. It took only minutes for Darren to make the switch once they got to Darren’s home. The knife affair was probably not over, Darren knew, but the damage would likely be minimized once his dad figured everything out.

Jimmy stopped the Spyder once they reached the library near the end of the Ali Wai Canal. He pulled the fast and highly maneuverable convertible into the big lot out front. The library didn’t open until noon so there was nobody there, although

Darren eyeballed the fire department building across Kapahulu Avenue. Looking at, messing with, and then keeping ammunition taken from a Navy ship at Pearl Harbor, no matter what condition it was in, might be considered some sort of crime.

They examined the Bofors 40 millimeter round clip together but did so by leaving it laying on the floor of the Corvair's front trunk, just in case someone might be watching. Darren was amazed. Jimmy was a brilliant technician, and it showed in the restoration. The rounds had never looked so good. The brass gleamed and even the lead rings that allowed the rounds inside the cartridges to grip the barrel sparkled like they were made of silver instead of lead.

"We've got about a pound of powder, but I don't think these things were driven by gun powder or even dynamite," Jimmy said, pointing at a wrapped container tucked into one side crease of the trunk's inside. "The powder's white. I think it's something called Composition B, very powerful, and we must be careful when we build the rocket."

Darren noted that Jimmy said the words "when we build," as if the construction of such a small dangerous vehicle was just another matter-of-fact part of normal teenage life.

"Don't you think we should store the explosive somewhere safer?" Darren asked, backing a few feet from the trunk.

"Nah, it's basically inert unless you have a detonator," Jimmy replied, slamming the trunk lid, "I have those safely in the glove compartment. We just have to figure out how to detonate for a slower burn than that stuff is made for, or at least I think so."

Darren sighed to himself. He always had the impression that Jimmy's friendship might be the end of the them but then he had to smile. Jimmy had made the whole knife problem go away with the ease of a master-first class player in life.

“How did you get the cartridges to hold the bullets once you had them all apart?”

“Epoxy,” Jimmy said, firing up the Spyder’s 150 horsepower turbo engine.

“The epoxy kid,” breathed out Darren, as the car took off, leaving twin black streaks across the surface of the library’s sun-bleached asphalt surface.

Jimmy’s work and ability to fix almost anything with epoxy was legendary among their small circle of friends at Fort Ruger. He had once glued the head of a model aircraft engine back together, after a Sunday crash at Sandy Beach. The engine had worked, flying that afternoon almost better than before, until they crashed it again.

“Okay, and now the fun begins,” Jimmy said, the Spyder consuming the short run up the Ali Wai in almost no time at all, until they turned to head over to Kalakaua, Waikiki’s main drag. “All we have to do is find Judy, get you back in her bedroom with your class picture, and then have her take us to Elvis.”

Darren’s stomach, which had almost settled completely, shot through with a stab of fear. His Mom worked at the Moana Hotel, where the movie was being shot. If they found Judy, and if she did the photo thing (if that was even the reason they’d been denied entry at the movie set), and if they found Elvis, and if Elvis wanted the WWII artifact, and if they avoided being arrested for the possession of stolen property from Pearl Harbor (where his unforgiving father was the Harbormaster), then what could possibly happen that had any chance of a good outcome?



## Chapter Ten

Jimmy pulled the Corvair Monza Spyder up to the curb, parking parallel, right in front of the steps that led into the Lewis of Hollywood hairstyling salon where Darren's mom worked. Jimmy jumped out of the car without opening the door, one of his signature moves that Darren hated because the only time he'd tried the move he'd spent four days healing the big muscle in his upper right thigh. Darren breathed in and out deeply before opening the door and getting out.

Kalakaua traffic was high with the cars passing by slowly all doing the same thing; trying to get a glimpse of the rock and roll king himself who might be entering or leaving the Moana Hotel.

"Like we're going to get in there this time," Darren whispered to himself, as Jimmy's enthusiasm was simply too over the top to attempt to deal with.

"Fame is just a few feet away," Jimmy laughed, doing some sort of two-step dance as he waited patiently for Darren to slowly move toward the main entrance of the hotel behind him.

The lobby was disconcertingly empty, totally unlike the day before when it had been a hotbed of activity. The big screens blocking all views of the back patio and the beach were gone, and people walked about under and around the giant banyan tree that was the sole overwhelming and single massive piece of flora in the very center of the bar area. Darren looked up at it with some hope. Maybe Elvis was gone, and life could return to normal. The glint of the brass plaque cut into the side of the great tree trunk sparkled back at him, as if to tell him that everything was going to be alright. The plaque he'd read many times over. It was a solid chunk of thick brass with letters carved

deeply into it. The letters informed any reader that Robert Louis Stevenson had spent his days writing the book *Treasure Island* under it. There was no date on the brass plate, but it was all grown over and so deeply embedded in the tree's thick bark that the fact that Stevenson had lived so long ago made the data carved into almost believable.

Jimmy had just laughed when Darren had proudly pointed the plaque out to him more than a year before.

"Stevenson wrote that book in 1882 and the *Moana* wasn't even built until 1901, so how can that be?" he'd said, rubbing his chin with one hand while staring at the brass plate and trying to look like he was serious.

"Oh," was all Darren had managed to say in reply. Jimmy knew things regular kids had no idea about. Darren wanted to point out that Stevenson still could have written the book under the banyan tree because the tree itself had to be at least hundreds of years old, but he'd chosen to say nothing.

"Don't even think it," Jimmy had gone on, as if Darren had added what he was thinking. "The tree was planted in 1904. My dad has a book about the hotel at home. I'll let you borrow it, but it can't leave the house.

Darren moved past the tree, giving one last wistful look at the authentic-looking plate. He'd liked it better when he'd believed that Stevenson had been there and written the book, as the bogus plate indicated.

A small group of people stood down by the low stone wall that separated the veranda and flat serving area from the sandy beach. An elegant tall man of some age stood in the middle of them.

"It's the Duke," Jimmy whispered, as they walked in that direction, his expressive behavior diminishing the closer they got to the group. The Duke was looking toward Diamond Head and the others with him followed suit, to the point where they didn't notice two young men approaching.

“Hi,” Darren said, suddenly getting the attention of everyone there. Nobody replied, all, including the Duke, simply turning their heads to stare.

“Where’s Elvis?” Jimmy asked.

Darren could have kicked him. The question was too direct and way out of place. The look on everyone’s face changed into the same expression. Darren knew that just asking the question made them look like every other rubber-necking bunch of tourists in search of getting an autograph, or more.

“You’re the kids who broke my board,” the Duke blurted out, although his voice was as soft as his verbal delivery, and seemed to hold no tone of accusation.

“Yes, sir,” Jimmy replied before Darren could say anything. “That’s us, and we’re here to find Judy Levy and her sister so she can get us back in front of Elvis Presley. We’ve got something for him.”

Darren cringed. All they needed was to find out where Elvis had gone. It seemed obvious that the movie was likely still being filmed and that there was some other place that filming was taking place.

“They’re filming at the Natatorium up the beach,” the Duke replied, glancing toward Diamond Head with a nod when he said the words.

Darren knew the Natatorium well, and the Duke’s involvement with it.

Darren swam there every chance he got if he could find anybody at the club or from school to go with him. Swimming in the huge salt-water swimming pool was great fun but very intimidating to do alone as the open ocean swept in under everyone’s body as they swam, and then swept back out. The Duke, a gold medalist in previous Olympics, had dived into open the vast swimming pool for the opening ceremony in 1927 and then practiced there with Johnny Weissmuller until his swimming career was over.

“What do you have for Elvis that seems so pressing?” The Duke asked, before going on, “something broken and glued back together?”

Nobody in his small group laughed. Only Jimmy did.

“Come on, we’ll show you if you want,” Jimmy said, turning to head back to the Corvair, “it’s an artifact from Pearl Harbor that is going to blow him away.”

“I’ll be right back,” the Duke said to his group in his soft but very penetrating voice. “I have to see whatever these two have come up with.”

Darren followed Jimmy, who surged toward the hotel lobby. The Duke came along behind him at a leisurely pace. Darren was surprised at the man’s attire. The great swimmer and surfer wore white trousers, a white shirt and a white sport-jacket over that. Almost nobody in the islands wore such clothing unless they were attorneys, politicians or military in civilian attire.

By the time Darren caught up with Jimmy he was opening the hood of the Spyder and peering down inside. Darren rushed to his side, hoping to stop Jimmy from pulling the Bofors rounds out in front of the whole world.

Jimmy didn’t do that though. He remained where he was, waiting, and not commenting until the Duke moved close, stepped down from the curb, and leaned over at his side.

“Know what those are?” Jimmy asked proudly, a great smile on his face.

“I was the Sheriff of Hawaii until last year,” the Duke said, leaning his thin frame over the lip of the trunk and staring down.

A shiver went through Darren’s body on hearing the ominous words, but he said nothing, waiting for Jimmy to do whatever Jimmy was going to do.

“Yes, that’s nice,” Jimmy replied, looking at the side of the Duke’s face from only inches away.

A moment went by before the Duke stood straight and backed a few inches from the rear bumper of the car.

“As sheriff, I would have had to arrest you for possessing this stuff, but I don’t have to do that since I don’t have that job anymore,” the Duke said.

“Oh,” was all Jimmy could manage to say in reply.

“Ah, what can we do?” Darren added, sensing trouble, before moving closer, slowly working his body between that of Jimmy and the Duke.

“You can get rid of these as quickly as you can,” the Duke said, pointing toward Diamond Head. “The ocean, deep or someplace like that. Is that ammunition live?”

“Not anymore,” Jimmy responded, from behind Darren’s back. “I took all the powder out. We’re going to make a rocket from that stuff.”

The Duke shook his aging head slowly back and forth. “No, I meant the warheads. Each one has a couple of ounces of high explosive at the tip.”

“Oh gee,” Jimmy replied. “I didn’t think of that.”

“No, I can see that that kind of thing might be a problem for you,” the Duke said. “Well, you’ve gotten this far with them, and handled the hell out of them it would appear. You’ve been lucky. Very gently drop these into the sea or someplace with deep water where they’ll never be found.”

“We can’t give them to Elvis?” Jimmy asked, his voice crestfallen in tone.

Darren looked over his shoulder at his friend. Until the Duke had begun speaking Darren hadn’t thought for a minute about the danger the live rounds might present or the now apparent fact that even possessing the things might be highly illegal.

“Forget Elvis,” Darren hissed. “Forget Judy. Forget all of that. We’ve got to get rid of these.

Thanks Duke...again,” Darren said, turning back to the Duke, “is there anything we can do for you?”

“They tell me you work at that club on Fort Ruger, where that special chef runs the place,” the Duke replied.

Darren was dumbfounded. The Duke knew where he worked and Wu, the awful chef, was famous in some way?

“Ah, yes,” was all he could say.

“Maybe you could get my party, and maybe Mr. Presley, in there for dinner since it’s military and we’re not,” the Duke said, his eyes moving back toward Diamond Head, as if the club was somehow visible from where they were on the street. “The view is the best on this island, for that sort of thing, and dinner on the beach has its disadvantages, what with Mr. Presley’s popularity.”

Darren was shocked. The Duke sounded almost like he resented the fame Elvis had.

“I’ll talk to Sergeant Cross, but I don’t know,” Darren replied, his mind churning away. There would be no hiding Elvis Presley, and why wouldn’t the Duke, if they wanted such a thing simply go way up the Air Force chain of command to make the request?

The Duke didn’t reply, the same small smile appearing on his face that had been there when he’d signed the broken surfboard before. He turned and walked back into the hotel, not looking back as they watched him go.

“What do you make of that?” Jimmy gasped out, slamming the hood down.

“I think we just got very lucky, is what I think of that,” Darren replied.

“What do we do with these?” Jimmy said. “The tips are explosive. Who would have thought?”

Darren wondered just what handling Jimmy had put the rounds through as he’d scraped them clean and then polished them for hours. The Duke’s comment about luck had been a vast understatement.

“Where?” Darren asked, moving toward the steps leading up to Lewis of Hollywood before turning and taking a seat on

the third one. Jimmy sat down beside him, his physical expressiveness a thing of the recent past.

“Where?” Jimmy repeated.

“Where, indeed?” Darren asked. “We’re a long way from dead about seeing Elvis again. Neither Judy, nor her sister, can get Elvis and the Duke into the Cannon Club for dinner, but I bet I can.”

“You mean my dad and your dad might be able to, but not you,” Jimmy said. “You’re just a busboy, or whatever you are there, and Sergeant Cross is just a sergeant, and Wu is just a civilian chef working on a military base.”

“We’ll see,” Darren replied, beginning to work out a plan that might even surprise someone as smart as Jimmy.

“We got nothing now,” Jimmy sniffed. “We’ll never get to see Elvis again and nobody’s going to believe we saw him in the first place.” Upon saying the words he pulled a small tape recorder, a little bigger than his hand, from his back pocket.

Darren had never seen a tape recorder that small. “Where did you get that?” he asked Jimmy, in surprise,” and what were you going to do with it?”

“It’s a mini-recorder, just invented,” Jimmy replied, playing with the buttons on the machines side. “My dad has it on loan from the Army. He said that someday everyone would have one.”

“What would anybody do with one?” Darren asked.

“What would anybody do with one?” came back at him in his own voice.

“That,” Jimmy replied, putting the machine into his pocket again.

“You were going to record Elvis without his knowing it?” Darren said, in shock. “Are you crazy? You can’t record an entertainer without his permission.”

Doesn’t matter now,” Jimmy replied, wistfully. “What do we do with the Bofors stuff?”

An idea came into Jimmy's head that would incorporate the disposal of the Bofors rounds, using the debt Wu thought he owed, the relationship Sergeant Cross had tried to build with him, Elvis Presley, the Duke and both their parents. Only hours earlier he had been on the bottom of a depressive pit looking down but now he rose up to his feet, energy suffusing every cell in his body.

"This is going to work," he said as if speaking out to the passing traffic on Kalakaua.

"What will work?" Jimmy asked, rising behind him

"Life," Darren replied. "Maybe we get to live."



## Chapter Eleven

With the Bofors rounds safely tucked into the padded back seat of the Corvair, Jimmy drove the machine down Kalakaua toward the zoo, this time his driving so slow and careful Darren couldn't believe it. Jimmy's moving of the rounds from the front trunk to the back seat had been like watching a slow-motion ballet to Darren. The Duke's short analytical comment about the explosive nature of the round's warheads had reached Jimmy at his most technical level.

"Where we going?" Jimmy intoned, his voice barely audible over the wind coming off Kuhio Beach, and the normal rushing sounds the convertible made in passing through the air, even at slow speed. "Want to drive out Makapuu way and dump these over the cliff into the ocean?"

"No," Darren replied. "Turn up Monserrat and head toward the club. There'll be nobody showing up to work yet, and I have an idea."

"I can't wait," Jimmy replied, in the same subdued tone he'd used ever since the Duke had called him out on possessing the ammunition.

"No, this is going to work," Darren said. "We get rid of the rounds, we get the Duke into the club, we meet Elvis again and we don't need Judy or her sister to do it."

"And how are we supposed to approach Elvis without them?" Jimmy replied, his voice brightening just a bit, Darren noted.

"All we have to do is get Sergeant Cross to let you be a busboy for the night, once we get them all approved for the dinner. That way we'll both be right there to talk to him, no matter what," Darren said.

“I don’t know how to be a busboy,” Jimmy replied, “and you still haven’t told me how we can possibly get them into the club. It’s a military officer’s club. Outside civilians can’t just come in and have a party or even dinner there. Sergeant Cross will never approve. Not even for the Duke or Elvis Presley, no matter how famous or popular they are.”

“Watch and learn,” Darren replied, with a big smile on his face Jimmy couldn’t see, as his full attention was on his driving, maybe for the first time since Darren had been driving with him.

Monserat was mostly without traffic, as the day was still young. The trip only took minutes, and soon they were at the curved road inside the abandoned Fort Ruger gate. The base was still open, with a tiny commissary, some remaining barracks and the Cannon Club complex set up into the angled flank of Diamond Head. There were no cars in the parking lot, only a strange looking motorcycle with the words Triumph on its gas tank. It was too early for the dinner crew to show up and too late for the lunch crew. Darren glanced at the old tattered looking motorcycle, wondering if some drunken customer had left it from the previous night since Sergeant Cross drove a car and most definitely not a motorcycle.

“Pull around back,” Darren instructed, “and park at the chained gate. Sergeant Cross doesn’t lock the cable; he just makes it look like the thing is locked. I think the key to the big padlock was lost long ago but he never talks about it.”

Darren opened the passenger door and stepped from the Spyder once it was stopped. He easily pulled the cable out from the rings that ran back and forth mid-way up its chain-link twin gates. The big padlock was attached to one end but the other end was free and allowed the cable to be pulled all the way through without difficulty. He pulled the two gate halves open and waved to Jimmy, who was still at the wheel of the car. “It’s wide enough,” he said, waving for Jimmy to maneuver the car around and back it into the narrow space so it wouldn’t be so noticeable.

Instead of doing as Darren instructed, Jimmy turned off the ignition and got out of the car. He walked to where Darren stood.

“I’m pulling the rounds out,” he said. “I’m not risking bumping into anything and having one or all of those rounds go off. I presume you have a plan for what we’re going to do with them here.”

“Okay,” Darren replied, “but you’ve got to help me move the grate first.”

Darren headed into the narrow alley; one side dominated by eight-foot tall freezers lined up one after another. Each freezer had a great, secure-looking, door with an over-size chrome handle. The doors on the freezers alone were taller than either of the boys.

“Wu’s grate?” Jimmy asked, finally beginning to figure out Darren’s plan.

“It’s just a hole with a grate over it, leading to a sewer main down below,” he went on. “How’s that going to serve as a good hiding place?”

Darren didn’t reply, instead he knelt down to work at the grate.

Together they got the grate out and then backed off the hole they’d prepared for Wu to fall into. That he had had a stroke of fortune, and not been hurt or killed, and come to view the boys as his saviors, was good luck beyond considering.

“When Wu came out of the hole his legs, from his knees down, were covered in awful black mud,” Darren said. “The bottom of this cistern is filled with deep, old collected and disgusting mud. We toss the rounds down there and they’ll never be found, and we don’t have to worry that somebody’s going to come across them, report it and then someone else, like the Duke, confirms they were brought out of the harbor by us.”

Both boys peered down into the black maw of the hole. That it was square instead of round made it look even more forbidding than it would have if it was round, like a regular

manhole.

“It’s your call,” Jimmy finally said, “I’ll get the package.”

Jimmy headed back for the car, which is Darren’s mind was sitting out in the parking lot like a neon beacon, but there was nothing to be done about it. Once Jimmy made up his mind that was it. there was the issue of who owned the cycle, as well. Darren had never seen it before and could only hope that his conclusion that it belonged to some drunken patron of the night before was correct.

Jimmy came through the alley carrying the Bofors rounds very delicately, held to his chest in the lightest of hugs.

Darren ran to close the gates behind him, just in case, wishing they were made of solid wood or metal instead of the chain links anybody could see through.

Jimmy knelt, before slowly placing the rounds on the cement next to the lip of the hole. He carefully unwrapped the rags he’d used to pad them earlier, before putting them in the trunk, and then the back seat of the Corvair.

“Can’t have the rags floating to the surface,” he murmured, preparing to pick the clip of rounds up.

Darren knelt by Jimmy’s side, wanting to witness the disposal of the rounds but also not wanting to be leaning over the opening when they were consigned to the black depths of the hole.

“Rags float where?” a voice out of nowhere said.

Jimmy froze, his hands on the rounds but no longer moving to do anything with them.

“Who are you?” Darren asked, his voice a whisper. “Where are you?” he went on, when there was no reply.

A door opened near the hole, and Wu stepped out of one of the freezers, clicking the door closed behind him.

The boys stared up at him, neither saying a word.

“It seems to Wu that you have strange toys beside your side,” Wu said, stepping close to the hole.

Darren noted the bottle in Wu's hand, and recognized it as a bottle of Bacardi Light, his dad's favorite drink. Wu swayed back and forth.

"What you doing good boys?" Wu asked, taking a swig from the bottle.

"Wu, you're drunk," Jimmy said, shock in his voice. "Is that your motorcycle?" Darren asked, trying to change the subject away from what they were doing.

"Triumph," Wu answered. "Best bike in world. Honda coming. Japanese coming. Hate Japanese but will be good bike."

"Why are you drinking this early?" Jimmy asked.

"Shift in two hour," Wu struggled to get out. "No law against drink. Fortify for night work. I nap. I work. I drink, nap and work," Wu laughed. Then his laugh instantly disappeared, and he became dead serious, and seemingly cold sober for a few seconds. "You no tell Wu drinks a bit."

"We will never say a word," Darren replied, being equally as serious in his demeanor and expression.

"What are we going to do now?" Jimmy asked Darren, removing his hands from the rounds.

"Not put blow up stuff in hole," Wu stated, pointing behind him. "Blow up stuff blow up someday, or now. Take shovel, go up hill, dig hole, bury blow-up toy forever, not put in hole." Wu continued to point behind him. "Shovel behind freezer, back," he got out, before turning and staggering to the rear entrance of the Cannon Club kitchen.

"Thanks Wu," Jimmy said to his departing back.

"No thanks," Wu threw back over his shoulder. "No see nothing. No understand Haole boys, but Haole boys' good boys. Save Wu. No see nothing."

Wu went through the door and was gone.

"We're going to do what he said," Darren answered Jimmy's question that he'd asked earlier. "He's seen the rounds, and he knows what we wanted to do. We can't take the chance

he'll talk, and maybe he's right. A hole in the side of Diamond Head is probably better. The place is a monument, so it'll never be built on. Wu's right."

"So, we follow the instructions of a drunken Chinese chef?" Jimmy asked, still not moving from his knees next to the rounds.

"Yes, we do," Darren answered, getting to his feet and heading for the closest space between two of the freezers. "If there's a shovel back here somewhere, I mean."

Darren found the shovel and with Jimmy, carrying the ammo clip with great care, moved up the mountainside behind the club.

"This dirt isn't as dry and hard as I thought," Darren said, sticking the pointed blade of the shovel into the ground from time to time as they climbed.

"The ground cover keeps it moister than anyone would think from a distance," Jimmy replied. "Are we there yet?" he finally asked.

"Okay, this is it," Darren stated, jamming the point of the shovel deep into the dirt and beginning to dig.

Jimmy sat, with the rounds in his lap, pushing his back into the angled surface of the mountainside and staring out over the top of the Cannon Club to take in the full scope of Waikiki, in all its strangely developed beauty.

"Now Wu knows a secret about us, and I can't see that as being good," Jimmy said, worry in the tone of his voice.

"No, it's good news for what we're trying to do," Jimmy answered, between digs with the shovel. "He owes us a second time now, because I think he thinks the secret of his drinking might cost him his job with Sergeant Cross and that's a lot bigger secret than a couple of teenagers messing around with some old munitions."

Jimmy eased the rounds into the hole Darren had dug.

"How we going to mark the spot so we'll know where the rounds are?" he asked, as he stood up and took the shovel to

throw in the loose pile of earth nearby, and then smooth over the disturbed earth above what had been the hole.

“We don’t need to know where the rounds are, although we should pile up some ground a foot or so above the spot so when it rains there won’t be a revealing crater here,” Darren replied. “In fact, we should deny anything said about those things, since we wouldn’t be all alone if they were discovered as having something to do with us. From what the Duke said, we’d probably hurt our dads because of the work they do.”

“What a waste,” Jimmy replied, turning to hike back down the mountainside. “I worked for hours on those, and I know Elvis would love them and no he’ll never see them. At least we’ve got the powder.”

Darren followed Jimmy down toward the back entrance to the Cannon Club, his thoughts leaving the buried rounds behind, as he contemplated exactly how he was going to somehow get Wu and Sergeant Cross to agree to allow the Duke’s dinner party.

“We talk to Wu first?” Jimmy asked, once they were down, the shovel replaced where it had been, and they stood standing at the back door of the club together. “He’s drunk, which might be the best of all worlds for your plan. We get him to agree and then have him talk to Sergeant Cross.”

“No, won’t work,” Darren replied, his mind racing.

“Why not?” Jimmy said.

“Wu and Cross don’t talk,” Jimmy came back, “Ever.”

“But Wu’s the famous chef, and Sergeant Cross is his boss, how can that work?”

“Wu’s Chinese and Sergeant Cross is black,” Darren said, “it’s bad enough that we’re both Haoles, as Wu’s a terrible racist, but the Sergeant being black is something else again.”

“That’s just awful, so what are we supposed to do?” Jimmy asked.

“We need an emissary with the power to speak to both and get both to work together on this,” Darren said.

“Who?” Jimmy asked, “since the Duke isn’t doing it or he wouldn’t have asked us.”

“Your dad,” Darren replied, still holding the door open and facing his friend, “and maybe you might want to tell me what your dad really does, and what he’s got to do with that whole thing going on at the barracks with that supposedly retired guy named Colonel Banks and his supposedly retired friend General Volckmann. What are they doing here at Fort Ruger and how can we use that information to help us.”



## Chapter Twelve

The rain came the following morning. Jimmie's dad's Corvair wasn't going anywhere. Although the convertible top seemed secure when the levers were pushed to hold the canvas and metal rod lattice work down securely, the pounding rain and wind of a Hawaii monsoon downpour were simply too much for it. Darren plodded toward Diamond Head along 16th Avenue, knowing full well that the rain was so heavy and driving that he would not have known where he was if he didn't travel the same route almost constantly. The Fort Ruger rock wall that rose up at end of the street at the intersection, forming the top line of the "T" that served as the top bar of the letter describing it, was easily scaled. Darren tried to ignore the rain and the miserable conditions that came with it. The recreation center was his destination, although it could not be seen across the central ballpark area that formed the heart around which the other operations of the base functioned.

"What took you so long?" Jimmy asked, his voice denoting the impatience and enthusiasm that formed the foundation of his expressive personality, as Darren finally arrived through the front double doors of the center.

Sergeant Barton ran the center, although he almost never talked to any of the kids, like Jimmy and Darren, who hung out there or played pool and other available games. The sergeant mostly pushed a big wide brush back and forth across the wide-open spaces that took up most of the floor space in the single great room configuration of the place. One day he'd stopped to demonstrate how the pushing of such a brush was something not as simple as it seemed. When the brush was pushed along and then stopped, it had to be bounced once off the floor before

proceeding. That dumped whatever the brush head had accumulated for the next push to truly clear the area in front of it. Jimmy and Darren had been impressed, although they never got to try out the new learned behavior because the sergeant never let go of his tool and the center was locked when he wasn't there.

"Okay," Darren said, breathing hard as he dried himself with two white towels Sergeant Barton had thrown his way without making any comment, like he'd been expecting Darren's arrival somehow.

Darren eyed the sergeant while he worked to dry himself as best he could while still remaining in his tee-shirt and shorts.

"You tell him I was coming?" he asked Jimmy.

"He doesn't talk much and, I think, listens even less, so...no," Jimmy replied, watching the sergeant continue his sweeping in a far corner of the room.

"Strange," Darren said, carefully folding the damp towels and putting them on the seat of a nearby chair.

"You talk to your Dad?" Darren asked, walking in small circles around Jimmy to help dry himself off.

"Last year," Jimmy began, before pausing.

"Last year, what?" Darren demanded.

"Elvis," Jimmy replied. "Elvis put up fifty thousand dollars at Pearl Harbor to help build that Arizona Memorial everyone's been talking about. My dad met him at the concert he did to raise the money."

"What?" Darren asked, stopping his monotonous pacing. "Does everyone on this island know Elvis Presley except me?"

"Hey, it's good news," Jimmy said. "Dad's agreed to talk to Elvis about coming, and maybe the Duke too."

"Great, but that's the easy part," Darren replied. "The hard part is going to be Sergeant Cross. He's a stickler when it comes to proper identification at the door. He even grills guests

sometimes to make sure they are properly invited and not gaming the club.”

“What game?” Jimmy asked, perplexed.

“Dinner at the club,” Darren said, “It’s about half what it would be in town, and the drinks about a third of the price, and then there’s the view, which can’t be beat.”

“What did your dad say about talking to Cross?” Darren asked.

“Well, that’s the tough part,” Jimmy replied. “We have to talk to Sergeant Cross. If that fails, then dad will go to the general, but he said that if he has to go to the general then you’ll probably get fired, because Cross will be cross that someone went over his head. It’s a military thing, dad said.”

“Me?” Darren said, stunned. “I put all this together and then I get fired? How could that possibly be? Cross can’t fire me. My dad got me this job and he’s the harbormaster for all of Pearl.”

“Your dad is a warrant officer, remember?” Jimmy said, flatly. “Warrant officer is like a private in the Army when it comes to being able to communicate cross service and with the real Air Force officers who really run the Cannon Club operation.”

“My dad’s not a real officer?” Darren asked, surprised again.

“That’s not what I meant, but it doesn’t matter,” Jimmy replied. “The fact is that we have to go and see Sergeant Cross and talk him into the deal. Elvis and the Duke, and all that goes with them, will put the club on the map.”

“Oh yeah, just great,” Darren sighed. “You don’t get it. Sergeant Cross gets paid a sergeant’s salary. He doesn’t want any more people or any more work that goes with those people. That’s why he’s such a stickler about membership and identification. Fewer people, fewer employees, and therefore less work.”

The rain beat down so hard on the roof of the center that it became hard to talk or be heard over it.

“Let’s head to the club and take shelter there,” Jimmy said. “If nothing else we can swim in the pool in the rain.”

“Oh God, how can we motivate Cross to do anything?” Darren said, sounding dejected. “He listens about as well as sergeant Barton here. What have we got to get him to do anything, much less this?”

“Let’s go,” Jimmy said, grabbing the towels. “It’s a short run, we’ll use the towels like umbrellas.”

Out of seeming nowhere, Sergeant Barton appeared, his broom nowhere to be seen.

“I’ll take those, thank you,” he said, holding out one big hand, as he was waiting for someone to put money onto its upturned palm.

Jimmy silently handed the towels over.

Once they were outside in the pouring rain Darren couldn’t keep silent.

“There,” he yelled at Jimmy, that proves my point. Sergeant Barton is just like Sergeant Cross. He protects what he sees as his own, and he doesn’t want any extra work either.”

“Well,” that’s not specifically true,” Jimmy yelled back, taking off at a run. “Barton can’t fire you,” he threw over his shoulder as he ran toward where the club sat invisibly up on the flank of Diamond Head.

The club wasn’t open, but the gate worked like it always had, and the back door into the club proper was unlocked, which meant that Sergeant Cross was inside. The sergeant’s tiny Datsun pickup was parked off to the side in the parking lot, where he always parked, but it was impossible to see if anyone was inside it without going over to it.

“Into the valley of death rode the six hundred, guns to the right of them, guns to the left of them, volleyed and fired...” Jimmy quoted from the Charge of the Light Brigade as he stood

holding the door open, looking more like a too young, sopping doorman rather than a teenage Military brat.

Darren stopped before entering, looking Jimmy straight in the eyes. "It's not guns," he said.

Jimmy looked back at him in question.

"It's cannons to the right of them, cannons to the left of them, cannons in front of them, volleyed and thundered..." Darren recited.

"Whatever," Jimmy laughed out.

They dried themselves using two of the discarded cloth table covers that were in the canvas dirty wash bin and then proceeded to search for Sergeant Cross. After about twenty minutes of covering every square inch of the club, they couldn't find the sergeant anywhere. Jimmy called for him at the top of his voice but to no effect.

"What the heck?" Jimmy said, giving up.

The sound of the backdoor slamming rang through the large dining area where the boys stood together. Both boys turned, as one, to look across the dance floor, where the door was hidden behind some curtains. Sergeant Cross burst through.

"Over here," he hissed across the dance floor upon looking up and seeing Jimmy and Darren, bent over as if carrying something very heavy.

Darren ran across the floor, his go-aheads squeaking wetly with each step.

"What is it, sir?" he asked, running up to the sergeant.

"We've got real trouble," Sergeant Cross said, his voice much more subdued than Darren had ever heard it.

Darren looked down to see what the sergeant was holding and almost fell over in shock. Jimmy ran up and stopped a few feet away, also frozen in shock.

The sergeant was holding the Bofors clip, the round's polished brass gleaming in the places where mud didn't cover the casings fully.

“I don’t know where these came from, I swear,” the sergeant said, plaintively. “It’s like they washed down from up on the mountainside, but that can’t be. The brass is all polished. These are new rounds not from old World War II storage up there.

“What are we going to do?” Darren muttered, more to himself rather than to the sergeant.

“What are we going to do?” Sergeant Cross responded, his voice gaining more of its usual commanding timber. “I’ll tell you what we’re going to do. We’re going to get rid of these damned things. Somebody’s trying to get me fired and we’re not going to let that happen.”

There was complete silence, other than the hard rain impacting on the roof above them.

Darren’s mind raced. The rounds they’d buried had been buried in loose dirt. They hadn’t even bothered to pack the dirt down when they’d buried the clip, never thinking about torrential rains beating down on the mountainside. The clip must have been unearthed, as the rain ran in runnels down the mountain, and then the empty casings had floated enough to be carried along, finally arriving in onto the edge surface of the parking lot, not far from where Sergeant Cross usually parked.

“We’ll help you, of course,” Jimmy said, his voice more that of a used car salesman than the Jimmy that Darren knew.

“Yes, we’re all in this together,” Sergeant Cross said, his voice conveying his gratitude. “Here, take this and dump it into the ocean,” he said, holding out the mud-spattered and dripping clip as if was made of some radioactive substance.

Once more Jimmy took hold of the rounds and very gingerly began moving through the door and out into the rain. Darren followed him, but Sergeant Cross remained inside, silently closing the door when the boys were through.

“Where are we going?” Darren asked Jimmy in a whisper. “We don’t have a car or even a bike.”

“Doesn’t matter,” Jimmy replied. “We’re getting these out of there so we can be the guys who save Sergeant Cross.”

“What are we going to do with them?” Darren asked when they got to the parking lot.

“We’re going to put these under a bush down the driveway and out of sight,” Jimmy replied. “Then, we’re going to get the Corvair, no matter how much the top leaks, put the clip inside, and drive to the Makapuu coast area. Over the side of the cliff, it goes, not to be seen for a million years, or whenever the Pacific Ocean dries up.”

“How does that help us?” Darren asked. “Nobody knows anything about us being involved here.”

“Are you thinking straight at all?” Jimmy asked, bending down to place the rounds carefully under a bush where they couldn’t be seen by anyone driving or walking by. “The Duke knows, and besides, we’re saving Sergeant Cross. We wait a bit and then ask him a favor, not to mention that you don’t even have to be worried about being fired again.

## Chapter Thirteen

Jimmy and Darren rushed back to Jimmy's house through the pouring rain. To Darren, felt warm and comforting simply because they were nearly invisible when they were out in it. No one in their right mind, or on a serious mission, could be found working through such a brutal beating downpour.

The garage was unlocked and the Corvair was where it was supposed to be. Jimmy's dad never garaged the government car, only his beloved Spyder. Jimmy pulled up on the garage door handle and the door slid upward, squeaking away, it's metal on metal rollers and hinges making a racket no matter how much oil was shot into them. Both boys remained standing out in the rain, frozen in place, although complete shelter from the elements was only a few feet in front of them both.

"I thought you might want some company," Star Black said, leaning sensuously against the Monza's left rear quarter.

Jimmy moved slowly inside the garage, more to hear her better than to gain shelter from the rain. Darren slowly followed, wondering how they were supposed to get back to the Cannon Club driveway, reclaim the Bofors clip, and then get it driven over to the cliffs near Makapuu Beach, before dumping it into the ocean waters.

Jimmy said, "ah," but nothing more came out of his mouth.

"I thought so," Star said, her eyes flashing brightly. "I'm bored stiff and you're up to something. You two are always up to something. I want in."

"There's nothing to be 'in' on," Jimmy said, his voice sounding so phony and nervous that Darren could not help but openly shake his head.

"She knows," Darren said, stepping around Jimmy, who normally assumed the leadership position on any of their many



adventures together, but in the presence of Star Black remained befuddled and seemingly disconnected from his normal intelligent and quick mind.

“Well?” Star said, folding her arms and looking for all the world like she was never leaving the garage.

“How did you get in here?” Jimmy asked, weakly.

“I was invited,” Star replied. “Where we going? Back to Pearl to get some more loot?”

“Oh, Jeez,” Jimmy breathed out “We’re going back to the club to get the BoFors clip, and then we’re going to take it out Kalanianaʻole Highway and dump it off the cliffs,” Darren said, seeing no other way to get rid of the bothersome girl.

“We taking the anemic little hot rod here?” Star said, backing away from the car to take the whole thing in as if she was appraising it to be junked.

“Get in, the back seat,” Jimmy said, stepping forward and quickly getting into the driver’s seat.

“Get the door,” he said to Darren, starting the Corvair.

Darren waited by the sliding door, holding the rope. The Corvair only started on the first attempt when it was warmed up, otherwise, it took four or five distinctly spaced turns of the ignition key to get it to catch and run.

The Corvair finally started, and Jimmy backed it out of the garage, Darren getting the door and then jumping in beside him.

“The rain’s over, we can leave the top down,” Darren said to Jimmy. Everything was wet but the torrential rain had disappeared as if it had never been there. The runoff had been deep and fast down every street on the base that the boys had walked and then run through.

They drove down Diamond Head Road before it turned into Monsarrat, Jimmy keeping the speed down, almost as if they had the BoFors clip resting in the back seat again. The fresh cool wind blew over them, smelling of flowers and other exotic flora Darren couldn’t identify.

“See the USA, in your Chevrolet...” Star belted out from the back seat, actually sounding a bit better than Dinah Shore from the television ads, Darren thought.

Jimmy turned on the radio and caught Frankie Valli singing a song that was fast becoming the hit of the year. It was called *Sherry*, and the boys always sang along when it played, but they didn’t with Star Black in the car. She did, hitting the amazingly high falsetto notes with a purity that was more than surprising, and somehow, she knew all the words from memory.

The song ended as Jimmy eased the Spyder onto the short upward angled road that led into the Cannon Club parking lot.

Star Black made no comment as the car stopped and both boys got out.

“Keep a watch out,” Jimmy said to Star, as he and Darren headed into the brush to retrieve the clip.

“Keep a watch out, that’s rich,” Star yelled at their backs. “What is this, Sky King but with a cheap mini-Chevy instead of a neat plane?”

Jimmy carefully lifted the rounds into the back seat, as Star scooted over to remain as distant as she could from them.

“We’re off,” Jimmy said, putting the Corvair in gear by hitting one of the transmission shift buttons mounted on the dashboard.

The cliffs running along the mauka (toward the sea) side between Makapuu Beach and Diamond Head were among the most beautiful wave swept features of the entire Hawaiian Island chain. The Molokai Trench called the Kaiwi Channel by locals, is the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean for thousands of miles in any direction at 2300 feet, and extends just offshore from the cliffs, descending down from the nearly vertical shelf that abruptly falls off into the depths there. That, plus the short distance between the two islands makes the waters among the most windswept and treacherously dangerous seaside areas of the world.

Star Black made the decision for the three of them, to stop just past the entrance to Hanauma Bay and climb down to the edge, since that portion of Kalanianaʻole Highway, the only road, allowed for parking along a narrow strip just mauka of the highway. Jimmy carefully cradled the clip in his arms, the rounds covered against prying eyes of other passing cars filled with tourists from all over the world.

The hike was easy for Star and Darren, but Jimmy had to slowly work his way down to the very edge. The cliff at that point rose up nearly a hundred feet above the roiling waters, their deep blue white-capped waves occasionally leaping up almost to the top edge before crashing against the rocks.

Darren looked out toward where Molokai sat on the horizon, looking more like a pancake than an island that possessed the highest cliff-top to sea elevation in the world. From one ridge it was a straight drop of 3900 feet to the sea below. There would be no likelihood of anyone finding the clip where it was going, he knew.

Star and Darren waited for Jimmy to get set up to dump his load. Carefully, he removed the towel and placed the rounds on the stone, before unceremoniously shoving them over the lip. There was no drama, as the clip simply disappeared over the edge. The three stood together, looking at the water heaping up like it wanted to possess them or at least drag them from their perch near the very edge. It was a hypnotic experience to stand there and so dangerous that the state refused to allow for easy access to where they stood, although it wasn't against any law. Over a hundred tourists died every year from doing the same thing they were doing and ignoring the danger of a freak wave swooping up to gather them back and down into the death-dealing churn of raging seas.

"What now?" Star asked as they turned as one to climb back up to the road where the Corvair sat waiting.

"We've got to get to my Dad so he can get to Elvis and the dinner at the Club can be arranged," Jimmy said, as if doing

such a thing was just another everyday event for a teenager enjoying the summer break.

Darren was aghast at Jimmy's revelation. It was like the brightest kid Darren had ever known was a complete paralyzed idiot in the presence of the young woman they both knew as Star Black. Darren couldn't get it. Her effect over his friend was almost magical, and he wondered while they climbed, if there was something wrong with him for not succumbing to that same effect.

Jimmy went on blabbing the entire story to Star until they reached the car.

"Okay, I've got it," Star finally replied, once she got a chance to wedge into the litany of Elvis-related short stories Jimmy was running on about.

Jimmy did an illegal U-turn on the highway, using the low-end torque of the high-revving flat-six engine, turbocharger screaming, to spin both rear tires and bring the car around using almost no pavement at all. The little Spyder launched itself back toward Hawaii Kai on the way to downtown Waikiki.

"You don't need your dad, who probably wouldn't do anything anyway," Star intoned, her bright clear voice penetrating right through the wind and over the howl of the engine. "He's a nice man but he's a bit of a stick, and he's not going to take any risk at all. All you need, you have. Sergeant Cross is an amiable coward, and Wu is forever yours now. They're all you need. Simply go back to the Duke, tell him the dinner is on and get the date and time down. Let the Duke do the invitations to a done deal. Then we'll go tell Cross and Wu and that's it."

Jimmy blasted down the steep hill from the top of Koko Head mountain, running through the very end of the yellow light of the traffic signal at the intersection to Hawaii Kai's only shopping center. The signal was one of only three on the entire island, and Jimmy loved to play 'chicken' with it. He swung the car into the shopping center, blew by the filling station adjoining

the main building, and then slowed for the speed bumps leading back to Zippy's drive-in restaurant.

"Shave Ice," he said as if speaking to himself.

Darren knew the shave ice joint well since Jimmy could never pass through Hawaii Kai without stopping there. They served a 'cold brain' shave ice that was bigger than most human brains and caused no end of ice cream headaches when consumed because it melted too fast to keep up with. The special concoction was made with syrup imported from Czechoslovakia and the ice was shaved so fine it all stuck together even if tipped to the side.

"Those are bad for your health," Star muttered.

"You want one or not?" Jimmy asked, pulling up to the little window of the place, situated in the middle of the parking lot and no bigger than an old-fashioned outhouse.

"Strawberry," Star murmured.

Darren ordered banana since only three flavors were ever served at shave ice outlets on the island. The third flavor was lime.

They got the shave ice. Jimmy pulled into a parking slot across from the tiny drive-in, since no shave ice could survive the wind generated in the passenger compartment of a convertible with the top down.

"What is this 'we' stuff, Star?" Darren asked, turning in the front passenger seat to look at the beautiful young woman.

Star slowly consumed her shave ice, making no reply, not even looking back at Darren.

"This is our deal," Darren decided to risk saying to Star, "and there is no 'we' involved here. You came for a ride and the ride's about over and that's that."

He waited for her response, not expecting much more than the quiet ascent. And then he didn't move fast enough. Star had casually reached her right hand into the paper shave ice cup, scooped out the entire remaining mass of her 'cold brain', and heaved it directly into his face.

“Ahhhh,” Darren screamed, and then jerked back, causing his own shave ice to drop solidly into his lap. He screamed again, grabbing the door latch and bailing out of the car backward. He leaned down and tried to get rid of the extremely cold and adhering ice from his face, chest, stomach, and crotch. Gradually, he succeeded.

“My God,” he finally got out, straightening up. “What did you do that for?” he asked, his breathing coming in rapid gasps.

“I know everything,” Star said, dumping her empty shave ice container onto a nearby grass-filled median, “and I’m along for the ride, as you big-nosed skinny friend here mentioned.

“That’s littering,” Jimmy complained, getting out of the car to retrieve the paper cup. He crumpled the cup and stuck it into the cigarette holder under the center of the Spyder’s dashboard, before re-seating himself. “Big nose?” he whispered, almost to himself.

“How do I look?” Darren asked, standing next to his open car door with his arms spread.

“Get in, we’re headed back to see the Duke at the Moana,” Jimmy ordered, starting the Corvair, which, since the engine was warm, fired right up. “You look like somebody punched you in the nose and you’re still bleeding, plus you wet your shorts. You shouldn’t have worn all-white today.

“I can’t go to the hotel or see anybody like this,” Darren said, still trying to futilely clean himself off. “I’ve got to get home and get these into the washing machine.”

“That syrup’s indelible European stuff,” Star remarked, looking bored while sitting casually in the back seat. “No way that stuff’s coming out.”

“I can’t be seen like this,” Darren said, his voice almost breaking.

“Like who’s going to care?” Star asked, before going on, “you’re not a major player in any of this. Let your friend here do the talking. When he’s not playing Mr. Wizard with live explosives, he actually makes a bit of sense.”

Darren got in the car and Jimmy eased the Corvair out through the parking lot to the highway.

He turned the radio back on, once they were headed back into Waikiki. Amazingly, Frankie Valli was belting out Sherry all over again.

“Big nose?” Jimmy said, under his breath, only Darren hearing him.

## Chapter Fourteen

Jimmy headed the Corvair around the tip of Diamond Head, only slowing in an attempt to avoid deeper runnels of mud that had flowed down from the mountain and across the road, that had only occurred a bit earlier. The mud, if it got on the Spyder's paint and dried, was extremely difficult to wash off without damaging the car's bright red finish. They drove with the top down, against Darren's wishes. The slight spray, flying up from the tires of cars in front of them, was bothersome, although neither Jimmy nor Star, who was more exposed in the back seat, seem to be bothered at all.

There was no more talk of taking Darren home to change. Star Black had alluded to having a relationship with the Duke and that was something neither boy could overlook, given how important it was to get the Duke to approach Elvis about the dinner. There was no way to determine how long Elvis would be on Oahu or, even if he wanted to have the Cannon Club dinner, or that the Duke would be able to reach him and convince him. How Star Black had come to know the Duke was another mystery. She was a surfer of some renown, for a woman, and that fact could not be denied, but she didn't seem the kind of female surfer who took to social gatherings or introductions well, either.

Darren knew he could get into the hair salon restroom and wash most of the shave ice stain from his clothes, although if his mother saw him, then it would be curtains for his ruining another set of clothing. Getting to Elvis, or having Star get to the Duke to get to Elvis, was more important. Darren was also relieved that Judy and her sister had been sidelined in their efforts. If he got to the Mainland to attend college in the fall without ever



visiting Judy's bedroom, then he might be able to live the rest of his life without always thinking back about how cowardly he'd been when it came to confronting a girl, who was little more than his own age. Only his experience with Judy gave him an understandable explanation about why Jimmy, notoriously brilliant, disciplined and independent, fell completely apart every time he was in the presence of Star Black.

Jimmy parked the Spyder under the portico that extended out from the lobby of the Moana.

"How are you going to find the Duke?" Darren asked, climbing out and holding the door for Star.

"Now, where would a beach bum be found, do you suppose?" Star replied, ignoring the open door, instead climbing up and over the back of the low-slung automobile. She slid a bit and then seemed to bounce down before springing to her feet.

"You'll scratch the paint," Darren said, slamming the car door. "It's not Jimmy's car. It's his dad's, and his dad will certainly notice the slightest mar in the finish."

"Do you mind, Jimmy?" Star asked, walking around the back of the car, heat waves from the rapidly cooling engine coming up through its two rows of rear hood vents.

"The paint?" Jimmy replied, weakly, before adding, "no, it's okay, you just polished it up a bit.

To make his point Jimmy walked to the rear of the car and gently polished the area Star had come down with one bare hand.

"Oh, please," Darren murmured, before following the fast-disappearing young woman into the lobby.

He looked down at himself. The red and yellow had sort of faded together. There was no point in trying to sneak into the hair salon bathroom. If he did wash the indelible syrup out of his shirt and shorts somehow, then he'd have nothing dry to change into anyway.

"Queen's," Star threw over her shoulder, bending down to remove her flip flops and immediately head off in the direction where the saltwater natatorium stuck out from the edge of

Kapiolani Park. Darren and Jimmy knew the park well, and Queens Beach too, although they never hung out there. That beach was one of the local ‘Kama’aina’ refuge beaches and Haoles were unwelcome, to put it mildly. Queens Surf, one of the closed-in reef surfing beaches was just offshore. On an extremely lucky day, Darren had ridden all seven of the contiguous reefs to arrive on the sand next to Kuhio, at the edge of downtown Waikiki. Riding all seven sets of surfing beach waves in one go was considered a remarkable feat for anyone, much less a young Haole. The ride from just off Diamond Head, and then all the way in, had taken almost ten minutes. Ten minutes of great challenge and a lot of fun, even though Jimmy was the only witness, and he cared about as much about surfing as Darren cared about playing the organ.

Jimmy and Darren didn’t need to be told not to follow Star. As the young and beautiful woman she was, the fact that she was a Haole would no doubt be completely ignored by the local surfers who hung out there.

They walked on the wet sand to Kuhio Beach and decided to wait there. The tide was low, but the surf was running strong at about six feet. Anything over four feet was considered high surf along the protected leeward shore encompassing all of Waikiki’s beachfront. Walking out on the concrete pier made viewing Queen’s Beach easy, as it lay only about three hundred meters toward Diamond Head from where they leaned on the waist-high stone ledge running right out to the pier’s end. When Darren had been in grade school at the nearby St. Augustine Elementary, he’d often played with the other kids on the horizontal lower pier that ran along toward the Moana a bit, and about thirty yards out from the beach. On high surf days, the waves would come in and wipe the low wall clean of everyone on the wall, to be thrown physically off the pier and into the inshore lagoon by such a seemingly gentle series of very powerful waves had been a wonder of great fun.

They waited for half an hour. Nothing could be seen of any human activity at Queens Beach. Finally, impatience got the best of Jimmy.

“Let’s go over there,” he said, beginning to walk back down the pier toward the beach.

“We’ll do more harm than good,” Darren replied, “and Star told us to stay away and let her do her thing, whatever her thing really is.”

“She may get herself into trouble,” Jimmy said, his pace increasing the closer they got to the sand, “being a Haole, and all.”

Darren knew there would be no stopping Jimmy since he’d somehow concluded that Star might be in danger and that he should be there to protect her.

The walk to Queens was short. Neither the Duke nor Star were anywhere to be seen when they got to the actual part of the sand known as Queens, however, but there was a group of angry-looking locals that surged forward to meet them.

“You no be here, Haole boy,” the obvious local leader said, moving in closer in order to be as menacing as possible.

It was almost impossible not to be totally intimidated. The local, or Kanaka, leader of the pack of Hawaiians, likely weighed more than Jimmy and Darren put together and, although he was the largest of the group, the fact that there were six more of them, all closing in, was even more intimidating.

“Ah, we’re with Star and the Duke,” Jimmy said, pointing further down the beach toward where Star had disappeared.

“You no local,” the Hawaiian went on as if he had not heard a word. The big bear-chested man, looking more like a Hawaiian warrior god than a regular human, punched the index finger of his right hand into Darren’s chest.

Darren recoiled from the physical contact.

Jimmy stepped in front of him and confronted the Hawaiian leader.

“Maybe you could try speaking English instead of pidgin and we might listen to you,” Jimmy said, aggressively, leaning in toward the big man who was at least six inches taller and many times thicker in every respect.

Maybe,” Jimmy said again, this time dragging out the seconds like he was thinking very seriously about something before he went on. “You might consider the fact that the new state of Hawaii is filled with male macho crap, like what’s going on right here, but it also enjoys the lowest murder, assault, and other physical contact crimes in the nation.”

“What you sayin’, Haole?” the Hawaiian replied, his expression more one of surprise rather than anger.

“What I’m sayin’, Kanaka boy, is that you’re all talk and no fight, and I’ve been around, in these places that pass for schools out on this island long enough to know that, so get out of our way.”

The Hawaiian said nothing, but his breathing changed to heavy slow inhalations and exhalations, while his facial expression went from one of surprise to a total deadpan look.

“And another thing,” Jimmy went on, completely ignoring, or missing the fact that the Hawaiian was giving every anthropomorphic indication that he was about to blow up like the nearby active volcano called Kilauea on the Big Island, “this Haole thing must stop. You use this word, and we might as well call it what it is; and that’s the ‘H’ word, to insult others simply because of the color of their skin. I’m not going to take that from you or anyone else.”

Darren literally backed up a few steps, his toes curling in the deep sand in preparation to run.

“Color skin?” the Hawaiian hissed out, his voice sounding more like it was coming from a huge rearing and poisonous snake than a human being. “You white color Haoles come to our lands and take all, then claim you insulted?”

“You going to get out of the way, or am I going to make you?” Jimmy replied, ignoring the Hawaiian’s complaint.

Without warning, the Hawaiian reared back, raised his clenched fist, and struck Jimmy on the right side of his head.

Jimmy went down instantly to the sand, his crumpling body giving every indication that he was either dead or unconscious by the time he lay sprawled flat on the sand.

The big Hawaiian stood still, his right fist unclenching and dropping to his side, while his companions stood frozen in place.

“Make me?” the Hawaiian finally asked, his tone changed to a low and controlled whisper.

As one, the Kanaka group of locals began moving slowly backward, as if the move had been choreographed. Finally, they turned, the big Hawaiian looking over his shoulder as he slowly walked away with his friends.

Darren stared at his friend without leaning down or attempting to assist him in any way. He intrinsically knew Jimmy was badly hurt and needed immediate and serious medical help.

“Not his head,” Darren said to himself, as he raced over the top of the sand toward Kalakaua Boulevard, the busiest street in downtown Waikiki. Jimmy was the smartest person Darren had ever met and just being around him for a short period was more entertaining than the volumes of other things Darren had done in his short life. As he ran, he wondered what he would do if Jimmy was so instantly taken from his life.

Upon reaching the sidewalk on the ocean side of the street, Darren ran at top speed to the Moana Hotel, and on up the stairs and into Lewis of Hollywood, where his mother worked.

“Mom, mom, mom,” he yelled, once he got inside the shop, rushing to every stall until his mother came out of the back to confront him.

“Jimmy’s hurt badly at Queens Beach and he needs a doctor right now,” he got out.

“Sit down,” his mother said, grabbing him by the arm and pushing him into one of the vacant beauty chairs. “Tell me,” she

demanded, leaning down until her face was only inches from his own.

Darren breathed in and out rapidly, trying to put together the right words to explain what happened, but his mother wouldn't wait.

"Surfing accident?" she said. "I told you about surfing there, with the waves coming in low across the sharp reef. People get cut up there all the time."

"Doctor," Darren breathed out. "He's not conscious," he started to explain, but his mother gave him no time to finish the sentence, instead of turning to grab a nearby telephone, her expression changing from one of accusation to worry and concern.

The shop turned into a place of bedlam, with customers and the other beauticians moving to surround Darren. They began asking questions, all talking at once to the point where Darren couldn't understand any of them

"I've got to get back," he said, jumping to his feet. "Jimmy's alone on the sand and I've got to help him." With that, he broke through what had become a small crowd and raced to and out of the front entrance he'd come in only moments before.

Running at full speed, he reached the place he'd left Jimmy's broken body and then stopped to look around. Jimmy wasn't there. Slowly, Darren scanned the surrounding area and spotted him. The same group of locals who were responsible for hurting the boy was ministering to him on the grass located at the very edge of Kapiolani Park. They'd moved his body from the sand to the grassy park area he realized, although Jimmy was still lying flat on his back and as obviously unconscious as he'd been in the sand.

Darren heard sirens and felt some relief, as he ran to where Jimmy lay.

"Hurt bad," the big Hawaiian said, kneeling at Jimmy's side. "Not meant to hurt this bad," he went on.

Honolulu police cars pulled up, one after another, blocking all traffic on Kalakaua.

The first police officer to reach them came at a run.

“What’s his condition?” he asked in an authoritative voice, leaning down, and then physically pushing the big Hawaiian back. “And, what in hell are you doing in all this Ahi?”

The big Hawaiian got to his feet slowly, while the officer knelt at Jimmy’s side, his fingers going to the boy’s neck.

“Halawa, I going back to Halawa jail I think,” the Hawaiian named Ahi intoned as if he was very used to saying the words.

“He’s still alive,” the cop said, “and he needs to get to Tripler as fast as possible.”

As he said the words an ambulance pulled up by the police cars parked at all angles out on the street. The ambulance stopped, and then very slowly began moving again, driving up over the curb and moving right into the park atop its beautifully cut and manicured grass until stopping where they were.

Two technicians, attired like doctors about to go into surgery, jumped out of the ambulance’s doors and raced to where Jimmy lay. In seconds they were at the ambulance again, opening the rear of the vehicle and pulling out a wheeled gurney.

Darren stood watching, unable to do anything to help. In minutes Jimmy was loaded onto the gurney, the gurney slid into the back of the ambulance, and then the vehicle was gone, lights and siren blazing. Other than a small, gathered crowd of people watching, the pack of locals who’d been there earlier, and the big Hawaiian, there was nothing to show that something serious had happened except the two dark tracks the ambulance had dug in the grass as it’d made its rapid departure from the scene.

“Who are you?” the policeman asked Darren.

Darren didn’t know what to say, other than that he was nobody, so he said nothing, just looking blankly back into the cop’s eyes.

“Doesn’t matter now,” the officer said, finally. “The Army’s on the way and they’ll handle that part of the investigation. You stay right here where you are.”

“The Army?” Darren whispered to himself. What was the Army going to do, and why was it involved at all, he wondered?



# Chapter Fifteen

How had the cop known that Jimmy was a military brat, and therefore needed transport to the Naval Hospital at Tripler instead of Queens or some place closer and private? Why was the Army coming? And why were the cops acting so weird, like a young kid had not been badly assaulted on a public beach? Who was Jimmy's father and what was his job that so many people reacted so quickly? And, finally, as Darren reflected, sinking down to the grass to sit with his knees pulled up wondering how he was going to get to Tripler to be with his friend, there was the issue of why he felt so totally in the dark about everything?

"You the kid that was with him?" a man asked, his voice coming gentle and smooth from behind Darren's bowed back.

Darren straightened up and turned his torso and canting his face upward to look into the man's eyes.

The man was nondescript, wearing an aloha shirt hanging loosely out above cotton khaki trousers. Brown leather shoes completed the normal businessman's attire of a typical island attorney and others involved in official business.

When Darren didn't answer, the man slowly squatted down to bring his eyes to the level of Darren's own.

"Who are you?" Darren asked, his voice a whisper, knowing he wasn't himself yet following what had happened.

"A friend of the family," the man said, with a reassuring smile, before flicking his gaze to the beauty of the Queen Surf waves breaking on the beach just beyond.

The morning light glinted briefly from a green stone on the man's left ring finger, where normally a wedding ring would have gone. Darren focused and then was surprised. He knew that

105

ring or one like it. Jimmy's father wore the same ring but not on his left hand. It was a West Point graduation ring. The man was Army, and he wasn't an enlisted man, either.

"Do you want to know what happened?" Darren asked him when the man didn't speak again.

"No, it doesn't matter," he replied, the smile fading from his facial features. "Others will investigate that. I'm just here for intervention and assistance. Is there anything you need?"

Darren breathed in and out slowly. Very rarely in his life had anyone asked him if he needed help. He was used to making it on his own, or with Jimmy or his brother or someone close to his own age making decisions with him.

"I want to go to Tripler to be with Jimmy," he asked, his tone hopeful. "There's also Jimmy's dad's car parked in front of the Moana where my mom works. I don't have the keys to take it home."

"Corporal," the West Pointer said, over his shoulder, even though it seemed that there was nobody near enough to hear him.

A young man, seemingly little older than Darren himself, peeled away from a small group of Honolulu police officers, civilian attired men and the locals who Jimmy and Darren had encountered only minutes earlier, and walked quickly, stopping a few feet short of them.

"Sir," was all he said, standing so stiffly it seemed like the mildest trade wind breeze coming in off the ocean water might make him teeter and fall.

"Stand at ease, corporal," the West Pointer said, without turning to face the corporal.

"It would appear that this young man is a confidant of our subject," he went on. "It would appear that he needs to get to Tripler to be with his companion."

"Sir," the corporal answered, his version of standing at ease being no different than the position he'd assumed when he'd walked across the grass to them.

“Where are the keys to the Corvair?” the West Pointer asked, his voice little more than a whisper into the slight wind coming from across the top of the breaking surf across the sand in the distance.

Darren was so distant from the scene he didn’t realize the question was and had to be, directed at him. He looked into the man’s steady gaze, his big brown eyes not seeming to blink at all while he waited.

How did the man know that the car they’d driven to the Moana was a Corvair? Darren knew it didn’t really matter, but suddenly everything seemed to matter, and on top of that everything seemed to be part of some mystery Darren wasn’t capable of putting together.

He always puts them in his shorts,” Darren replied. “He always keeps them in his right back pocket, so he won’t forget where they are.”

“Take the sedan,” the West Pointer said, still not looking at the corporal standing at attention only a few paces behind him. “Make to the hospital where the boy’s body was taken. Secure the keys from the pocket indicated by the conversational reply to you just heard. Repair back to this spot in short order.”

“Sir,” the corporal replied, but not moving from his position after saying the only word he seemed to know or use when responding to the strange, laid back, but obviously a very powerful man.

“Maximum speed,” the West Pointer ordered, his voice almost too quiet for even Darren to hear, and he was much closer than the corporal.

Still, the corporal didn’t move.

“Sir,” the corporal whispered back for the fourth time, but the intensity of his whisper was much greater than the West Pointer’s as if he was waiting for something more that gave every appearance of being vitally important.

“Execute,” the West Pointer said, waving the hand with his ring on it backward languidly, but to no effect, because at the

instant the word execute was said, the corporal had disappeared, his exit so fast and quiet that it seemed the entire exchange between the three of them had been choreographed and practiced many times.

Through the fog of whatever had appeared in his mind following the violence committed on his friend Darren was still able to realize that what had happened in the time since, and the communications dealing with it, was among the very most extraordinary he'd ever experienced in his short life. The corporal was gone, leaving Darren alone with the strange man again. He thought about what had happened, and then it came to him that the man had used the words "the boy's body," in describing Jimmy.

"Is Jimmy dead?" Darren squeaked out, trying not to let his voice break, but failing, thankful for the covering whirl and banshee whine of an unlikely helicopter somewhere very low and nearby.

"Not to my knowledge," the West Pointer replied, and then quickly continuing, "I'm sorry I gave you that impression with my description a few seconds ago. He was in good condition when they transported him, and I'm sure the Tripler team will bring him back." At that, the man rose to his feet and stood, letting the wind blow his shirt loosely around him.

"Are you leaving?" Darren asked, remaining where he was, his legs almost too weak to support him, he knew.

"I will remain on station for as long as it takes for the corporal to retrieve the keys to the automobile so that you can proceed to the hospital in that conveyance and be with your friend," the man said as if formulating the plan in his mind as he spoke. "I will then visit your mother to instruct her on your whereabouts and the situation. Your father is known. Your father will be reached. Your father will understand that you are in good condition and will return home in short order."

“Why is all this happening, and who are you really?” Darren could not help asking, finally getting full control of his voice again.

“I’m a friend of the family, and now your very own,” the man replied, his smile larger and brighter than ever before.

“What’s your name?” Darren asked.

“In due time,” the West Pointer replied, his smile beginning to fade. “A man of some distinction is coming our way now. I would advise, as your new friend, that you listen and then agree to whatever he proposes or recommends. You can merely nod your head if you are so inclined.”

Darren looked at what had been a congregated group of talking men, but now was a dispersing mess of cops, civilians, and the locals who’d Jimmy and he had so mistakenly encountered earlier. Two men approached, causing Darren to come to his feet. One of the men was the Duke, and the other was the big Hawaiian who’d struck Jimmy. Darren waited, watching them come, Duke, leading the Hawaiian as if he was leading a giant dog but one without a leash.

The Duke stopped well short of where the West Pointer and Darren stood waiting.

“Let’s move to a bench down the way,” the Duke said, pointing a short distance back in the direction where the Moana Hotel sat perched on the bank of sand just above the lightly beating waves constantly rolling into Waikiki Beach.

The Duke sat on the side of the picnic bench facing the zoo across the road, while Darren took a seat on the opposing side. Neither the Hawaiian nor the West Pointer sat down. Both men stood just behind who they were so obviously with, and at a distance almost too far away to overhear the conversation.

The Duke began talking without waiting for Darren to say anything, or even introduce himself.

“This is what happened,” he began and then related the story of a surfing event gone wrong. It was a complete fable about how Jimmy had fallen from his board and how a big wave

had come along and knocked his board into the side of his head. The Hawaiian and the other locals had seen the incident and rushed into the raging surf to successfully save Jimmy.

Darren listened for the full fifteen to twenty minutes it took for the Duke to lay it all out. He occasionally looked up at the Hawaiian, uncomfortably pacing back and forth on the sand, but said nothing.

Finally, the Duke was done. He opened his arms and turned his hand's palm up as if offering a sermon.

"What do you want to do?" he asked, before lowering his hands back down to the table and waiting.

"We came to see you here," Darren blurted out. "We came to get you to have Elvis do the dinner engagement you asked us to get and to let you know Sergeant Cross and Chef Wu are aboard. All we wanted was for you to get Elvis to come and let us know when you want it to happen."

"That's it?" the Duke replied, a huge smile revealing his perfect white teeth. "That's all you want?" he asked. "That and to go and see your friend and take him home when they fix him?"

Darren remembered the advice his new friend, the West Pointer, had given him and wondered if he should not simply shut up, nod, and then wait for the corporal to bring the car keys. More than anything, however, he just wanted to return to what it had been before, without people asking him what he wanted or talking in such a funny way that it took extra time just to figure out the meaning of the words they were using.

The sound of the drumming roar of the helicopter once more came in to allow Darren to delay saying whatever he intended to say as if helping him to remain silent for as long as possible. The noise died down and then was gone.

"Why is the Army here and what's going to happen with the police, and everything?" Darren finally asked, wondering if he'd gone too far.

“The Army will do whatever it is the Army has to do,” the Duke replied, his features gone serious, with a slight tinge of sadness thrown in. “The police have accepted the story. It’s a good story. Hawaii is the better for it and you boys, as well. Whatever price might be charged to certain people involved will be done so by others that do not matter in your life or that of your friend.”

Darren suddenly realized that there was nothing more to be said.

He nodded his head.

“Okay, Darren got out, “but I’d like to talk to my new friend once more about this.”

The Duke nodded back.

Darren turned his body to look behind him at the West Pointer, but the man was gone. Only the corporal stood, again at attention, his right hand extended. From the end of his hand, a set of keys dangling. They were Jimmy’s keys.

“Sir,” the corporal intoned, as before.

Darren realized with a rush that the only way the corporal could have gotten to Tripler and then back in such short order was by helicopter. The helicopter had been for him. The enormity of the act of retrieving the keys did not escape him. When he turned back the Duke who was gone, moving slowly back toward the area where the Hawaiians were still gathered, the big Hawaiian moving at his side, but glancing back every few seconds to look at Darren.

## Chapter Sixteen

Darren moved toward the Moana Hotel, using the hot sidewalk instead of the more protective cooler sand along the shore. He'd left his flip flops in the car, but it had only occurred to him that he'd done so when he began his trek back to the hotel. His feet hurt, but not overly much, as he'd built up quite a callous on the sole of each foot from running around so much without any cover on his feet at all. Just before going up the steps and entering Lewis of Hollywood, he made his decision. His place wasn't at Jimmy's side. He wasn't family and he had had enough experience with the Naval Hospital that he knew he wouldn't be welcomed with open arms by the stiffly starched and rigidly traditional operation.

Darren would have avoided seeing his Mom if he could have but knew life would be unlivable when she came home later to be enraged about not being filled in.

The shop was filled with women of all kinds, sitting in cutting chairs, drying chairs, or being worked over getting shampoos and rinses.

"How's Jimmy," his mother yelled, from one of the cutting chairs, spinning her client's chair so that the older woman faced Darren.

"He's at Tripler," Darren responded, shakily, suddenly embarrassed at becoming the center of attention.

"They flew in a helicopter," his mother went on. "He must be in real trouble."

A million thoughts went through Darren's mind at once about the potential of damage Jimmy had suffered, but he knew deep down there was nothing he could say about the subject because he really knew nothing. The fact that his friend had



been flown to the hospital aboard a military helicopter probably, had nothing to do with Jimmy's injuries, but there was nothing to be said about that either.

"Ah, they said he'd be okay," Darren intoned, no emotion in his voice, never expecting his reply to be accepted. His mother was Germanically harsh, under most conditions, and never missed much of anything.

"Okay," she replied, spinning the chair back to where it had originally been positioned. "Go home and wait to hear."

Once again, Darren was surprised. Without knowing much of anything his mother had come to the same conclusion he himself had. Darren waited for her to say more, or for any of the other stylists to comment, since they'd all been so concerned earlier, but nobody said anything. Darren turned and departed the way he'd come.

The car was right where Jimmy had left it. Darren pulled the keys that the disappeared West Pointer had given him from his back pocket. The Spyder's engine turned over and fired up almost instantly like it had been waiting for any opportunity to power the car out of there.

Normally, given the opportunity to drive the Corvair alone, an opportunity he'd never had, Darren would have found an open stretch of highway to let the Spyder's turbocharger howl the vehicle up to top speed. Jimmy always said it would do a hundred but had never taken it there. Darren drove slowly, down Kalakaua, intending to round the tip of Diamond Head and bring the convertible into Fort Ruger, and the officers' quarters, from the rear of the dominating crater.

Darren didn't think of Star Black until he saw her. She was sitting alone at one of the park tables on the side of the road where the Kapiolani Park Bandstand stood, permanently erected and open between the road and entrance to the Honolulu Zoo.

She sat with her feet pulled up, her arms wrapped around her knees, and a look of expectancy on her facial features. The wind blew her deeply black hair off toward Diamond

Head. Darren wondered about such a young woman of such beauty but so seemingly hardened by life.

Darren pulled the Corvair over to the side of the road, put the transmission in neutral, and looked across the grass to where she sat.

“Where have you been?” Star asked, languidly unfolding her body to stand next to the picnic table.

Darren made no reply, his head turning toward the ocean, his attention drawn by the fact that there was nobody there. The entire mass of police, military, civilians, and even the islanders themselves were gone. There was no one on Queens Beach and only an occasional tourist couple walking down toward Waikiki from the zoo.

Star crossed the road at a loping amble, ran around to the passenger side of the Spyder, and hopped over the closed door. Landing heavily down on the well-padded seat she seemed to settle in before turning her full attention on Darren.

“You going to punch it or sit here idling away all day?” she murmured, before turning her head to watch the road in front of them.

“Okay,” was all Darren could get out. He looked back, wanting to be particularly cautious, as the day had become a mess of failed experiences and it wasn’t half over.

They drove in silence up the road and past the Coast Guard station. The builders of the road around the tip of Diamond Head, after the war, had constructed many turnouts and lookouts, the view being wonderfully spectacular at every point from the raised conveyance. The view was great even driving by in a car, as the lookouts dotted by, only low walls used to protect the public from falling over while sightseeing. Parking at the lookouts was common, especially in the evening when taking a girlfriend there was referred to as “going to watch the submarine races at Diamond Head.” Darren thought about the expression as they whizzed by each lookout, but the thought was driven from his mind when Star spoke again.

“So, you want to go out and see what this little unknown hotrod will do?”

Darren was shocked again, a condition that he found to be frequent whenever the strange girl was around. How could she come to the same conclusion about what he wanted to do without ever having talked to him about it?

He was struck dumb since he didn’t want to admit ever having had such a thought, nor the violation it would be to take his friend’s car and secretly push it to its limit without his knowledge.

“You thought about it and decided not to because of what happened,” Star concluded, the sentence not being phrased as a question.

Darren sucked in some passing air, trying to show no emotion by using the passing wind and his concentration on driving to avoid saying anything or looking at her. The woman was so uncanny in coming to her conclusions that she was scary. Really scary. Like ‘read your mind,’ kind of scary.

“I’m taking the car back to Jimmy’s,” Darren said, finally, hoping that Star would leave the other issue alone. “He’s going to be okay the military guy told me, and I didn’t want to go to the hospital because I’m not family.”

“That was a whole weird scene at the beach,” Star replied. “Jimmy was great in facing them down, though.”

Darren frowned but kept his attention on making the turn onto Diamond Head Road, to get to the backside of the crater. Jimmy had faced them down... Darren said to himself. Facing someone or a group down didn’t have to be getting hit in the face as part of the bargain. The only ‘down’ had been where Jimmy’s body had struck the stand. Darren watched Star, as surreptitiously as he could while driving. She hadn’t communicated anything about where she wanted to be taken or dropped but he was too afraid to ask.

The turned right on 18th Street, then left on Kilauea, up the steep hill until turning the Spyder left again on Makapuu

Avenue to come into the main body of camp housing from the Waikiki side. Star lived across the common, or what had come to be a baseball field over time. Without comment from her, Darren had decided to drop her at home, leave the Corvair at Jimmy's place and then climb the wall where 16th Street dead-ended into the fifteen-foot security wall that ran all the way around the base. The wall was made of lava rocks held together with cement mortar. It was intimidating but extremely easy for any teenager to climb and then descend on the other side. Lava chunks sticking out all over allowed for great foot and hand gripping surfaces.

"The good news about Jimmy," Star said, as they made the last turn into the side entrance to the housing area.

"What good news?" Darren blurted out, in questions, unable to stop himself.

"Jimmy got hit in the head," Star replied, raising herself up to jump from the Spyder once Darren brought it to a complete halt in front of her housing unit. "If there's anybody who can spare a bit of brainpower, then Jimmy sure fits the bill."

Star hopped out of the car without opening the door, just the reverse of how she'd gotten in earlier, and then was gone without another word. Darren wondered about how he always felt like he was a bug, or less, in her view of existence. Jimmy had some-place with the strange girl but even that was as odd as everything else about her.

Returning the car to Jimmy's house was uneventful. He left the keys in the glove box, after carefully backing the Spyder into the garage. For some reason the Dorrenbacher's never closed or locked the garage, so he left the sliding door open.

When he scaled the wall at the "T," formed by 16th Street butting into Kilauea, he hit the concrete running. He raced at top speed the three blocks to his own house, trying to use the heavy exercise to calm himself. On the outside he appeared fine, he knew, since nobody had commented about the fact that inside, he was an emotional nightmare. Jimmy was his hold on real life.

Jimmy's family was a real family, not the fractured fighting thing his own was. Jimmy was accomplished and revered by his parents while Darren was constantly criticized and diminished by his own. In fact, Jimmy's parents complimented Darren more than any adults had ever done in his life. What would he do if Jimmy didn't make it? His plan to go off to college was closely tied to remaining in contact with Jimmy for friendship and advice.

When he got to the lava rock wall running low in front of his own house, he stopped to catch his breath. He leaned on one of the high rock posts that stood on either side of the driveway leading down to the garage that served as the entire basement of the home. He saw his mother's 57 Ford parked sideways, out from the carport the house above served as. He saw his father's work car parked next to his mom's. Darren leaned out from the column of mortared stones that hid him, to stare at the right side of the Ford. The passenger door was dented in. He felt scared and relieved at the same time. Although Darren had his driver's license and permission to drive the Ford on occasion, in practice he never did. His mother always had the car for her job, or for when both his mom and dad were going out somewhere together.

"Oh no," he breathed out, knowing what had to be coming when he went into the house. His mother had crashed the car and there was going to be hell to pay. His father would go berserk. It had happened once before when the only car they had was a 49 Chevy, and the ensuing battle between them nearly destroyed half the interior of their house at the time.

Darren turned away from the driveway and headed to the front door, his thoughts on how the day couldn't get worse. Before he could grip the knob and turn it the door swung inward, and Judy Levy stepped out, with a big smile on her face.

"It's only a car," she laughed out. "I talked to them, and I think they understand. Because of what happened to Jimmy you were upset, and not yourself. Your mom forgives you for taking the car without her knowing or giving permission."

Judy walked toward the sidewalk, only looking back with her devastating smile to meet my father's eyes, as he sat and glowered, waiting for me to come fully into the house so he could begin. She glanced once at me, blinking her big eyes in her way, and then headed back, walking the reverse of the way I'd just come from Fort Ruger. I steeled myself for the confrontation with my parents over the car accident I hadn't had but would have to admit to, and to the loss of driving privileges for the same car I'd also never really had. There was no strength within me to deny the accident. Dad would simply take it out on my mom if he knew. I had to go to work at the Cannon Club so there wasn't much he could do to me physically, because work was more a religious belief to him than any other belief he held.

A car pulled up, silently appearing out of nowhere. There was no traffic on the too-narrow 16th Avenue, so cars were uncommon, and those that passed never stopped in front of our house. I turned to stare, doing anything to delay entering the house.

The West Pointer stepped out of the driver's door and stood where he was, the large Chevrolet sedan idling.

"Your friend is going to be fine," he said, his voice almost too soft to hear. "They have to sandbag his head and keep him down for a day or two. A small hole was drilled in the back of his skull to release the pressure. I thought you might want or need to know."

I could think of nothing to say that might keep him where he was and therefore delay my facing my parents, but then my father pushed me aside and walked over to the passenger side of the still idling Chevy.

"What's your business here?" my Dad asked.

"I was filling your son in about the surfing accident down at the beach today, and how his friend was doing, but I'll be on my way now." The West Pointer started to get back inside the car.

“We know all about the accident, and you didn’t say who you were or what your business is that brought you to my home,” my Dad said, using his tough Coast Guard boatswain’s mate voice.

The West Pointer stood to his full height once again.

“If you have a question then end the sentence with a Sir,” the man said quietly, his tone more a whispered hiss than anything else.

“I don’t know you,” Darren’s father replied, this time a bit more hesitantly.

“You don’t know me, Sir,” the West Pointer said, pronouncing the last word much harder than the rest, “but I know you.”

Neither man said anything, both just standing and looking at one another for many seconds. Finally, Darren’s dad turned and went back into the house. The West Pointer’s gaze fell upon Darren, and the softening was as surprising as it was effective.

“Don’t be late to the club,” the West Pointer said, folding his body down to get into the car.

After he was gone, I turned back to the still-open door of the house. Neither my father nor my mom was anywhere to be seen. I went to my room, changed for work, and then left retracing Judy’s steps toward the base, thinking all the time that somehow, the West Pointer’s visit had changed everything at home, at least for the time being.

## Chapter Seventeen

It was difficult to get through the night, and then stay on to clean up the club after almost everyone else had left. Jimmy's condition was unknown, and Darren had no way to find out, except to go to Jimmy's house and talk to his parents. Jimmy was an only child and highly doted on, which made his life so much different than Darren's own that it was a wonder to both boys that they were such fast friends. Darren didn't have it in him to bother the family at such a late hour, or under the circumstances of Jimmy's injury. He would simply have to worry through the night that the results were not good until he heard something else.

It was full dark by the time he was finally done, and it wasn't until he was closing the fence gates and making believe he was locking the chain that he saw Star Black.

The young woman sat on a parking stop at the very end of the empty lot, the part of asphalt closest to the upsloping edge of Diamond Head's nearby flank. She sat in the very place the Bofors rounds had landed following the downpour. The mud was long gone, with the mist providing nothing more than a heavy wetness to the air all around.

"What?" was all Darren could think to say, as he walked the short distance from the chained gate to where she sat, her legs tucked up under her, her arms hugging both knees.

"He's doing fine," she said, without any preamble.

"What?" Darren asked again, knowing he was sounding stupid.

"Your friend Jimmy is in good condition with a very good prognosis," Star went on as if Darren hadn't said anything. "He should be home by tomorrow if all goes well."



“How do you know?” Darren asked although he knew it didn’t make any difference how she knew.

Star was not given to either lengthy discussions or to telling fibs or embellishing stories.

“You going to go with that surf accident fable the Duke came up with?” she asked, not bothering to answer Darren’s question.

“You waited for me to get done with work to ask that question?” Darren said while thinking about the nature of the relationship Star might have with the Duke since she’d walked right up to him and his followers and been accepted well beyond how most Haoles were treated.

“Which question?” Star asked her voice one of pure innocence.

“Colonel Banks came to my house,” Darren said, not really caring about any of the questions asked, or the answers that might ensue.

“He’s a powerful man,” Star replied, “and you don’t want to get on his bad side. He runs that super-secret Special Forces thing here and nobody messes with him or those men that work with him.”

“Don’t I know that,” Darren breathed out in tone little more than a whisper, thinking about how the colonel had saved him from some draconian punishment for something he hadn’t done, but would never be able to say he’d never done.

He’d also never seen his father so abruptly cowed and in retreat. Darren knew that feeling well himself, and felt sorry for his father, while at the same time the whole incident thrilled him to the core.

The next day, Saturday, was field day at home. Darren worked on his part of the house, polishing brass (the door jams and handles had all lacquer removed with acetone when they moved in), scrubbing wood floors, and cleaning the windows with ammonia, and using old newspapers to dry them. Darren worked hard and fast, wanting to get over to Jimmy’s as soon as

he could, but also knowing he had to endure his father's white-glove inspection, pass that inspection, and get his twenty-five-cent allowance before he could leave. Except there was no allowance. His father informed him that he'd done a passable job getting his part of the house in shape but that, since he had a regular job his father had gotten him, he was no longer eligible for an allowance. Darren didn't change expression, as he stood at a position of attention to receive the announcement. He made a dollar and a quarter an hour at the club with tips that about equaled that amount or even more on weekend nights. Saturday was the big night for the club. He wanted to get away as quickly as he could. His father would interpret any expression as disobedience and therefore, it would have to be punished with more work.

"Yes, sir," Darren said, with some enthusiasm, generating a look of surprise in his father's facial expression.

Since the incident with Colonel Bank, his father had not spoken to him. The damage to the Ford had to still be fresh on his father's mind, Darren knew, and he fully expected that there would be some fall out that would land on him like a ton of bricks at any time, but there was nothing so far.

"Dismissed," his father said, turning without further comment or ceremony to walk into the kitchen.

Sergeant Cross and Chef Wu were both in obvious evidence out in the main dining area of the club, when he got there which was unusual. Normally, Wu stayed back, deep inside the protective layers of stainless tables, stoves, and warmers that acted as a barricade between him and regular humanity. For some reason, he and Cross had taken up seated positions at the general officer's corner table, the one that was positioned so that all of Waikiki was spread out down below through the giant single pane glass windows. The two men talked and smoked away, the glass-walled corner having become less visible through a thick pall of slowly swirling smoke.

“Bring a coffee, and tea for the chef,” Sergeant Cross ordered, without looking at Darren, seeming not to notice the fact that he wasn’t a waiter, and that the rest of the wait staff would be angered by his being treated as if he was one of them.

Darren left the two men and headed for the kitchen, having overheard enough of the conversation between the two men to understand that the plan to have Elvis and Duke Kahanamoku as guests for dinner was the subject they were discussing. He never made it through the kitchen swinging double doors to get the coffee and tea order, however.

“The coffee and tea are coming right out,” one of the waitresses he didn’t know by name said, her tone hard and sharp. She stood in front of the swinging doors as if guarding them against unlawful entry. Darren had no doubt that she’d likely guard the doors with physical force, if necessary.

It was a rebuke, so Darren wouldn’t get the idea he could perform wait staff duties on any kind of regular basis, although the mostly Asian group of women would never oppose Sergeant Cross or complain directly to him about anything. The negative feeling generated by the seemingly minor slight Sergeant Cross had committed was to be fully played out, but not on the Sergeant.

Darren sighed, turned, and went about his work, hauling dishes, silverware, and tablecloths to prepare all the tables for dinner service.

The Cannon Club didn’t change, the only feature showing any difference from the many days before Darren had worked there, was the dance floor. For some reason, unbeknownst to anyone using the floor, the building architect had left a square portion of the ceiling fully open to the elements, although the space for the live musicians to play was covered. The dance floor was made of polished concrete. The slightest moisture laid down by rain, or even a heavy mist, made the dance floor so slippery that it was nearly impossible to stand on, much less dance on. Fortunately, the Diamond Head location was so dry, almost year-

round, that the floor's surface wasn't much of an issue, and the only live music for dancing was played on Friday and Saturday nights.

Darren knew that he had somehow been placed in a position of danger by the Sergeant, and he needed his job at the club for at least the remainder of the summer. The women would do him in, he knew. He'd seen it happen to the busboy he'd replaced not long ago. The young man told off one of the waitresses when he was criticized for being too slow at clearing tables so waiting customers could be seated. That's all it had taken. A week later and he was history, secretly fired and sent packing without so much as a word back to any of his friends still working at the club.

It was near the end of the second dinner service that fortune changed violently, before smiling down upon him. A group of four couples occupied one of the largest tables in the main dining area. They were Navy officers, all dressed in whites, with big gold buttons and every piece of leather they wore polished to a glittering spit shine. The order was for lobsters around. All four men, and the women who accompanied them, ordered the special full pound lobster with double beakers of heated and liquefied butter, the butter having half an inch of lemon juice on the bottom with the butter 'floating' on the juice below.

Darren took the order, which was finished and properly presented by Wu. His tray would hold all eight plates with the beakers gathered in the very center. It was a challenge to carry so many plates on a single flat aluminum serving tray, but Darren had done it many times before, without missing a beat or spilling a drop of anything. He arranged the plates carefully, braced the butter beakers in the very center, and then hoisted the load to his right shoulder.

The club was busy, with wait staff running around and through the open spaces between tables. Darren saw an opening to his target table, but the half-open hallway that ran around the

dance floor was populated with customers and wait staff. The dance floor was empty, as the band had been sent home due to the misting conditions. Nobody wanted to dance in the rain.

Darren cut across the wide-open dance floor, his tennis shoes making a slight squeaky sound barely audible over the din of the place. His transit went perfectly well until the last few steps of his travel. The table was the first one off the far side of the dance floor. He was almost too it before he slipped slightly on the smooth wet floor. He caught himself, panic leaping to his throat. He balanced and then corrected and rebalanced his load as he fought to stay upright. He succeeded with a feeling of relief, until the flat aluminum serving tray tilted, seemingly on its own, forward, and slightly down. Just as he arrived at the table the whole load of lobster plates and butter beakers rushed onto the tabletop and slid all the way down its length, dumping lobster, butter, and lemon juice into every lap of each and every person at the table.

Darren stood still, the serving tray still canted down, the blood leaving his face, his chest seeming to nearly explode with horror. The Cannon Club came to a halt. All noise faded until there was complete silence.

And then the laughing started. It wasn't other customers laughing at the horrid mess of food, butter, and lemon juice all over the four officers and their consorts. It was laughter from them, as they stood and worked to clear the mess from themselves as best they could.

Darren stood frozen in place, the tray still balanced, but empty, still tilted forward and down.

Sergeant Cross appeared out of nowhere and started yelling. He first berated Darren for his clumsiness and then sent him to the kitchen, before turning to apologize to the officers and their wives for the actions of one of his employees.

Darren waited in the kitchen for the ax to fall. Amazingly, the other female members of the wait staff, one and all, came to

console him. He was the best busboy they ever had, they said, but their tone converted everything they said to the past tense.

Sergeant Cross came through the swinging doors. He motioned for Darren to follow him to his tiny office in the back. Once there, Cross closed the door carefully.

"I had to say all that to mollify them, although I think they're mostly too drunk to care what happened," he said, to Darren's complete surprise.

"We're even when you walk out that door, understand me?" the Sergeant said, pointing his right index finger at Darren's chest.

"Yes, Sergeant," Darren replied, his relief so great he could say nothing else and nothing further.

"Stay in here for a while, and then get back to work," the Sergeant said, and then left the small office, closing the door behind him.

The night, after that disastrous event, went by uneventfully, only Wu giving Darren any idea that everything might be returning to normal by telling him that the big Elvis dinner was going to happen in two weeks and that he would be promoted to wait-staff for that night only. Darren was elated, even though he knew, in his heart of hearts, that the existing wait staff would never forgive him completely for the earlier violation. The club had no waiters. Only females worked as waitresses and they were very proud of that established fact. Not only that, but all the waitresses were locals. None were Haole women, although that was never discussed by anyone.

After dinner and clean up, the staff departed one and two at a time until only Darren was left to close.

He needed Jimmy desperately. Jimmy would know exactly how to handle each nuance of the complexities that had been thrown his way. Sunday could not come too soon, and Darren could only pray that Jimmy was not only to be released from the hospital but that he'd be the same Jimmy he'd come to know and love.

## Chapter Eighteen

Sunday took a long time in coming, as Darren lay in his bed, under a giant poster of the moon, carefully pinned to the wall above his head. The night had been long and filled with waking moments of terror. Terror that Jimmy might not make it back like he was before, despite what both Colonel Bank and Star Black had said. Darren tipped his head back to stare, upside down, at the stark landscape of the moon, normally an image that fired his imagination, but not on this day. He glanced over at his small electric alarm clock. It was only six in the morning. The small birds sang away, as dawn was making its presence known, and the plumeria trees that hung wonderfully aromatic blossoms out over and toward his window from the neighbor's house supported their bouncing from branch to branch and cavorting with one another.

Darren threw on a clean pair of shorts, a cotton aloha shirt with pineapples garishly printed all over it, and then moved through the house until he reached the kitchen. He prepared the long stem percolator coffee pot with ground Lion coffee and then left it for his father or mother to turn on when they awoke. It was Sunday, so nothing more in the way of chores had to be done and his parents wouldn't be expecting him to be there when they got up because on Sundays he never was. His mother often asked where he went, but telling her, and especially his dad, was simply an exercise in pain and criticism. He used the surfing excuse most of the time, if cornered. Neither he nor Jimmy really surfed that much. Mostly they just hung out in downtown Waikiki, went swimming, kiting and flying model planes at Sandy Beach, body surfed Makapuu or went to the Navy base to sniff around for interesting stuff that might be going on there.

Today was different, however. Jimmy was supposed to be home, although Darren doubted, he'd have gotten out of a Navy hospital on any weekend day. But Jimmy wasn't normal, and the circumstances of his injury hadn't been normal either. Colonel Bank was downright scary, and the helicopter coming in for the evacuation had been intimidating as it was exciting.

As was typical of all the homes Darren visited in Hawaii, the Dorrenbacher screen door was all that was closed. He peered through the screen before knocking and was not disappointed.

The first thing he noticed immediately upon entering was seeing his friend standing in front of the door, as if awaiting Darren's arrival, was his smile, a smile that covered half his face. The second thing I noticed was the lack of a bandage or any evidence at all that he'd been struck so severely that he'd lost consciousness.

"They tell me that you suffered some anxiety over me coming into contact with that local slime," Jimmy said, laughing out loud as he finished.

"Ah, officially, you got hit by your own surfboard," Darren replied, a sheepish grin on his own face, wondering why he'd felt to bereft, alone and truly anxious about Jimmy's injury.

"I got more attention than I ever hoped, and in fact, too much," Jimmy went on, beginning to gingerly step down from the front porch steps. "They said I have to take it a bit easy for a while, but we can go to the recreational center and play pool if you want."

"What did they tell you?" Darren asked, joining Jimmy as he walked on the sidewalk toward the center.

"Who?" Jimmy unaccountably asked. "The doctors, Colonel Bank, my dad, or the Duke?"

"The doctor," Darren replied, surprised by Jimmy's answer.

"I'm fine," Jimmy said. "Minor concussion and a big bruise under my hair," he ruffled his fingers through the hair on



the left side of his head. “Lucky he didn’t hit me in the nose. I bleed easily from there.”

“What did the Duke say?” Darren asked, unable to hide the excitement from his voice.

“He said we get free use of Queens Beach and the surf anytime we want from now on,” Jimmy replied, laughing again. “We’re locals now. Too bad I didn’t get punched out a couple of years ago.”

“And Bank?” Darren asked, more pleased about the Queens Beach news than he wanted to admit. It was hard to be a Haole boy in Hawaii.

The locals charged a huge but very painfully subtle price for not being one of them. To be excluded from all of their social functions and even spoken communication, other than one-word replies or whispered insults, with such hatred that Darren never discussed it with anyone. He’d gone to grade school with many of the kids attending the same Maryknoll Academy he’d just graduated from, but the early childish friendships had all been traded in for alienated reservation by the time he’d come back to the island for high school.

“Evidently, the Queens Beach solution was his idea, although I don’t think that’ll be the end of it. It was not like those Special Forces guys to let anything physical, like what happened to me, go by without some equally physical response on their part.”

“But why does the Army care what happens to you?” Darren asked. “You’re not even in the Army.”

“It’s Dad, not me,” Jimmy replied.

“What does your dad do, really?” Darren asked, still unable to take in the massive and rapid response to Jimmy’s injury.”

“I don’t know,” Jimmy said. “I guess it has something to do with submarines at Pearl. Maybe your dad knows more than that. The army is doing something with those submarines, but I don’t know what.”

Darren thought silently to himself for a few moments, as they walked. Both boys would ride to Pearl every once and a while to collect matchbooks from the subs, but they never really talked to any of the sailors. The next time they were cruising Pearl on their bikes Darren vowed to pay attention to any submarine that might have army personnel or equipment near it.

Reflecting on secret military stuff didn't come second nature to Darren, although Jimmy was always coming up with far-out stuff, from UFOs to mystery ghost ships sailing the oceans at night. There was no question that the army had a secret facility located in the center of the crater that was Diamond Head. Jimmy had found out about it because he'd taken pictures with his camera one Sunday when they'd been up at the top point listening to music and viewing the spectacle of downtown Waikiki below them. The developed photos, taken to a photography development place, had been deleted by the photo lab, for 'governmental secrecy and public intervention' purposes. That the government had somehow viewed the negatives and then found them to be problematic was a revelation, but the fact that the government was willing to, through the photo development business, to say what they'd said, was even more revealing...and, in a way, threatening. Jimmy and Darren had decided, at that point, to no longer photograph military sites at all, of any kind.

That Jimmy was going to be okay and sounding much like his old self was such a relief that Darren almost couldn't deal with it. Having a best friend had become so much to him that he couldn't figure out how he'd gotten along for so many years without one.

The recreational facility was empty. The sergeant who cleaned and operated the place wasn't even in attendance. Jimmy played around with the pool table for a few minutes and then decided.

“Let’s drive down to Queens Beach,” he said, holding the eight ball in his right hand like he was going to throw it across the room, or something.

“Okay,” Darren replied, wondering if Jimmy was in good enough shape to drive, but having no say in the decision, he knew.

The convertible was there and ready when they arrived at Jimmy’s house. The drive down to Queens Beach was uneventful, and Darren was buoyed up by the fact that Jimmy drove with his usual high-speed abandon.

There was nobody at the beach when they parked at the aquarium. As unlikely as it was, the beach was deserted. Everyone loved Queens Beach and the tourists gave the locals no end of trouble with respect to occupying it day in and day out. But there was no one on the beach and only a very few surfers sat on their boards offshore.

“What do you make of this?” Darren asked, looking up and down at the empty beach.

“Army, and all that junk,” Jimmy replied. “They probably questioned everyone to the point that nobody wanted to be around anymore.”

“You wanted to confront them again, didn’t you?” Darren asked.

“Well, if we can come here now, any time we want, then we better know it and they better know it too,” Jimmy replied.

“What do you want to do now?” Darren asked since either swimming at the beach or surfing would require getting suits, a board, and more.

“Let’s change and go to Sandy Beach,” Jimmy responded, a smile growing across his face.

Sandy Beach was the most dangerous beach on the island, with a shore break, waves of ten feet or more crashing down on the sand, that had killed so many military personnel that it was forbidden for them to go there. A barge had crashed on the beach many years before and it’s rusted remains also posed a hazard

for swimmers. Only the most serious of local bodysurfers went to the beach and almost no Haoles at all.

The drive back home was remarkable only in how short a time it took. Jimmy hit seventy miles per hour on the two-lane road, which, unaccountably, made Darren feel more comfortable with him. He knew that Jimmy was coming back from a near-death experience, and he wanted to be there with him for the effort. If confronting what locals were body surfing at Sandy was what Jimmy wanted to do, then Darren was all in.

## Chapter Nineteen

Sandy Beach was called Sandy, but only by Haoles and tourists. It was Sandies Beach to the locals, just like the wonderful Bellows Beach further around the shore, just beyond Waimanalo, was called Sherwood Forest to them. The tourists who visited that beach always remarked about the wonder of the densely beautiful pine forest spread back and forth and up and down it only a hundred yards or less across the pure white sand to the beating surf of the ocean. Sherwood Forest's real meaning to the locals had little to do with the forest, however, and everything to do with the fact that any tourists leaving valuables inside their cars when they parked them just beyond the forest would return from an idyllic beach stay to find everything they had gone. The cars left there, easily identifiable as tourist conveyances because they were obvious new rentals with rental stickers on the windshields and bumpers, were not only burglarized but their locks punched out or convertible tops slashed open. Although Oahu had one-hundredth of New York City's population, it continually outranked it in car break-ins by over fifty percent per year, many of those along the two-mile stretch of Bellows Beach.

Sandy was 'ripping' when Jimmy pulled the Corvaire off the highway and nosed it into the small parking lot near the beach's Makapuu end. Darren looked at the monster waves rolling in. They moved slowly through the deadly blue deep water, coming up out of the Molokai Trench, cold and seemingly slow. They ran directly in toward the steeply inclined sand and broke right upon its wet surface. "Uncommon ocean break," was what one of Darren's father's friends had said upon staring out at the waves before walking right into them and being stripped of

his swimsuit and sent to Tripler Hospital after trying to dive under one of the fifteen-foot monsters that possessed no ‘under’ at all. Darren didn’t like Sandy, except to sit on the sand and watch for tourist women in two-piece bikinis to try to somehow get through the pounding waves. So many lost their suits that it became hypnotic for young men to visit the beach and do exactly what Darren liked to do.

Jimmy unaccountably sat down on the sand, just short of where the giant surf crashed and rolled up the sand to then attempt to reach up and get the boy, but never quite made it far enough before being sucked back down the incline to become the next wave.

“I thought we were going in,” Darren said, sitting down to gaze out upon the wonderfully wild and passionate scene.

“You know I can’t go in,” Jimmy replied, his voice depressed, his chin resting on his pulled-up knees.

“You want to go down to Queens and confront those guys again, too,” Darren observed. “What gives? And you didn’t turn on the radio or anything on the way here.”

“I can’t take the high sound of the music,” Jimmy said, surprising Darren. “The sound of the waves breaking is okay, even though its louder. I wanted to make sure I was okay, and I think I am, but also don’t want to be weak.”

Darren didn’t know what to reply. He knew nothing about the physics or medicine of hearing, and he couldn’t figure out what Jimmy meant by being weak. Getting hit in the head by a guy, out of nowhere, who weighs a good hundred and some pounds more than you didn’t seem to mean that the guy who got hit was weak, at least to Darren.

“In a couple of days, you’ll be all healed up, and then we’ll go down there and kick his ass,” he finally said, after a few minutes of surf-interrupted silence.

“My father won’t understand,” Jimmy said, after a few moments, his face already beginning to redden in the direct rays

of the unprotected sun, plus the billions of reflections up and back from the rough semi-pocketed sand. "I can't wait too long."

Darren was mystified. What wouldn't Jimmy's father understand and what might he be waiting for that could take too long? The moments passed, but Darren refused to ask any more questions. Instead, he watched the monster waves slowly parade in, rear up mightily and then expend all their energy by crashing directly down onto the sand. He looked out over the tops of the cresting giants and watched the few locals who waited for some huge monster to body surf for a few seconds before being crushed and possibly broken upon being jammed down onto the flat surface of the waiting wet sand.

The locals are what it was, it finally came to Darren. He looked sideways at the profile of his friend. It was an about-face. It was about macho. The islanders were all about both of those things, which had little or nothing to do with real performance. Threaten, act tough, but do nothing if it can be helped. The strike against Jimmy's head had been an accident. The big native had somehow lost his normal reticent acumen and lashed out. Now Jimmy had to prove that he was courageous and tough. He didn't have to prove that to the locals at Queens Beach, because the Duke had already taken care of that. He had to prove it to his father.

Darren reflected on the difference between the boys' fathers. His own father was abusive, verbally and physically, but only to children and women. He was as threatening and macho as any military man could be, but he was never confrontational with them, had never gone into combat, or even had a fistfight in Darren's memory. Darren had always thought that he had a lousy dad. But Jimmy's father was another creature entirely. He was the 'real deal' kind of man, who'd fought in the war, and then the next war and then become some kind of a war hero to join other 'special' men training to do even more combative things. He was a man of action, no comment or threat, like the West

Pointer Darren had encountered at the beach and then at his own home. Which father was worse to be the son of?

Jimmy got up suddenly.

“You’re right, tomorrow’s another day,” he said, dusting the thick clean but very hot sand from his legs and swimming shorts. “I’ve got to get you to home to change, and then to work. We’ve got the whole Elvis thing to think about and also tomorrow. I can’t go against those guys yet. I know it’s too soon, but you can for me, and my dad won’t even know.”

A sudden deep pang struck Darren right in the center of his belly. “You can?” he whispered to himself, getting up to follow his friend, now loping toward the convertible.

The ride was exhilarating but not nearly as much fun, as Darren considered the depth of meaning and the distinct possibility of violence being performed on his body the next day at Queens Beach. The car rocketed up through the switchbacks atop the gorgeous cliffs, with the Molokai Trench swells shattering against their vertical faces, throwing spume and spray high into the brilliantly lit afternoon atmosphere. They passed the archery range, and then the police firing range, nestled down into a crook just off-road before they came to the top and barreled past Hanauma Bay’s entrance. From there it was only a very few minutes down Koko Head’s flank and into the small village of Hawaii Kai.

“Shave ice?” Jimmy yelled but didn’t wait for Darren to answer as he made the turn into the small shopping area that was at Hawaii Kai’s only intersection. There was a small Chinese store near the end of the strip mall that sold shave ice but only in three flavors. Neither boy cared since true aficionados of shave ice only ever ate the block shaved stuff when it was flavored with strawberry syrup.



## Chapter Twenty

Jimmy blasted the Spyder up the flank of Diamond Head, the Corvair's turbocharger emitting a pleasing jet engine whine until taking the corner onto 16th Avenue. Seconds later Darren was home, and Jimmy took off again. With its strange rear suspension and engine geometry, the Corvair, even under full turbo power, would not "peal out" and screech its rear tires at all. The rear end just got lower to the pavement until it almost dragged. Darren stared after his friend, wondering what the following day was going to bring. Confronting the locals at Queens Beach, once more, seemed like a recipe for potential disaster. What could come of it, other than he himself ending up at Tripler the military hospital, but without out Jimmy's dad's horsepower to get him treated as well, and out again?

Darren got out of his unused swim gear, jammed his suit and "t"-shirt into a cloth bag, and then showered, dressed for work and was off, loping the half-mile to the back wall surrounding the fort. The climb up and over was like nothing, even though the very top of the lava rock structure was threaded through with barb wire. Carrying the bag was easy during the run since it was so light. Before he climbed the rockface he simply threw the bag up and over with all his might.

When he reached the Cannon Club and went in the back way, it was obvious that the night was going to anything but normal. The whispers, and even open talk by everyone working to get the place ready for first dinner service, was all about the coming visit by Elvis Presley.

He was early for work, so he rushed through the alley, went in through the back door, and proceeded straight down the side stairs and out into the pool area. He didn't bother to use the

restroom inside the club to change, instead quickly shedding his work clothes behind some nearby bushes. He put on his swimsuit, hung his clothes on the bush, and then ran the short distance to the edge of the waiting pool. The water lapped gently, the fading sun sending sparkle through the air above and around it.

“You could use the washroom like everyone else,” a female voice said, from somewhere nearby.

Darren froze in place, unable to either back up or dive into the inviting water in front of his feet. He didn’t need to see the woman. It could only be one person, the person who inhabited the pool area more hours than anyone else allowed to use it. Star Black.

Darren breathed in and out with light breaths more like tiny gasps than breaths at all. What had Star seen and what would she report to everyone he knew at the base and around it?

“I wanted to swim before work,” Darren finally got out, his eyes darting around until he found the young woman sitting under a bush on the far side of the pool.

“That doesn’t answer the question,” Star replied but failing to add anything further.

“There was no question,” Darren said, before diving into the cool water and going to the bottom of the deep end. He wanted to stay down in the silence for as long as he could but knew it would not be nearly long enough. The woman would be there when he surfaced, no matter how long he stayed under, he knew.

Darren held his breath at the bottom of the pool for as long as he could before surfacing. Slowly and carefully he made his way to the side of the pool near where the short but very supple one-meter diving board stuck out over the water. The Kiefer board was one of the Olympic, and very expensive, boards that only the military, outside of some major school or sports pool, might invest in.

“Star?” Darren called out, softly.

There was no answer. He tried again, and a few more times. It seemed so unlikely that the meddlesome girl would simply leave while he was underwater, but finally, stroking across the length of the pool, he felt a sense of great relief. The beautiful girl wasn't the least bit interested in him, and Darren understood why. She was a college girl and college girls, once in the first year of that advanced education system, found high school boys, even those graduating and going to college themselves, as somehow beneath notice, if not downright contempt. Jimmy was the exception, although he was already enrolled in the University of Hawaii, so maybe that made things different, but there was no way for Darren to know.

Darren self-dried himself in the sun and by moving to the end of the pool area to stand where the trade winds swept up the curving face of the nearby crater wall. In minutes he was dressed and ready to work.

Work was normal, with the club filled throughout the afternoon and evening, although the edge of excitement that the expected coming Elvis dinner was palpably sharp and tinged with great good nature and humor. The rumors flew among all the staff. Elvis would perform. Elvis would introduce himself to each member of the staff. It was endless. The harder and longer Darren worked the more he became convinced that Jimmy would likely forget all about any confrontation at Queens Beach the following day. He'd been hit in the head, after all. A good night's sleep might change everything.

After work he went immediately to bed, putting the day behind him and hoping for a better one on the morrow. The surfboard rental shop on the beach in front of the Moana Hotel was open at seven a.m. every morning. Most beach businesses and there were plenty of them, were active, if not already open as the sun arose behind Diamond Head. Seven to seven was the general rule for dawn and dusk, although, the sun usually came up before six. Jimmy paid the two dollars for their boards, the smallest they could rent but still a good nine feet in length. The

rental surfer guys made no mention of the boy's previous problem with the Duke's board.

Darren moved carefully down the beach, dragging the tail of his board since his small size prevented him from gripping one edge, like Jimmy could, and then lifting the board over the sand. Darren's board left a trail behind them, like a bedraggled snake of some large size. For that reason, Darren walked on the wet sand, so the waves coming in would wash away the trail.

They stood in front of the seventh layer, or tier, of the series of reefs that extended down, all the way from the very tip of Diamond Head's out-thrust front edge, past Queens and ending at Kuhio Beach pier, to check out the surf. It was important to view the breaking surf for many minutes, even if it made little difference about when and where you would go in. It was part of the culture, and appearance in surfing was becoming more and more important as the art of surfing grew dramatically in size. Ever since the Beach Boys release of *Surfin' Safari* the summer before everything had changed, most notably; surfboards that had rented for twenty-five cents a day had gone to a buck for half a day.

"You can't surf, they said," Darren murmured over to Jimmy, for the tenth time, knowing that saying it again would make no difference to his stubborn friend.

"We didn't come here to surf," Jimmy replied. "I'll just go out and sit on my board until the natives get restless."

Darren's heart sank. Instinctively, he looked behind him at the edge of Kapiolani Park, over at the picnic tables where the prior confrontation had ended in Jimmy's hospitalization, but there was nobody there. He breathed in and out again, deeply but smoothly. Maybe everything would be all right. Maybe the locals wouldn't show up at all.

"We're not going to surf?" Darren asked, relief in his voice since surfing when it was low tide at Queens had given him more small scars on his lower legs and knees than he'd ever been able to explain later in life. When the tide was low the

waves broke right on the sharp unforgiving coral, which meant that no wave could be ‘wiped out’ on or in without real pain and some potential serious injury.

Darren looked up the beach, toward where the big concrete Natatorium sat, sticking out into the ocean in its imposing artificial way. Two locals were walking toward them from that direction, both carrying surfboards, both big enough to carry them under their arms, even though the boards they carried were obviously larger than what either Jimmy or he had rented. One of the Kanaka locals was the big Hawaiian who’d hurt Jimmy with his single giant punch to the side of his head.

“We may not even have to get in the water,” Jimmy said, letting Darren know he’d seen the locals himself.

There was no point in entering the water until the confrontation was either avoided or over, Darren knew, although all he wanted to do really was throw his board into the surf, jump onto it and paddle away all around the island of Oahu if necessary to get away from the situation.

The Hawaiians approached near soundlessly, their bare feet on the sand not making enough noise to overpower the sound of the incoming waves constant splash. Jimmy and Darren continued to examine the incoming surf, as if waiting for just the right moment to enter the water and paddle out, ignoring the approach of the locals completely.

“Small board, big wave,” the giant Hawaiian said after both men had approached within a few feet and stopped, each setting his large heavy surfboard down flat on the dry sand just a few feet from the incoming and outgoing sea.

“What?” Jimmy asked, turning his head as if noticing the man for the first time.

“Big board, small wave,” the Hawaiian went on, pointing at his own board laying nearby. “You ride with control over the reef and not fall off.”

“Ah, okay,” Jimmy replied, glancing quickly over at Darren before turning back to face the man who’d hit him.

“You use our boards to surf, you not get hurt anymore,” the Hawaiian said.

“We guard your boards while you surf and give back when you done.”

Darren was so surprised by the exchange it took him a few minutes to process what the Hawaiian said, but suddenly, he got it. The big boards would glide straight, true, and with a whole lot more stability at slow speed. The bigger waves would allow the smaller boards to be much more reactive and race down the face of steeper water for control.

Darren waited for Jimmy to say something negative or aggressive, given the reason they’d come to Queens Beach in the first place, but Jimmy didn’t respond as expected at all.

“What do you want for that favor?” he asked, instead.

“You get us in to see Elvis at the big party,” the Hawaiian said.

“You hit me in the head, and I had to be taken to Tripler,” Jimmy said, pointing at the side of his head where the big Hawaiian had struck him. “What about that?”

“All forgiven,” the Hawaiian said. “You local boys now.”

Darren could only stare back and forth at the Hawaiian and then Jimmy. It was the strangest conversation he’d ever heard. It was like both were speaking English but neither was understanding what the other one said.

“Well,” Jimmy said, seeming to lose his train of thought, but then he recovered. “Darren works at the Cannon Club so he’s the only one that gets you in if he wants to get you in, but he also wants to kick your butt for what you did to me. I’m his best friend.”

Darren wasn’t shocked. He’d been expecting something like what had come out of Jimmy’s mouth. He stared up into the Hawaiian’s eyes, his mouth dry and fear making him want to throw up on the spot. But he held himself together but could say nothing. He was only slightly capable of breathing at all.

“You kick my ass anytime,” the Hawaiian said, his voice serious. “I am always here. But you can use the boards to surf right way and maybe you invite us to the club with Elvis.” The big man held out the end of his board for Darren to grasp.

“Okay,” Darren croaked out, taking the board as best he could.

Jimmy and Darren paddled out beyond the reef, the big board’s cutting through the shallow breaking surf smoothly as if skating across a surface of melted butter. Once outside the surf line, and out of all hearing from shore, they stopped and sat, legs dangling over the sides of the boards, and staring out to sea.

“I can’t believe you’re inviting those creeps to the club,” Jimmy said, keeping his voice near that of a whisper.

Darren didn’t reply. There was nothing to be said. Some things Jimmy didn’t understand at all. Darren would have said anything to the Hawaiians in order to survive. That he couldn’t very well invite anyone to the coming party at the club would only come out later, which was fine. He breathed in and out, feeling the thick sea air re-invigorate him, the swells making him rise on the water and then fall gently back. Somehow, he’d gotten through the day, Sandy Beach, Star seeing him naked at the club, and finally, the confrontation at Queens. Tomorrow would have to take care of itself

## Chapter Twenty-One

Darren's father was in a rage by the time he got home from work. The rages were all founded upon the same squishy ground. Bacardi Light was the name of the ground.

"Who's this Kahanamoku character?" his father had started with.

Darren was a young master of the communications game with his dad, however, so he went into defensive mode without even thinking about it.

"Who?" he answered, his voice soft and gentle as if speaking to an infant or toddler, which his father, except for his size and ability to become extremely violent, certainly was under the influence of the alcohol.

"I got a call today," his father went on like he'd prepared a speech for Darren's return from work. "Not here. Oh no. Not here at all. At the harbor. This local clown calls and gets through to the harbormaster, and he says he's some sort of Duke and using that last name. He wanted to know if I was going to provide any assistance to you in helping get this Elvis Presley dinner off the ground."

Darren's heart sank. The Duke had called his dad. He had elevated Darren to some sort of important decision-making status. No attention at all could be paid to his father's family members. Vidal Sassoon had come to the Lewis of Hollywood styling salon to attempt to induce Darren's mother (who was doing Ethel Merman's and Doris Duke's hair) to partner up with him. Darren's father had squelched that deal before it could go anywhere. There was no way his wife was going to rise above him in any way, shape, or form.



“He’s just a surfer,” Darren replied, diminishing the Duke’s stature down to almost nothing.

“I can’t stand Elvis Presley or what he calls his music,” his father replied, ignoring Darren’s response totally. “Who the hell has a first name like Elvis, anyway?”

There was no point in attempting to answer any of his father’s questions. All Darren could do was wait in silence, because his father never started one of his drunken angry tirades unless he had some brutal point laying at the bottom of it.

“I don’t want you working at the club anymore,” his father said, delivering the line that Darren had been dreading. He needed four hundred more dollars to pay for his trimester payments to attend St. Norbert College in Wisconsin. The school required one full year’s payment in order to start. Upfront and the checks have cleared the bank issuing them. Sharing tips as a busboy had changed Darren’s life. The tips were much more than his paltry salary, and one more month of work would secure his entry to the college and his escape from home.

“Sergeant Cross needs me,” Darren replied in a weak voice, fighting for time enough to fashion an argument his father might actually buy.

“He’s a sergeant and I’m a Warrant Officer,” his father quickly replied, seemingly ending the conversation.

Darren thought furiously about all the things he might say, until realizing that rank might mean more than he thought with respect to what his father did. He didn’t need to reply. He needed to find someone of high rank who would talk to his father.

“Okay, dad,” he replied, knowing the agreement would mollify his dad, but also give him time to come up with something. He needed Jimmy’s wise advice and counsel, and he needed it badly.

Sleep came hard that night, as Darren lay awake, wondering if he was going to be able to go away to college at all.

His trusty little German alarm clock went off at six-thirty. Getting ready for the day and then getting out of the house was his goal, and he succeeded in that endeavor. He could not show up at Jimmy's house before seven-thirty, or so, however. Although Jimmy had some problems with his own father, he wasn't prone to getting up early to run away from them.

Darren climbed the wall to gain entrance to Fort Ruger's backside. He didn't, however, jump down to proceed to Jimmy's house. Instead, he sat atop the wall, staring out toward the wondrous view of Koko Head in the distance while feeling the early morning trade winds that made Hawaii the envy of every other resort community in the world. Everything was just right. The wind, the view, the temperature, and even the surroundings of a bit broken-down old U.S. Air Force outpost.

Darren thought about the exchange he'd had with his father the night before. What was the Duke doing calling his father? Why would he take that step? Why did the Duke not believe that Darren would do whatever was necessary to make the dinner happen?

"I'm only eighteen," he whispered into the wind.

The key was a military member of high rank. Who did the Duke have at his disposal, or Sergeant Cross, for that matter? And then there was Jimmy's father and his clandestine bunch of army specialists. Who did they have? A major or colonel wasn't going to get it. They needed a general or admiral to make things happen in his father's mind. The Duke had inadvertently thrown a monkey wrench into the works, and it was important that he didn't know that. There was no other job that was going to save Darren, or give him the money, to make it at St. Norbert College. He had to stay the course and that meant he had to, somehow, appease his father.

Darren waited out the time. His light knock at Jimmy's back screen door was answered instantly. Jimmy was up and about his mother said, opening the door and welcoming him in,

even though she was obviously wearing only a gown over her bedclothes.

Darren waited until Jimmy was dressed and ready for the day. Once outside, he couldn't help but put the problem directly into his friend's lap.

"This is a U.S. Air Force problem," Jimmy started out, before going on, having listened to Darren's five-minute diatribe. We need the head of the Air Force at Hickam to make a statement."

"And what are the chances of that?" Darren replied, wondering if his friend would be of any help at all.

"Flag rank officers love big entertainment galas," Jimmy said as if his statement covered all the bases of what might be needed.

"So?" Darren asked, mystified about his friend's answer.

"Sergeant Cross," Jimmy said, kicking another stone along the way.

"Sergeant Cross is just a sergeant," Darren replied, disappointment in his voice.

"Sergeant Cross runs the Cannon Club. Your father is only a low-level warrant officer, but he runs all of Pearl Harbor. My dad is only a major but oversees some new army strike force so secret he can't even tell his family about it. Rank doesn't mean everything in the military."

"How can we get Sergeant Cross to call some general officer at Hickam," Darren replied. "He's not going to want to do that at all."

"There's little question that the general, and probably his family as well, have been to the Cannon Club. And who doesn't love the place up here on the flank of Diamond Head? Cross needs you to make this all happen, or at least he probably believes that."

"Why did the Duke call my dad at work?" Darren blurted out, the single major issue he could not get from his mind.

“Obviously, the Duke wants this whole thing to go down badly. That’s his way of motivating you to make it happen.”

“Oh, great,” Darren breathed out, for some reason feeling a bit of relief. “I’m now in charge of making the event happen. How did that come about?”

“Well, who else do they have?” Jimmy asked.

“Okay,” Darren said. “I get it. They need the club and to get the club they have to have Sergeant Cross and Chef Wu, and that means you, as unlikely as that seems. There’s no way the Duke is calling Sergeant Cross or anyone else. He’s a big player in his own circle but not with the military. To them, he’s just another local loser.”

“He’s got three Olympic gold medals,” Darren replied.

“How did we get treated at Queens Beach the other day?” Jimmy countered.

“The Kanaka/Haole thing never goes away,” Darren replied.

“You got it,” Jimmy said. “That Sergeant Cross is black is another part of the complex puzzle. He doesn’t sound black. Unless you meet him in person you wouldn’t know. So, they don’t know either. You don’t want Sergeant Cross meeting anyone in person, including this general officer we both need to get this thing done.”

Darren tried to think the whole thing through, as they approached the recreation center. It was too early to be open yet. Two big floor brushes were set up, leaning against the wall by the double entry doors. The brushes were for them. For some reason, both Jimmy and Darren had been designated as ‘brush boys,’ by the sergeant who ran the place. The sidewalk that ran up and down the front of the building needed to be swept every morning. Why they did it was not a question they ever asked. The brushes were there. They were there. So, they brushed the sidewalk clear, once again. Darren wondered what to say to the sergeant when he went in for work later in the day.

Jimmy would know. He swept away, glad for the distraction the work gave him.

## Chapter Twenty-Two

The single thought that pervaded Darren's mind and kept him from worrying about what Sergeant Cross might say to his request to get confirmation and a date and time for the Elvis dinner, was about the weekend and what Jimmy had said.

"Sunday, we go up to the tip with the radio and get away from the rest of this dreary island habitat," Jimmy had said, out of nowhere, when Darren had asked him about how to approach Sergeant Cross.

Diamond Head would be there once again and, since absolutely nobody made the climb up to the top of the governmental posted (Do Not Enter Under Any Circumstance) crater walls except them, they would have plenty of time to simply relax and talk. Both boys knew, of course, that their fathers would, with their current active positions and ranks in the military, be able to save them if they were ever caught for trespassing on governmental property. Jimmy was the single person on earth who was never, in Darren's opinion, boring when talking about almost anything or nothing at all.

"What about Cross?" Darren had asked and then had to repeat when Jimmy had offered no resolution to Darren's problem or some script to follow in dealing with the sergeant.

"Easy," Jimmy finally said. "Tell him to book it, get ready for it, make sure that Wu is there to cook for it, and then take leave for the time it is going on."

"Take leave?" Darren asked, in shock.

"Yes, the Sergeant goes on emergency leave to visit some sick relative back on the mainland. He works all the time, probably never takes leave because he's worried that someone will replace him in this cushy job where he can take food home,

probably skim a few bucks from the nightly take, and then be the big honcho in charge when he feels like it.”

“He never acts like the big honcho in charge,” Darren murmured, thinking about the rest.

“No, you got me on that one,” Jimmy replied, “he’s about as low profile at doing his job as anyone I’ve ever seen, and that fact that the place runs like a well-oiled watch is kinda beyond belief.”

“What do I say?” Darren asked, getting back to the subject at hand.

“You tell him that nothing can go wrong, and if it does, he’ll be able to blame it on whoever he leaves in charge for the event,” Jimmy said, exasperation in his voice.

“But he has nobody to leave in charge,” Darren replied, a bit perplexed. He has Wu, but Wu barely speaks English and he’s a civilian, anyway. The waitresses, even the old senior ones, are all government contractors. He can’t have any of them being in charge, considering that there’s a lot of money coming in every night.”

“The sergeant,” Jimmy said as if his conclusion was blatantly obvious, and the man’s identity known to all.

“What sergeant?” Darren asked, this time in dismay. “There’s no other sergeant working at the club.”

“Special Services,” Jimmy said, walking with Darren as he headed for work.

“Special Services what?” Darren asked, again in dismay.

“The man in charge has to be of sufficient NCO rank and in Special Services,” Jimmy said. “That’s the only rule.

“My God,” Darren breathed out, physically stopping to stand and stare at his friend, who simply ambled on, like what he’d said wasn’t something astounding.

“You mean the Master Sergeant running the recreation center, don’t you?”

“You got it,” Jimmy replied.

Darren ran to catch up with the other boy.

“But he’s as dumb as an ox,” Darren said. “No, he’s dumber than an ox.”

“So, what,” Jimmy replied, laughing, and he’s not that dumb. He just doesn’t talk almost at all, which is very protective when serving in a plush do-nothing job in a place like Hawaii. He’s even married to a local girl. And he’s a Haole on top of it. Perfect.”

“I still say he’s too dumb to do anything,” Darren replied, glumly.

“Really? Let’s see, he leaves the brushes out for us to clean the sidewalks,” Jimmy went on. “He doesn’t even leave a note. He assumes we know what he wants and then he assumes that we’ll do it without complaint.”

“That’s being smart?” Darren asked.

“No, what’s smart is that he plans things like that and then executes them without anybody seeming to know, understand, or question it. He’ll do the club and keep his mouth shut, and probably not steal any food or anything else either.”

What if Cross doesn’t to go on leave or doesn’t want to tell lies to get the emergency thing down?”

“Trust me on this one,” Jimmy answered. “Cross is secretive about everything. He hasn’t forgotten Wu and the hole, or any of that. He’s well aware that your dad runs Pearl Harbor, and my dad runs some exotic bunch of wild men training to do strange things in God knows where. You’ve got to be like our recreation sergeant. It’s what you don’t say that’s really important. Cross will go along just like we brush the sidewalks all the time.

“You think the Master Sergeant knows he’s smart,” Darren said, as they walked along, picking up small stones and tossing them at nearby trees.

“He doesn’t think that way, most likely,” Jimmy replied. “He’s what my dad would say is ‘mission-oriented.’ He moves from one thing to another, one step at a time, never talking about any of it. Don’t forget that neither he nor Cross ever wear their



uniforms, not that we see, anyway. Cross is a Staff Sergeant, while our recreation sergeant is a Chief Master Sergeant. Way higher in NCO rank. He didn't get those extra stripes because he's dumb. He's just very quiet."

"I'm only just 18," Darren replied.

"So, I'm just a few months older," Jimmy said. "What's that got to do with anything?"

"You went to Punahou, the best high school on the planet," Darren said. "I went to Maryknoll Military Academy."

"So, what, you had the cool uniforms and all those military balls to take girls to. What bearing does any of this have on any of this."

"I don't know," Darren said, as they walked up the hill up toward the entrance to the still closed club. "I'm just eighteen, coming out of a second-tier catholic high school where my grades weren't that great. You're coming out of Punahou with straight 'A' grades. How did I get in all this stuff, with the Duke, with Elvis, with any of it? Without you, I wouldn't be able to do any of it."

"I can't recite the alphabet backward in less than ten seconds, play chess worth a damn, or even predict what flight surfaces will do in the violently changing trade winds when we fly our planes. And you soloed in a glider with the Civil Air Patrol at Bellows as a Freshman. Do I have to go on building you up in your own mind? I'm not smarter than you. I just have a different father and I'm better than you at making it seem like I'm smarter than you."

Darren was taken aback. Everything Jimmy said was true, although he couldn't understand, and knew he probably never would, Jimmy's comment about their fathers. Jimmy was a musical prodigy, gifted at paying attention in class to get great grades and able to come up with plans like the Elvis dinner at a whim. He thought of his own talents as much more mundane and less interesting.

“Sister Michael Marie said I wasn’t that smart,” Darren replied, as they stood together looking out over the Waikiki complex of hotels growing larger on almost a daily basis. “She also said, however, that I had the best memory of any student she’d ever had. Okay, I have a good memory, but I’m not like you.”

“There’s no answer to the question you didn’t really ask,” Jimmy explained. “That’s the part I meant about our dads. Your dad will never allow you to have or use any of your talents if he has his way. That’s how bad he feels because he was not given those talents. That he’s a Warrant Officer One, the lowest-ranked officer in the military, and running one of the nation’s most important naval harbors escapes him completely. There’s nothing you can do about any of that, and knowing, even if you believe me, what I just told you about that, you can’t do anything about it. Maybe until you’re older.”

With that conclusion, Jimmy loped off back toward the central area of the base, saying nothing about what the remainder of his day and evening would hold.

He threw one comment over his shoulder that Darren barely caught.

“Talk to Star about Diamond Head,” he said, and then was gone down the driveway, seeming to accelerate to get away from hearing what Darren might say, or so it seemed to Darren.

“God, can it only get worse with her?” He breathed in and out deeply before he could work up the courage to disengage the chain and then enter the back door of the unlocked club. Sometimes Darren wondered, as he stepped inside, how the club avoided ever having any theft or at least any reports of theft.

He walked all the way to the ocean side of the main floor dining room and looked out and down from the wall of near floor to ceiling glass windows. Star sat alone at the pool, this time wearing her signature black one-piece swimsuit, which looked more attractive on her than most women wearing bikinis that Darren witnessed on a near-daily basis down on the Waikiki

beaches. The trade winds blew her hair, adding to the near movie conceived scene. She suddenly looked up at the windows he was looking down from. He instantly pulled back, even though he knew that the plastic sun covers on the windows would keep anyone from seeing into the club from the outside. It was like she knew he was there, and she was waiting to encounter him. The girl who'd seen him naked. Maybe if he just made believe that occurrence had never happened then she would make-believe the same thing too.

"Fat chance of that," he said, but only to himself. There was no getting around the fact that he would have to talk to her, otherwise, Jimmy would not only accuse him of cowardice but laugh at him until he cried. He also knew that Jimmy was a bit smitten by the woman or he'd never ever have allowed her to go with them anywhere. How could Darren go against that? He was stuck with Judy, which wasn't all bad, he had to admit, while Darren had the same thing, kind of, going with Star. Maybe it was that they'd both gone to Punahou, although Jimmy claimed he'd never seen her there, which simply wasn't possible.

There was nobody at the club. Darren could prepare tables, sweep, wipe the windows, or a variety of other things that had to be done before customers could be admitted. The waitresses all loved having a busboy, because without one, then all those pre-dinner chores fell on them. If they just acted as they loved him, he might have felt different. Instead, they loved him like a slave. He had to bow his head, shut up and get the work done before disappearing. They also complained about splitting tips with him but paid properly, regularly, and always in exactly the right amount.

Darren went down the stairs, grudgingly trying to figure out what to say to Star Black that might make her not want to climb the mountain on the weekend. If she went along, then the many things he and Jimmy usually discussed in that 'free time' would be all different.

He walked up to where she sat, making believe she was reading some magazine or other she'd likely brought with her. She'd put on a big floppy hat, that just about completed her look of being near Hollywood in appearance.

Darren sat on the edge of the chaise lounge right next to her, getting ready to make his presentation.

"I saw you naked," Star said, "we might just as well get that right out in the open."

Darren swallowed, then choked and coughed. He couldn't believe she'd said what she'd said out loud. He looked rapidly around to make sure there was nobody else around the pool and then was relieved to find one.

"I'm coming on Sunday," Star went on. "Jimmy didn't invite me. He said you would have to approve, and you approve, of course."

Darren breathed deeply in and out, but could not talk, his mind still racing over the few seconds when he'd been visibly naked the day before. What else might Star say, and to whom?"

And then he got it. He suddenly wasn't paralyzed anymore. Star was doing what the Master Sergeant had done, what he himself was doing to Sergeant Cross. She was playing him. If he allowed her to come along and approved of her being part of the climb, then she wouldn't talk. But she wouldn't say that directly. She was smart. Judy, his own girlfriend, wasn't that smart, and in that way, he envied Jimmy in the sort of having Star as his distant girlfriend.

Darren still said nothing, although he was no longer frozen into silence. There was really nothing to be said.

"See you on Sunday," Star finally said, before slowly getting up, tucking her magazines under her arm, and holding down her big hat from swipes made by the diving and whirling trade winds trying to dislodge it from her head.

Darren sat on the chaise lounge for a while longer, after Star left. He promised himself that he'd never swim nude again. His mind raced to thoughts of simply not approving of Star's

intrusion and putting up with his being described naked to anyone she might care to tell but then retreated from such thinking. He was leaving Hawaii for college, to arrive at a small town in Northern Wisconsin where nobody knew anything about him. It was best to do anything he could that nobody did, indeed, know anything about him before he departed.

As he walked back into the club, slowly climbing the stairs, he realized that Star, and the encounter with her, had helped him prepare for his discussion with Sergeant Cross. That discussion would be much less filled with fear and trepidation. Sergeant Cross was nothing compared to the inherent power and presence of Star Black.

## Chapter Twenty-Three

Darren went back inside and began the real work of getting the place ready, the kind he made himself do well but didn't like at all. The work he loved was with the people, not doing the scut work before anyone arrived, although nothing would be able to function in the club without that same scut work being done and done well. His mind worked as his body worked, quickly, methodically, and with practiced skill, at least the skill that might be brought to bear by an eighteen-year-old boy. How would Sergeant Cross react when he was informed that the club was not only going to host Elvis, the Duke and a few more, including the Air Force commanding general at Hickam, but that he, the NCO in charge, was also going to take leave while it all went down? There would be no point in trying to work any local attendance into the mix because the sergeant at the recreational center would have no clue about what was going on unless Cross told him, and that wasn't likely to happen. No doubt Judy would insert herself, and maybe even her parents, through her sister's relationship with Elvis. The only person who didn't seem to have an interest in coming was the only real musician, who wasn't the least bit interested in any of it. That person was Jimmy Dorrenbacher.

Sergeant Cross showed up just before the club opened for the evening. The sun was still up so he was easy to spot motoring up the drive and parking in his usual reserved spot. There were only three special spaces for parking in the lot. General/Admiral Officer Parking, Handicapped Parking, and then one more for the Club Commander. The commander's spot was the least choice, but it was also closer to the rear entrance to the club that Cross always used. Cross had created the

commander sign himself, letting a few members of the staff know that he thought that that title was the best in the Navy since it was the only title that indicated real command. An admiral could be a paper pusher, as could about every other rank in the military.

Wu showed up late, at least for him, and went immediately into the back closet Sergeant Cross referred to as his office. He closed the door, which was saying something because of his thick girth.

Darren waited, making believe he was moving different items from the kitchen to the dining room, but in reality only making believe, with empty trays and boxes. Wu came out of the office and made for the kitchen. Darren avoided him, knowing it was time to make his presentation of a list of requests to Cross, before nighttime at the club became the constant hive of activity it was about to turn into.

Darren waited until the waitresses were all busy deeper inside the dining area before approaching the open door. He tapped lightly with his right knucklers on the right jamb of the door frame.

“Enter,” Sergeant Cross said, not looking up from the tiny desk he was sitting behind, pouring over some papers.

Darren had never been inside the office before. He stood before the desk, his back end almost out the door. He wondered how Wu had fit inside the small space. He noted that even the sergeant’s typewriter was a tiny traveling model. Everything in the office was something one might find in an overly large dollhouse. He smelled the alcohol immediately and could even identify the booze because it was about all his own father drank. Bacardi. The sergeant and Wu had been drinking in the tiny office, probably to celebrate the potential success and advancement of their reputations and careers due to securing the Elvis party and all it entailed.

“What?” Sergeant Cross asked, seeming to be reading intently.

“Ah,” was all Darren could get out.

“You,” Cross said, finally jerking his head up.

“Yes, sir,” Darren automatically replied.

“I’m not a sir,” Cross said, “as I’ve told you before, so many times. What is it you want now?”

“It’s about the Elvis social gathering,” Darren got out.

“What about whatever the hell that thing is supposed to be, and what do you have to do with it?” Cross said, his tone revealing his interest, in spite of the words he used to minimize that fact.

“It’s not me, sir, it’s the Admiral, the base commander at Hickam,” Darren whispered across the small desk, glancing furtively behind him.”

“Close the door,” Cross hissed.

Darren pulled the door closed, as it was hinged from the outside since the office wasn’t big enough for the door to open inward.

“You...” Cross began, but couldn’t seem to go on for several seconds. “You, you, spoke to the Admiral? You yourself?”

Darren suddenly read not only anger but fear in the man’s expression.

“He wants to come and bring his wife,” Darren replied, avoiding any discussion about who he might have actually talked to personally.

“Oh, great,” Sergeant Cross replied, shaking his head, and looking down at the mess on top of his desk. “I’m supposed to meet the Admiral, Elvis Presley, the Duke and whoever else shows up, and then entertain them for the night and make certain nothing goes wrong, or my career is basically over.

“Ah, not exactly, sir,” Darren said, starting to feel sorry for the man who’d never done anything to hurt or abuse him in any way. “You set it all up because there’s nobody else capable of doing that. You then go on emergency leave and have the recreational sergeant take over while you’re gone. The only



person, since the waitresses, myself, and Wu are all civilians, who could lose his job is the recreational sergeant.”

Darren had figure out that there was no point in going into any detail if Cross didn’t agree. What date, time, number of participants, and who those might be didn’t matter if the sergeant wasn’t going to be there. If he was going to be there and said no to the proposition, then the rest wouldn’t matter because the sergeant was never likely to take the risk of putting the whole thing on, which only Jimmy had figured out.

Sergeant Cross looked down at the surface of his desk, then turned sideways to contemplate first one wall, before turning to stare at the other. He rubbed his short-haired head with both hands before rotating back to look at Darren.

Darren pulled back a bit, at his expression. The sergeant was like a crazy man, his eyes round and ripples of frowns running up and down his forehead.

“I do this favor for the Admiral, so the Admiral gives me leave, off the books, of course,” Cross said, the first excitement Darren had ever heard come through from the man. If the party is a great success, then the Admiral will owe me more. If it is a great failure then the recreational sergeant gets passed over, not me.”

He stopped speaking at that point, again staring down at his desktop, but no longer rubbing his head.

“What’s ‘off the books’ mean,” Darren asked, feeling like he was stepping into ever-deepening water. or maybe even quicksand.

“You tell the admiral that I’ll do it,” Cross said, not answering Darren’s question.

“Does he have a date in mind and how many will be in his group,” the sergeant went on. “Maybe we must close the club for that night if there is going to be a raft of guests. Make sure that’s okay too when you talk to him.”

Darren couldn’t speak. He had no relationship with the Admiral. He knew he was so out of my depth he couldn’t even

contemplate there being a bottom somewhere under him. What had Jimmy gotten him into, and how was he ever going to get out of it. Suddenly, Star Black, probably another unwanted guest to the party, telling everyone that he was swimming naked in the pool didn't seem like anything major at all. He wasn't likely going to go off to college. He was likely going off to prison.

"Get me the date and the okay," Cross repeated, before waving Darren out. "You've got work to do."

Darren presumed the sergeant was talking about his work at the club, so he stepped outside, turned, and then asked Cross if he wanted his door closed. The sergeant simply looked at him, like he was a bug on a wall display with a pin through his center. Darren left and went back to being a busboy for the night, his thoughts consumed by what he would discuss with Jimmy, and how Jimmy had gotten him in so deep he might never get out. Only Jimmy could think his way through the Elvis maze both of them had constructed for themselves, and almost everyone around them.

The next day, Diamond Head day, Darren was up before six and out of the house in less than half an hour, even after following all his father's rules that had to be followed before he could exit. He'd showered, brushed his teeth, found clean underwear, shorts and "T" shirt, and then checked the garbage can to make sure no animals had tossed everything all over the side yard. Breakfast was not required to be made or eaten, so he skipped that. The trip to Fort Ruger took only minutes at a full run. Even though he was outside Jimmy's house in record time, he knew better than to approach the residence until he could lurk around and observe signs of life. Darren's father was a man to be feared, especially if you were Darren, but Jimmy's father, in the non-expression of his quiet and totally withheld emotions, was terrifying, although he'd never said or done anything threatening toward Darren. The morning was young, the temperature perfect and the trade winds blowing gently through the palms nearby. He could wait.

The wait was about half an hour. Darren spent the time tossing small stones up into a Plumeria tree, trying, usually unsuccessfully, to hit a single flower and knock the easily detachable thing from its quaking wind-driven branch. In half an hour only six flowers had fallen victim to his rock attacks.

Jimmy came out without warning, gently closing the screen door behind him, before walking over to where Darren sat atop the low lava rock wall that ran the entire distance along the front of the house. Jimmy carefully set his prized Zenith Transoceanic 3000 transistor radio between them. The radio had been his Christmas present months earlier. Jimmy proudly claimed that it was the only short and long wave transistor radio that pulled in FM stations, and they'd proved that fact on many Diamond Head climb occasions.

"We need to meet Star behind the commissary in twenty minutes, so there's no rush," Jimmy said, not looking Darren in the eyes.

Although there had never been any agreement about having anyone else along on their climbing adventures, and Star had already been up there once with them, it still seemed like a violation to have her along. Jimmy could not have said no to any suggestion that she might accompany them, although Jimmy could not know that. Still, it seemed a violation of some sort that Jimmy hadn't told him.

There was really nothing to be said, so Darren remained quiet, both getting up at the same time to head toward the commissary building located only a few hundred yards past the park, and then up the main road that ran back down to intersect with Diamond Head Road.

Time went by as they sat on the commissary steps. The commissary wouldn't open until mid-day so there was nobody around. Jimmy didn't turn on the radio because the unwritten and unspoken rule was that the radio was to be listened to only upon the very peak of the mountain. Finally, many minutes after

Star should have shown, there was no avoiding the fact that they were climbing alone.

Darren followed his friend around the building and up the path that led to the side of the backside of the crater that would take them to the top edge. Darren moved with an enthusiastic spring to his step. Star was not coming, so he would have the time in the world to come up with a plan to save himself by following Jimmy's wise advice and counsel.

The climb was uneventful. It was a warm Hawaiian morning with a bright, but not burning, the sun rising on the other side of the mountain, only directly visible when they were moving along the very top apex of the ridge. The wind was nothing more than a series of soft caressing wafts of fresh ocean air. They took turns carrying the small but heavy radio. Only upon approaching the very tip of the peak, where the flat concrete slab had been poured down during the war, to become the very top of the peak, did things change. They changed because Star Black sat on top of the slab, in its exact center, leaning back on her arms, and staring out over the amazing scenery all of Waikiki displayed below.

"Oh, she's here," Jimmy exclaimed, increasing his pace while, at the same time, Darren decreased his own.

"What a shock," Darren said, but the words not traveling far enough to reach Jimmy or Star.

Jimmy and Darren sat down next to her, or just below her feet, which made Darren frown. Jimmy turned the radio on and the music began to play, occasionally broken into by the German-accented, but brilliant, guy who introduced, and then commented on each piece. Star snaked a fairly sizeable cloth bag from behind her, pulled out a tablecloth and spread it out. Then she unloaded the remains of the bag down upon it. Three bottles of Bubble Up soda, and half a dozen Musabi rolls, made of spam covered in sushi rice, held together with a fish skin wrap, all scattered around on the cloth until the boys scrambled and caught it all.

Suddenly, Darren realized that there might be certain positives in having Star along. He grabbed a Bubble Up and opened it with the opener she'd thought to bring.

"How did you haul all this up along the ridge?" Darren asked, wonder in his voice.

"Oh, I'd have never made that climb with the bag," Star replied. "I came through the tunnel, and then up the path that winds up from the inside of the crater. It's not a climb, just a steep and long hike."

"You can't have gone through the tunnel," Jimmy said, offhandedly, securing one of the soda bottles for himself. "There's an Air Force guard stationed at the locked gate at all times, day or night."

"He's a man, like the rest of them," Star shot back, holding her Bubble Up out so Jimmy could pry the top off.

"Like we're men?" Darren asked, shocked by the exchange. Star had used her feminine wiles to get past the guards, and Darren believed every word of what she had to say.

"You're not men, your boys," Star said, taking a swig from the soda bottle, swallowing, and then smiling one of her rare but radiant smiles. "That's why I'm up here with you and not down there with them."

Suddenly, Darren realized that he could lay out his misgivings and troubles to Jimmy without regard to Star being there. Jimmy would advise him, and likely Star might be of some help too, and, coming to understand here better every time they met, she also very likely had little or no interest in telling anyone about his skinny dipping in the club pool.

## Chapter Twenty-Four

Johann Strauss, the composer of the Blue Danube Waltz, took over the next few minutes, as the three of them sat on top of the thick concrete slab that made up the protective roof of the closed and shuttered observation slit below. All the WWII emplacements and storage areas underground had been long ago sealed by military forces from all the services.

“What’s this week’s subject of discussion?” Star asked as the wonder of the waltz ended.

“The coming big meeting with everyone at the Elvis dinner,” Jimmy replied.

“I told Sergeant Cross that I was in direct communication with Hickam’s commanding general,” Darren blurted out, unable to think about anything else. “I don’t know the general and have never talked to him. I’m supposed to arrange for the general to give Cross the leave he needs to get away, according to Jimmy’s plan, and then make sure it’s ‘off the books,’ too, whatever that means.”

“It means that it will not count as actual leave,” Jimmy said. “It’s free time, but it doesn’t matter because you can’t talk to the general, much less ask him for anything.”

“Have you two really thought about Elvis?” Star asked, causing both boys to turn to face her in silence.

“Have you spoke to Colonel Tom Parker or any of his handlers, agents, or any of those?” she went on. “You really think you can reach Elvis Presley through the blizzard of people surrounding him dedicated to making sure that people like you don’t get through to him?”

“What?” Jimmy replied, dumbly. “Darren’s already talked to him. He sat in Judy’s house and listened to him play the guitar and sing.”

“Trust me, you’ve had your last conversation with Elvis on this earth and the chances of his attending some ‘wish list’ party of nearly unknown local players isn’t ever likely to take place.”

The radio grabbed their attention as Star finished speaking. The German announcer had introduced Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Fourth Movement as they’d been talking. The Ninth’s “Choral” movement began to play. With the trade wind blowing lightly, the sun shining gently and the layout below them of Waikiki facing out into the sparkling Pacific Ocean was too much to oppose. They sat in silence as the movement played through to its climax.

“Why wouldn’t he come?” Darren asked Star, his voice weak and unsure, up against the seeming powerful wisdom the woman emanated.

“What’s in it for Elvis, or Tom Parker?” Star replied. “No media, nobody important, and they plenty to do elsewhere.”

“What about Judy’s sister?” Darren asked. “She’s his girlfriend,” he went on.

“For as long as he’s on Oahu,” Star shot back. “After that, there’ll be another girlfriend, and you can take that one to the bank.”

Darren stared down, watching the surfers sitting on their boards waiting for the next big wave, which wasn’t likely to come since the leeward side of the island got none of the big stuff that rolled all way the down from the Bering Sea.

“Then there’ll be no party and I’ll be off the hook,” he mused, more to himself than to Jimmy or Star.

“Not so fast,” Star laughed. “I didn’t say that he’d say he wouldn’t come. All that will happen at the last minute. It’s Hollywood. Big stars are notorious for it and everyone is used to them not showing up.

“I’ll lose my job,” Darren said, rising to his feet in order to start pacing the twelve feet or so that measured both the length and the width of the stone block they were on top of, the drink and snacks Star had brought all but forgotten in his renewed misery.

“Wait a minute,” Jimmy said, excitement in his voice. “We can cancel the party without telling Elvis or any of the rest of them that he’s not coming, and you can avoid the whole issue of not being able to talk to the general, much less get any kind of leave for Cross.”

“What if he shows up?” Darren asked, stopping his pacing to stare intently down at his friend.

“Who?” Jimmy asked, his brows furrowing.

“Elvis,” Star replied, with a laugh. “Wouldn’t that be something?”

“This is all just great entertainment to you,” Darren said to her, with anger in his tone. “I need the money from my job to go away to college. The first semester has to be paid before I even get there, plus room and board and books.”

“Then just tell your sergeant that the general said no,” Star replied, the humor still coming through in her voice. “Tell him that the general wants him there to make sure it all goes well since he has run the club so excellently over the years. Cross will have a big swollen head; the dinner won’t happen and your job will be saved. The Duke doesn’t matter and none of the rest of them do either.”

“That way Sergeant Cross will want to put the thing on to please his general, instead of making sure it never happens,” Jimmy concluded, obviously impressed with Star’s plan.

“Now you’re thinking,” Star said, taking a swig from her bottle.

“This all has such a bad feel to it,” Darren said, finally drinking from his own soda after sitting down as far from Star as the stone surface would allow. “I am, we are, so far in over our heads it’s unbelievable. Jimmy’s dad threatens my dad and



Duke calls him on the phone. Elvis or no Elvis? Generals! Sergeant Cross! How did I get into this mess?"

"Stop complaining, any kid your age would give everything he or she had to be in your shoes. Your Dad runs Pearl Harbor, for Christ's sake, and your mom has a great job. You have the grades and the money to go off to college thousands of miles from here. You've met Elvis Presley and Duke Kahanamoku, and you're on this idyllic island having the time of your life. What more do you guys want?"

"She's right, you know," Jimmy said, so quickly that it seemed like he was part of some scripted kid's television show.

"So," Darren mused, "I have to tell Cross that the show is a go, but he has to be in charge of it and stay? That's the plan? Why don't I feel better about it? Wu is going to kill me anyway when the thing doesn't go off. This is his big shot at stardom."

"Wu's the cook?" Star said, laughing again. "He makes dinner for Elvis Presley and that's going to make him famous? He's not even going to meet Elvis. He'll be cooking. And if the others would let Wu close to him, he'd simply be the object of "say hello to the cook who made dinner" kind of thing.

"That's not the way Wu sees it, and having him as an enemy again is something I want nothing to do with," Darren replied.

Everything Star said made all the sense in the world, but the way she said things rankled with Darren. Star was maybe two years older than he, and only a year older than Jimmy but she made herself sound like she was an aged woman of the world. Even accompanying Darren and Jimmy to their secret special spot, she'd managed to do it in such a way that he and Jimmy seemed like elementary schoolers instead of experienced high school graduates.

The rest of their two hours was spent with Jimmy and Star talking about the difference between her University, Stanford,

and Jimmy's, which was only the University of Hawaii...still unaccredited as a college back on the mainland. UH had one great feature in its favor, however, other than where it was located. That was the East/West Center that Darren had been a part of since transferring in to finish high school at Maryknoll on Oahu. His comments about the origin of the universe at lectures there had made him a favorite of some of the speakers to the point where some had come to his home. When his dad found out that two of the men were from Africa that had been the end of home visits. Darren stayed quiet as Jimmy and Star talked on into the early afternoon. They weren't really talking about their colleges, he knew. It was about them and each other and if there might be a 'them' at some point. It was boring to sit through, even with the wonderful music and even more terrific view.

"I'll be the busboy, maybe, if the things do happen" Darren interjected at one break in their conversation, "the 'say hello to the busboy' kind of thing.

"What, you want to become famous too?" Star asked, "just like Wu. Let's see, how many former busboys' have been president, or even a governor? None? That would be my guess too. But the money at least gets you into college, not that you're likely to stay there."

"I lectured once at the East/West center," was all Darren could think to reply to her comment, and the nasty tone it was delivered in.

"Hence, that explains why the place is unaccredited," Star replied.

Darren knew he was out of his element, that Star would be able to win any contest that made her seem superior to him.

"Time to go," Darren said, deciding not to reply to the ridiculous conclusion Star had delivered.

He'd looked over at Jimmy when she'd made the unaccredited comment and he'd seen that it had bitten Jim pretty deep too. He was studying at a college from which a diploma

might one day be worthless, compared to the highly touted, vaunted, and expensive Stanford University.

Jimmy jumped to his feet, shoving the empty bottles and napkins back into Star's pack. Star got slowly to her feet, giving away no emotion at all, which was her normal way of setting her features to not allow any expression to appear that she wasn't completely in control of.

The hike back was easy, the only difficult part being the razor-thin edge that had to be crossed with two-hundred-foot vertical drops on both sides. The eight to ten-inch edge was about twenty feet long. Jimmy ran across it lightly, as he always did, flipping around at the other side and laughing, knowing I could only cross by getting down and slithering over, one leg down on each side. Star walked across without looking down, also showing no emotion.

Later, before we made the easy climb down to the back of the club, she made a comment about their return.

"We should call that short stretch 'Lizard Crossing,' after Darren and how he looks when he's down on his belly like a snake."

Jimmy said nothing and neither did Darren.

Darren swore to himself, however, that no matter what the woman might have on him in the future he would never ever make the Diamond Head climb with her again. His analytical mind would also not let him forget that the irritating but brilliant woman was absolutely accurate once again.

The surf was low but the tide was well on its way to coming in, so Jimmy and Darren got into their suits and headed for the beach. Jimmy parked the Corvair right in front of Lewis of Hollywood Salon, able, as almost invariably happened for him, to get an open spot right in front of the place. Darren's mother didn't like them using those spaces as Lewis, the shop owner claimed that customers should only be allowed to use those spaces. Kids of workers should have to walk. But the car was Jimmy's dad's car and Darren had no power over him when

it came to such things as pulling stunts that made Darren's Germanic mother angry.

They rented the largest boards they could get, having been forced to use the 'big guns' by the big Hawaiian and then, upon using them, discovering that the man knew exactly what he was talking about. They surfed for an hour and a half until the tide began to change. They rode almost any wave they wanted, didn't get one scratch from the coral on top of the reef and Jimmy was able to move forward to the front of his board and 'hang ten,' a move where all ten toes are curled over the very front tip of the board. He would then yell "Cowabunga," as he raced toward shore, over the reef, nose-diving into the sandy bottom on the other side.

Darren asked Jimmy to drive him to work when they'd turned their boards in and were racing back along Diamond Head Road, the back way into Fort Ruger that had much less traffic so Jimmy could make the rear-engine and rear-wheel vehicle slide around corners. The moves made Darren nearly sick every time, not to his stomach but in fear that Jimmy would one day lose control of the speedy convertible. Darren turned on the radio, to which Jimmy promptly grabbed the little volume knob and twisted it up all the way.

*"Puff the magic dragon, lived by the sea and frolicked in the autumn mist in a land called Hanalei,"* burst from the front and rear speakers. Both boys loved the new song because they instantly thought of Hanalei on the island of Kauai. Neither boy had ever considered that there was no autumn mist around the ocean where the Hawaiian Islands were located.

Darren changed clothes as fast as he could and then ran to where Jimmy was, engine running and radio blasting right out in the street, blocking the Makai Lane if there was any traffic coming from behind him. Fortunately, there was never any traffic on that street.

The trip to the club was performed in minutes, Jimmy parking where Wu usually left his cycle. It was too early for the

chef to be at work. Sergeant Cross's car was parked in his usual slot of self-made importance. For some reason, having Jimmy at his side made Darren much more courageous. They walked in the back door and went straight for Sergeant Cross's office. Jimmy had counseled him about how to speak to the sergeant.

Sergeant Cross looked up as they approached, his eyebrows going up when he saw Jimmy.

## Chapter Twenty-Five

Sergeant Cross looked up at both he and Jimmy but made no comment about why the other boy was there. He simply waited, his tiny office filled by the three of them, two smallish chairs and the desk the sergeant sat behind. There was no room for him to lean back, so he simply sat straight and waited.

Darren gushed forth the new plan, again alluding to the fact that he was in direct contact with the general at Hickam. When he was done, he looked quickly over at Jimmy, but his friend neither looked back at him or made any comment.

“That explains this,” Sergeant Cross said, holding out a simple eight and a half by eleven sheet of white typing paper.

Darren took the extended sheet, turned it and then read what it said, before falling into an even deeper silence than the one he’d planned he would have to apply to await the sergeant’s response.

“Four hundred and forty dollars,” came out of the silence, when neither Sergeant Cross nor Jimmy made any move to add anything orally to the exchange.

“Apparently, you have the kind of power no high school kid should have, no offense,” the sergeant said.

The ‘no offense’ comment completely threw Darren. The sergeant was trying not to offend him. For some reason that short comment created fear and not satisfaction inside him.

His mind raced at what else the letter said. It was quite simple and clear. If the dinner, or party, with Elvis went down then he, Darren, would receive a bonus from the Air Force in the amount of Four Hundred and Forty dollars. That amount was almost exactly half what the tuition to St. Norbert’s was for the entire freshman year he was about to enter into. It was more money than he’d earned, net, all summer by working for the club

almost non-stop. That amount would secure his first year of tuition, room and board and books. He could get a job at the college to begin saving for his second year. Suddenly there was light at the end of his tunnel of depression.

He handed the paper back to the sergeant without further comment.

Jimmy looked at him, but Darren wasn't about to comment about anything the letter had said, not until they were alone.

The party had to happen. There was now no choice, Darren decided. How could any of the impossible details be brought together to make that happen. How had his college future become intertwined by the comings and goings of a nationally famed superstar of music?

"I presume you will have a report for me soon, about all this," the sergeant said, calmly, while taking the communication from Darren's hand and placing it carefully, facedown upon his desk.

Darren could tell that Jimmy was almost beside himself, fidgeting and trying not to look into Darren's eyes.

"Yes, sergeant, that will certainly be the case," Darren replied to Cross. "I'll get the work done now to ready the club for serving dinner," he continued, not knowing what else to say.

"Oh, you can leave that to the other wait staff," Cross said. "Go do what you need to do to make all this happen. I presume that this person," Cross nodded up and over at Jimmy, "is your confidant and assistant. I suppose you'll want him here on that night, which is fine with me. Give him any title you want. Just make all this happen."

Darren backed out of the room, getting stuck in the door as Jimmy did the same thing. Finally, both of them turned toward one another and sort of bolted and ran down the narrow hall to where the door to the outside stood gaping open. Once outside, the closed door, Darren raced to the parking lot and then sat down heavily on one of the concrete parking slabs, set down to

make sure cars didn't slam into the side of the club when they parked.

Jimmy sat down beside him.

"Okay, that was something," Jimmy said. "What did it say?"

Darren told him.

"Who was the letter from and what authority was listed for the payment?" Jimmy asked.

Darren looked at his friend for a few seconds before replying.

"I don't know," he finally said, his tone sheepish. "I didn't bother to read that part. Four hundred dollars," he breathed out.

"Four hundred and forty dollars," Jimmy corrected. That's one fifth of the total my dad paid for the Monza, and one fourth of what your dad had to pay for the 57 Ford."

"Why does it matter about who the letter was from?" Darren asked.

"To make sure that Cross isn't playing a game of his own here," Jimmy quickly responded. "He's only a sergeant but he's one clever individual and he's trying to survive this Elvis thing, the way he probably sees it. He'll likely pull whatever trick he can to make sure he doesn't lose his place in the military over this. We need Star Black."

"What?" Darren almost yelled.

"Star Black," Jimmy replied, his voice silk and smooth, like the pronunciation of the girl's name was something magical and special.

"We need her because this is a man thing and she's really good at working through the man stuff," Jimmy said. "Whether we like it or not or are afraid to do, we have to reach the general. Only he will have the kind of power we need to get through to Elvis or convince his entourage that it's in his interest to attend the party."



“I can’t figure out anything that could influence Elvis,” Darren replied, shaking his head.

“How about permission to fly out of the airfield?” Jimmy said, his voice soft, like he was just coming up with a concrete idea about what it might take. “All aircraft entering or departing Honolulu Airport require Hickam permission. Ever since the war.”

“Oh great,” Darren gasped out. “We’re going to deny, or try to get the commanding general to deny, Elvis Presley leaving Hawaii. Now what part of crazy is not apparent to you in that statement?”

“I didn’t say exactly that, and that’s why we need Star Black,” Jimmy shot back, getting up and heading for the Corvair. “She understands stuff like this.”

“She doesn’t care about stuff like this,” Darren yelled after him, but grudgingly getting up himself to race to the Spyder before Jimmy blasted off.

Jimmy drove straight to the quarters that Star and her family occupied. Darren thought about the young woman while Jimmy careened the convertible along the narrow roads of the base. They knew nothing about Star’s family. She never spoke about anyone else in her household, ever. Her strangeness extended into every facet of their distant relationship with her.

Jimmy turned the key, the Corvair’s motor died, and he jumped out.

Star was not home, the woman both boys presumed to be her mother told Jimmy.

They sat in the car for a few minutes, not talking, until Jimmy broke the silence.

“Where would she be?” he asked, more to himself than to Darren.

“Where’s she always?” Darren asked back.

“The club, we just left the club,” Jimmy said, a great smile crossing his face.

“She’s always at the pool, when she’s not out climbing with us,” Jimmy followed up, twisting the key in the Spyder’s ignition and bringing the car’s turbo-powered engine to life.

They headed back to the club, neither having thought to check to see if she was there before they’d left earlier.

Once more, Jimmy approached the club, but instead of parking distant from the back entrance, he slipped the Corvair into the slot reserved, but almost never occupied, for a general officer.

“Are you crazy?” Darren asked his friend, as the engine died once again.

“You’re a big deal now, or at least until Elvis doesn’t show up for the party,” Jimmy laughed, leaping from the car and heading around the side of the club to get directly to the pool area.

Filled, once again with a good measure of fear and trepidation, Darren followed Jimmy around the front side of the club until they arrived at the pool area. Star was there, laying back on a chaise lounge, this time wearing a pure white one-piece bathing suit, making Darren wonder just how many she had.

“Well, well, well, it’s the two climbers, just down from their assault on Everest,” she said, as if she’d been preparing the line while awaiting their arrival.

“We’ve got a problem,” Jimmy said, looking over at Darren when he spoke.

Darren remained silent, getting the message that Jimmy was sending him.

“We have to put on the party and Elvis has to come,” Jimmy said, avoiding all the blabbing Darren would have done to explain everything that had happened.

“Hmmm,” Star said, not looking at either of the boys, instead peering intently down into the clear unruffled pool water.

“Motivational change somewhere in there, I suppose,” Starr replied.

“The Air Force is giving Darren a big bonus in cash if the party goes on as planned,” Jimmy explained.

“I doubt if the Air Force has much to do with that, if it’s true, but no matter,” Starr said. “There’s only one way you might get to Elvis himself, cause there’s no way the Colonel is going to either let you talk to him or want him involved at all.”

“The Duke?” Darren offered.

“The Duke’s only a big deal out here,” Starr replied. “Back on the Mainland he’s nobody. Aging Olympic Stars and surfers get no notice at all.”

“Judy,” Jimmy said, shaking his head after saying her name.

“That’s close,” Starr replied. “Actually, it’s Judy’s mom. Mrs. Levy is beautiful in her own right, and I have it on good authority that Elvis really likes her. She’s got to invite him back. She’s also dependable and smart, unlike Judy’s sister. “Only you guys breaking in on another home visit will have any chance at all. Elvis does things all the time that the Colonel doesn’t want him to do, and this might fit that bill.”

Darren sat down on the concrete edge of the pool, a great sigh coming out of him. Starr automatically repositioned her chaise lounge in order to place Darren at her feet, like up on the mountain. Darren wondered, absently, whether she did things like that on purpose or simply out of habit. Somehow, no matter what, his school picture was going to end up on Judy’s mirror and he was going to visit that bedroom at least one more time.

“Okay, that’s a great plan,” Jimmy concluded, taking a place next to Darren at the pool’s edge. “All you have to do,” he said to his friend in an excited tone, “is have a short talk with Judy to set up a meeting with her mom.”

“I don’t have to talk to Judy to talk to her mother,” Darren said, his voice low and depressive. “She thinks I’m the best thing that’s ever happened to Judy, but I’m not sure she’ll have enough power to reach Elvis, although her daughter might be willing to help there.”

“You know, before the summer’s over, you’re going to have to deal with the Judy thing,” Starr said.

“What Judy thing?” Darren replied, turning to face Starr.

“Unrequited love, wounded hearts, damaged egos and latent unsatisfied sexual undertones,” Starr said.

“Oh my God,” Jimmy gushed out. “How do you do that? You just hit it right on the head. I couldn’t put all that together if I tried, especially the under-table sex stuff.”

“Undertones,” Darren corrected, but his voice so low it was hard to understand what he said.

“Think Mrs. Levy is home?” Jimmy asked.

“She doesn’t work, her husband’s a colonel, so they have enough money and those great quarters,” Starr said.

“Let’s go,” Jimmy said to Darren, jumping up and taking the Corvair keys out of his pocket.

Darren got up more slowly, knowing there was no other way and that he had no other choices if he wanted to have a real shot at getting the bonus money.

The ride to the Levy home was short and quick, although Jimmy pulled up to the curb near the front door more slowly than he usually did.

Darren got out of the car and walked right into the house without knocking, as he normally did. He’d asked Jimmy to wait in the car, as he wanted to plead with the older woman alone after checking to make sure nobody else was in the house.

“Darren,” Mrs. Levy said, from down the hall and around a corner that led into the kitchen.

Darren walked slowly to the end of the hall, turned and looked at Mrs. Levy. He stopped suddenly. The older, but very attractive woman, was wearing a white slip, which was transparent enough to vaguely show her bra and panties underneath.

“Ah,” was all he could get out, wishing he’d had Jimmy come in with him. Mrs. Levy had a very expressive personality but he’d never seen her wear anything like what she had on.

“Sit down,” Mrs. Levy instructed, her back to him while she worked doing something over the stove.

“I’m making some tomato and cheese sandwiches,” Mrs. Levy said. “Is there something you want?”

## Chapter Twenty-Six

Darren went to the table and dutifully pulled out a chair and sat down, more than a bit worried that someone might come along and see him with Mrs. Levy dressed the way she was or undressed the way she was.

“I’ll throw something on, for the sake of propriety,” Mrs. Levy said, before turning from the stove and rushing off down the hall as if she’d read Darren’s mind.

Darren started to breathe normally again, not moving, trying to arrange the argument he and Jimmy had sat in the car and put together.

Mrs. Levy returned in seeming seconds, dressed like she was usually dressed, in slacks and some light flowered top. Darren was relieved. He couldn’t put aside completely the image of her in the flimsy clothing she’d been wearing, however, but had to push back thoughts of why she might have appeared to him like that until he could think better later on.

She carried a plate of cheese sandwiches to the table and sat down herself.

“Do you want a sandwich, or did you come for something else?” she asked.

Darren wanted to shake his head to clear it from thoughts about what the ‘something else’ might extend to, but instead, he launched into his sales presentation.

He talked on and on for many minutes. Mrs. Levy ate a sandwich slowly, never interrupting or saying a word. When Darren finally stopped talking, she cleaned her hands with a paper napkin and let out a big sigh.

“So, what do you really need, and why and how is it supposed to work?” she asked.

Darren knew his whole routine to hear Elvis play once again in this life and to be with Judy when he did so, had not flown at all. Mrs. Levy was much more like Star than Judy, he realized. She simply knew things that should have been unknowable, at least to Darren's way of thinking.

Darren didn't reflect long. His sales presentation had fallen on deaf but not necessarily unsympathetic ears.

"I need the \$440.00 dollars the Air Force is promising me," Darren began, the rest coming out in a rush. "I need for Elvis to show up at the club to satisfy the Duke, the Air Force General out at Hickam, Chef Wu, Sergeant Cross, and possibly even my own father. I can't get Elvis to come because unlike the morning we spent last week over here, I can't get near him to talk to him. I know he'd come if he knew. His handlers won't let me near him, or Jimmy, or even the Duke for that matter. But, if you can get Elvis to come back to visit your daughter again, then Jimmy and I can break in and talk to him. I just know he'd do it. The man just struck me that way."

"He's a very sincere boy, rather than a man," Mrs. Levy replied, "sort of a lot like you. There's no number to call him but my daughter sees him all the time. All I can do is ask her to have him get hold of me. Having her ask on your behalf probably wouldn't be as effective."

"But, you'll try?" Darren said, some amazement in his tone.

"Of course, I'll try," Mrs. Levy laughed. "How could you think anything else?"

All Darren could think to do was leave, although it didn't seem like the woman wanted him to leave. Instead of getting up he took one of the grilled cheese sandwiches and started eating it.

"This party you're planning," Mrs. Levy said, munching on her own sandwich, which she'd carefully cut into four smaller pieces, "Was that all your idea?"

“Mostly,” Darren replied, being as truthful as he could. It had really been the Duke’s idea, but he didn’t want to waver in having Mrs. Levy do him the favor personally. He was almost certain Mrs. Levy had never met the Duke and therefore might not care whether ‘his’ party went down or not.

“My daughters will be going off to college, like you, very soon,” Mrs. Levy said, making Darren wonder instantly about why she was saying what she was saying as if she’d prepared to have the conversation with him for quite some time.

“Ah, yes, that’s true,” was all he could think to reply.

“Their relationships will change, the one’s back here and almost everywhere else, when that happens,” Mrs. Levy said. “I don’t want you to get lost in that shuffle, if it’s possible, although very likely it’s not.”

“Get lost?” Darren asked, finishing his sandwich and wanting nothing more than to get back out to where Jimmy sat outside, waiting in the Monza.

“I want you to stay in touch with me after you go off to college,” Mrs. Levy replied. “Hawaii is different than most other places and my husband and I plan to retire here. People who come here and then leave invariably come back to visit time and again over the years. You’re a special young man, and I think it would be great to stay in touch after your relationship with Judy is over.”

Darren sat frozen, stunned into silence. Mrs. Levy was basically telling him that she was breaking up with him. That eventuality had never occurred to Darren. Judy was only the second girlfriend he’d ever had. Gail Kolauokalani had dumped him to go back to her old boyfriend a year earlier. She’s said he was ‘too nice a guy’ to be serious about. That her former boyfriend had beaten her on several occasions somehow had meant more than being a nice guy to her. Now, here he was again. Judy was a girlfriend, although he loved and feared her at the same time. The pictures lining her mirror up in her bedroom gave every indication that she would move on from



Darren like she'd moved on from all the others, but the spoken reality of its being predicted by Mrs. Levy was emotionally painful to hear.

"I didn't mean to hurt you, but you need to know, I think," Mrs. Levy went on, obviously sensing Darren's emotional state.

Darren's mind raced in circles. Colonel Levy was never to be seen in the home where Darren had spent as much time visiting as his own. The daughter that Elvis seemed so taken with was never there either. Only Mrs. Levy and, quite occasionally, Judy were seemingly ever in the place, at least during the daylight hours during which Darren visited. He realized suddenly that he spent more time with Mrs. Levy than Judy, or any other member of the Levy family, although the woman had never spoken to him so directly or intimately before.

"Okay," Darren said, suddenly, rising to his feet. "I'll come back later and keep checking to see how it's going."

Darren knew that what he said was some sort of nonsense, but he had to get out of the house and away with Jimmy. Only driving at top speed down Monsarrat in the convertible with the radio blaring out a Frankie Valli song seemed to make any sense at all. He could not face Judy, at least not yet, and he was afraid she might walk in at any moment. Jimmy might know what to do or how to handle the whole mixed mess of what his relationship with Judy and Mrs. Levy had become, along with the additional nightmare of complexity that the Elvis party had turned into.

"I'll make sure we get to Elvis," Mrs. Levy said, "and I'm pretty sure he'll come to the house. "I'll be here for you tomorrow morning. Judy's having her hair done by your Mom then, so we can spend some time plotting this all out. You make life more fun than it normally is."

Darren wanted to say 'yes, ma'am,' but he bit back that reply. Somehow, whatever was going on with him and Judy, and Mrs. Levy didn't call for that formal of a response, although he couldn't think of anything appropriate to replace it.

“Ah, okay, I’ll see you in the morning,” he tentatively threw out and then walked quickly down the hall to the front door. His relief at seeing Jimmy sitting out front in the Corvair was palpable. He ran around the car and jumped over the door, his breath coming and going in sighs while he tried to calm himself.

Jimmy took off, using his normal gentle (for him) acceleration from the Colonel’s house.

“You don’t look so good,” he said over to Darren.

“Just take me home,” Darren said, finally, as he couldn’t think of anywhere he could go that would allow him to hide out from the world.

Jimmy drove in silence, but he didn’t head toward Jimmy’s house, or even the street it was located on. He drove toward Waikiki.

“Where are we going?” Darren asked.

“You don’t get to quit or take a break right now,” Jimmy said, hitting the turn onto Monsarrat with squealing tires. “We’ve got a plan. You, me and Star. You’re not going to just shut up and leave us on our own. I went back to Star while you were in there. She walked down to the Natatorium, where she’s waiting.”

Darren cringed down. Star would no doubt come up with some wild, biting, but probably very accurate conclusions about the strange nature of Darren’s relationships with the Levy women. He didn’t want to hear them. He was being dumped, again. He was being either toyed with, pursued, or just the foil of an attractive older woman who happened to be his girlfriend’s mother. And he was being dumped. It was all too much. He felt like a juggler with so many balls in the air that he could not possibly keep them all up there, and some of the balls, especially the ones that dealt with women, were filled with contact exploding powder.

The trip down to the Natatorium took only a few minutes. Darren turned the radio on, but Frankie Valli was not

singing. The Beach Boys belted out one of their most famous songs through the front speaker: “*Do my dreaming and my scheming, lie awake and pray, do my crying and my sighing, laugh at yesterday...*” Darren just wanted to be in his room, like the song’s title, but he knew there was no escaping the wildly interweaved scenario he’d originated and then set in motion.

They parked the car on the street, got out, and then headed for the big concrete arch that served as the entrance to great salt-water pool.

They would not have to search for Star, Darren saw. She stood under the arch, centered, with the Duke at her side, as if a part of some movie set.

Darren’s heart sank even further. How was it that his life had become so entwined with that the Duke, a distant and nearly silent man of such great local distinction? How could doing something like breaking his favorite surfboard have brought them together in the strangest of ways, and what could he tell Star, or Jimmy for that matter, of the truth about his meeting with Mrs. Levy?

## Chapter Twenty-Seven

Jimmy trotted toward the great concrete arch of the Natatorium while Darren hung back, moving slowly but steadily toward the couple. The Duke was wearing his usual ‘uniform’ consisting of a white short-sleeved shirt, cotton trousers, and leather sandals. His still completely black hair gleamed with the sun behind him. Star wore a Muumuu dress, which looked like hell on almost all women who choose to wear the local piece of attire, but on Star it looked terrific.

When the four were together, the Duke led them through the arch and along a walkway that extended the full length of the built-in bench-type blocks where spectators over the years had seated themselves. He found a block that was unstained by the many birds that frequented the place and sat down to gaze down into the huge pool of gently swirling seawater. There was nobody in the pool since it was so early in the day. The multi-platform high diving structure sat on the outside wall of the pool, built in the late nineteen forties, looking like some sort of modern construct meant to bring the old ancient Greek style of architecture with a touch of modernism.

The quarried stone blocks were uncomfortable to sit on for any length of time, but Star, Jimmy, and Darren found places nearby where they could be close enough to hear and talk, but not too close for comfort. The Duke did not induce anyone to get too close, although he was among the most personable of men, as far as Darren was concerned.

“What have you figured out to do?” the Duke asked, once they were all situated.

“The plan is to have Mrs. Levy, Judy’s mom, approach Elvis,” Jimmy quickly replied. “Then she is to get him to come

to dinner or to some other social engagement she comes up with, and then notifies us so we can show up. Time is short because the movie will be done filming soon.”

“And you two are supposed to convince him to attend this special function?” the Duke replied, obvious disbelief in his tone.

“Well, not exactly,” Darren said. “Mrs. Levy has a strong relationship with Elvis, so she’ll do the talking, mostly. We’re there because she feels sorry for Jimmy and me, and she thinks he will too.”

“Amazing,” the Duke said, coming to his feet. “I guess my work here is done. That I’ll be interested in some report on how this works out goes without saying. Star, I would appreciate it if you would get hold of me when you know something.”

“Sure, Duke,” Star replied, getting up, walking over and then giving the Duke a big hug.

The Duke didn’t respond, instead simply letting Star hug him. When she let him go, he took a step back and rearranged his attire by patting himself down, as if he was ironing out wrinkles she might have created. He turned and walked out toward the entrance, waving a ‘Shaka’ (thumb and little finger of his left hand sticking out with the rest of his fingers bent into a small fist) sign backward toward us without looking.

Darren looked at Star, who moved to take the Duke’s spot on the huge rock shelf, once again giving herself a position of dominance.

“Well,” Darren said, “this is a fine mess, and you are reporting to the Duke and not us,” he went on, unable to keep a small bit of jealous anger from his voice.

“I think his confidence level in your ability to perform might be a little limited,” Star answered. “So, you want to tell me what happened with Mrs. Levy and how you arranged for her to do whatever it is she’s going to do?”

Darren was stunned. It was like the girl could read his mind and inside it all the things he didn't want to talk about with anyone, much less his best friend and Star.

"Okay," he said after almost a full minute, sighing, and then looking down into the waters of the natatorium before replying. He poured out everything that had happened, from the moment he'd entered the Levy home until he'd made up an excuse to leave. When he was done, he looked up into Star's eyes, feeling momentarily relieved but armored as best he could be against whatever it was, she might say about all of it.

"My, my," Star began but was interrupted by Jimmy.

"That's fantastic," he said, "You've wormed your way right into the woman's heart, and I don't think that's an easy thing to do. She doesn't even notice my existence, but she likely wants to sleep with you."

Darren grimaced but said nothing.

"You don't understand women, Jimmy," Star replied. "Sleeping with a teenage boy half her age isn't on her mind. She never had a son, only two daughters. You are the son she never had. Unlikely as it seems, she sees you as the perfect teenage boy, as if her son would have grown up just like you, not that you are grown up at all yet."

Unexpectedly, Darren felt relieved. If Star was correct, and she was correct about most things, then the situation with Mrs. Levy was nothing to worry about.

"When?" Star asked. "This all has to go down really quickly for it to have a chance of working."

"I didn't ask her that," Darren answered, "but from her conversation with me I think she got that."

Jimmy got up suddenly.

"Where are you going?" Star and Darren both asked together.

"Surfing," Jimmy answered, nothing else to do right now. Want to join us?"

“I don’t surf, at least I never have,” Star replied. “The guys at Queens always want to take me out but I’ve never gone.”

“I’ll get a big board and we’ll take some waves together,” Jimmy said as if tandem surfing was something he did all the time.

In fact, Darren knew that his friend had never done it before.

“Okay,” Star said, “you can drop me at home to get my suit on and then pick me up in a few.” She jumped down from her rock and walked with Jimmy toward the arch.

Darren got up and followed them, wondering how Star had somehow entered herself into their lives, and in such a way that she slipped neatly right between Darren and his best friend. They got to the car, with Darren trailing behind. When they got to the car Star didn’t hesitate, jumping over the passenger door and into the passenger seat. Darren was aghast. Star had ridden in the car with them before but had always been in the back seat. Now he was in the back seat, and she was upfront.

Jimmy jumped in on the driver’s side, laughing when he did so before turning the ignition key and engaging the starter.

Darren didn’t think there was anything funny, as he dutifully got into the back seat of the car.

The turbo Corvair engine did not start. It turned over and over but would not fire, which is the way it acted upon occasion but usually only after sitting for a long time.

Darren smiled secretly behind Jimmy’s and Star’s backs. Maybe there was some justice in the universe, he thought.

Jimmy got out after pulling the lever to operate the release for the trunk, or in the Corvair’s case, the hood. Darren got out with him.

“Why now?” Jimmy breathed, as both boys bent to examine the flat engine.

Darren immediately understood that Jimmy was enjoying the attention Star was heaping on him but could not contain himself enough not to show his happiness that the engine had not started.

“Sometimes fate works for the best,” Darren said, thinking the expression not quite right or accurate but expressing a bit of what he felt about Star seeming to put a bit of distance between him and his best friend.

“Not funny,” Jimmy hissed at him, trying to unscrew the dual air cleaners that sat atop the carburetors.

He succeeded, pulling the two cumbersome metal canisters from the car and placing them on the asphalt. “Do your thing,” he instructed, before walking back to the side of the car and jumping back into the driver’s seat.

Darren waited, placing a hand first on the left-most carburetor and then his other hand muffling the right. He and Jimmy had performed the operation before. According to Jimmy’s father, the carburetors would leak out their fuel supply, held in tiny tanks near their tops, and muffling the air coming in, when the starter was turning the engine over, would suck gas from the tank up to the carburetors and allow them to spray gasoline down into the cylinders.

“Okay,” Darren said, getting ready to pull his hands back as quickly as he could when the engine started. Several times he’d been burned when he wasn’t fast enough. It wasn’t uncommon for the engine to backfire up through one carburetor or both, and sometimes both.

The engine turned over, and Darren pulled his hands back. Both carburetors flared flames six inches, or so, high. As soon as the engine was running the flames disappeared. It had been close. Darren examined both hands to make sure part of his fingernails had not been melted, which had happened twice before, but he was okay.

Darren replaced the air filters, slammed the hood down, and climbed over it, and into the back seat.



“Don’t do that,” Jimmy yelled, as he usually did. Jimmy was always afraid the sheet metal would bend under Darren’s weight, not confident that Darren knew just where to put pressure down without anything bending. Nothing bent.

Jimmy pulled out of the parking spot and whirled the Spyder around, slamming Darren into the right side of the car, hurting his shoulder a bit.

Darren said nothing, unhappy with his reduced stature, even though he knew full well that Jimmy couldn’t have started the car alone or been able to pull off getting the Elvis party back into planning without him.

The rides to Star’s house, then Darren’s and Jimmy’s, and back to pick everyone up again took less than half an hour. Jimmy picked up Darren last, saying that Star was the closer of the two, no doubt trying to soften the blow that, once again, Darren was riding in the back seat.

“Judy breaking up with you is a good thing,” Star said, turning her head, as the Corvair raced down Monsarrat toward Waikiki.

“A lot you know,” Darren shot back, more perturbed by losing his ‘shotgun’ seat than anything else.

“I know about women,” Star replied. “You have never even liked her, and, in fact, you’re afraid of her. You can’t be a boyfriend to a girl that you’re afraid of. It’s simple logic. Plus, when you go away to college, you’ll have a whole new collection of women wanting you even more than Mrs. Levy.”

Darren had no reply. He was stung. First Star had relieved him from his thoughts about Mrs. Levy seemingly making advances on him and now she was bringing that scary fact back to the forefront of his thinking.

“You have to be careful when you approach here again, about the date and everything else, or your fear of her daughter could be replaced by a much greater fear of Mrs. Levy.” Star laughed. “You sure have a way of digging holes for yourself you find almost impossible to get out of.”

“Oh, like I don’t have help in digging those holes,” Darren replied, his anger rising to the surface.

“Don’t be so sensitive,” Jimmy said, entering the conversation while turning so hard onto Ala Wai boulevard that Jimmy was thrown all the way across to the left side of the car. “Your ability to dig holes makes life out here a whole lot more interesting for all of us, so keep digging.”

They arrived on Kalakaua and Jimmy, once again, to Darren’s disappointment, was able to park right in front of the hair salon. They got out, Jimmy popping the front trunk hood and pulling out beach towels, something they never carried when surfing alone. Air drying as they made it back to the Corvair was usually the only drying they got.

Darren wondered what other surprises Jimmy had packed into the car for Star. Deep down, he also knew that he resented the easy-going nature of the strange relationship between Jimmy and Star. His own with Judy, and Gail before her, had been stiff and formal, even though he did not see himself as that kind of guy.

Star jumped out of the car and raced into the salon.

Darren got out and stood at the curb but didn’t move after that.

“What’s she doing?” he whispered to himself in wonder, more than to Jimmy.

“She’s saying hi to your mom, of course,” Jimmy replied. “She’s really good with adults, if you haven’t noticed, unlike us.”

“Right,” Darren breathed, still not moving.

He knew in his heart of hearts that Star’s visit would not play well over dinner when he got home later. The family dinner every night was among the things Darren dreaded worst, other than working with his father on the Ford. His memory of the mechanics of the Ford and all of its parts bothered his father so much that such work ended up being an attack session from beginning to end. Dinner with the family was worse because the

interrogations began when the first food was delivered. Everything was on the table, from Darren's schooling, coming college, money, job, Judy, Jimmy, and more. All of the material was ripe for biting criticism and advice. Much of it was alcohol-induced, as 'happy hour' at home was four o'clock to the second, and dinner wasn't served until five. The dinner subject for this night would be all around Star and what she'd done or said while in the salon.

Star came out with a big smile on her face. "Your mom was out somewhere but the rest of the staff was great. I may get my hair cut there one day if I ever have that kind of money."

"Oh great," Darren could not help saying.

They moved toward the beach, passing through the grand opening to the Moana lobby, also grand in every way. The beach was half-filled with tourists, most of them in the warm lapping water and low breaking waves.

Darren surfed alone, although Jimmy and Star were close by. Queens was running low at high tide, so the big boards did their jobs just fine. Darren caught wave after wave, while Jimmy and Star spent most of the time falling off their board and getting back on. Jimmy was discovering that tandem surfing was nothing like surfing alone.

When they were finally done, Jimmy and Star were so exhausted that they simply could not go on, they gathered on the beach to tow their boards back to the rent concession at the hotel.

The car was where they'd left it. Darren was tempted to enter the salon just to see what damage had been done but didn't go in. It didn't matter. Star's appearance there alone would be enough to create havoc at dinner.

"Hey," Jimmy exclaimed when he went to clamber over the car door. "We've got a note or ticket."

He pulled a small slip of white paper from under the driver-side windshield wiper. He read it to himself before handing it to Star.

“It’s for you, Darren,” she said but didn’t hand the note over.

“Seems that Mrs. Levy is working fast, all right. “She wants you to come over right away to discuss the plan.”

“Oh, okay,” Darren replied, relieved that it wasn’t a note from his mom or something worse.

“She did sign it, though,” Star went on, finally handing the note to Darren, “and she signed it ‘love, Mrs. Levy.”

Darren turned white, climbing into the Corvair’s back seat, his strength drained. He didn’t even bother to try to claim the front seat. His top worry had been about dinner at home, but that had instantly been replaced by the coming meeting with Mrs. Levy.

## Chapter Twenty-Eight

Darren slunk down in the back seat of the Corvair, bracing his arms and legs against the jerky half-wild movements of the car's body as Jimmy drove even wilder than normal. Star seemed highly entertained by the dangerous driving exercise, laughing at the most fearful moments for Darren. Not that it mattered, Darren thought, as he tried to put together the rest of his day, and the evening of work beyond that.

Dinner would be early, as his dad got home from Pearl religiously every afternoon at three-thirty. Dinner was at four and work at the Cannon Club for Darren began at five, or at least used to when he was doing the pre-dinner scut work for all of the wait staff. No matter what, he wouldn't go in late, however. The Elvis event had raised him up in Sergeant Cross's opinion, but he knew the sergeant was nobody's fool. If the Elvis event did not go down, there would be no job, and he had to plan for that too.

Before home, he had to face Mrs. Levy, and he had to do it alone. He had hoped never to be alone with her again but, deep down, he knew that the favor he was asking was very personal and quite extensive, if not risky for Mrs. Levy. The woman's daughter was nearly betrothed to Elvis, and the damage that could be caused between them over something so seemingly innocent as a set-up invitation with he and Jimmy showing up by 'accident,' might grow into a huge chasm between mother and daughter if Elvis broke up with her over it.

Jimmy guessed that he wasn't invited to the Levy house, stopping out front and then waiting with the motor running for Darren to get out.

“Cannon to the right of him, cannon to the left of him, cannon in front of him, volleyed and thundered,” Star murmured with half a giggle, as Darren crawled over the door frame and stood by the side of the idling Spyder.

“Very funny,” he replied to Star’s adaptation of Tennyson’s Charge of the Light Brigade.

“Well, are you going to take Star home, or what?” Darren said, when Jimmy made no move to drive off. Although he didn’t want to enter the house alone, he also did not want the car sitting outside idling away with Jimmy and Star in it. Darren knew Jimmy wouldn’t shut the car off again until he was home, for fear that it wouldn’t start again.

“We’re going, after you go through that door,” Jimmy said, pointing at the Levy home front door.

“Why?” Darren asked, in surprise.

“Because we’re afraid that you’ll run,” Jimmy replied.

“Ridiculous,” Darren whispered to himself, as he walked slowly to the screen door. He knew there was no point in knocking, as Mrs. Levy never answered the door. The house rule was that anybody who was a friend would know to simply walk in and introduce his or her presence. Anybody else could call and make an appointment, or not. Mrs. Levy didn’t care, although her husband had thrown some huge rages, according to Judy, in the past over such cavalier behavior.

The Corvair took off slowly once he was inside the screen door, Jimmy and Star talking away although their voices quickly grew too distant for Darren to make out any meaning.

The spring tensioned door swung shut behind him. The aroma of the plumeria flower scent, blown by the trade winds through the open front windows. It gave a dissonant, yet not unpleasant, context to the difficult situation Darren found himself in. He walked down the hall, feeling the wind pushing him forward and the flowers trying their best to make him feel better. Darren loved plumeria trees, with one right outside his bedroom window at home. He always wanted to climb them

because their branches were low, interlinked and looking so comfortable to climb and hide within their nearly complete umbrella of flowers that were always plentiful and waiting. The branches were too fragile, he'd discovered many years earlier when he'd tried to climb one, however, so he'd given up on that idea. Plumeria leis were the cheapest flower adornment to buy on the island, and he loved the aroma, which always made them his choice to give his dates for military balls.

He walked slowly, knowing that the door swinging shut would have alerted Mrs. Levy that he was there, but he heard no welcoming comment from deeper inside the home. He turned right at the end of the hall and walked into the combined kitchen and dining area, where he'd met Mrs. Levy before.

She was there.

Darren breathed in and out deeply but silently.

"Sit down," Mrs. Levy commanded.

Here remark was delivered in a 'Maryknoll Nun' tone. There was to be no arguing about it or even questioning. Darren didn't hesitate for even a second. He grabbed a chair at the table where Mrs. Levy sat, pulled it out, and sat down as ordered.

"You are a remarkable boy, and I think very few people understand that", Mrs. Levy began, waving her hand for Darren to shut up when he tried to respond.

"Judy is going to begin dating Joe Pillsbury," she went on, as if that news was like discussing the weather. She said the words, but Darren also noted that she didn't look him in the eyes when she said them. "She doesn't want to hurt you, so she wanted me to tell you."

Darren sat and stared, his mind almost a blank. A beautiful young girl's mother was assigned the task of telling her boyfriend he was dumped. It didn't make any sense. Mothers did not do such things. Daughters didn't ask their mothers to do such things. Not in the real world.

“Pillsbury?” was all that Darren could get out. “What’s a Pillsbury?”

“You don’t cook much, do you,” Mrs. Levy answered.

Darren looked across the table intently for the first time. Mrs. Levy was dressed in a beautiful blouse and skirt ensemble, with high heels and earrings and everything. She looked like the women who attended Sunday Mass every weekend where he was required to attend. Looking at the wonderfully attired and made-up women on Sunday’s was the best thing Darren got out of going to mass.

“Ah, no, not really,” Darren replied, not having a clue as to where Mrs. Levy was going with her conversation.

“Pillsbury is the premier maker of flour in the world,” she said. “Joe Pillsbury is the son of the current majority owner of that company. He’s a rare catch, particularly out here in Hawaii. Elvis is probably never going to marry my daughter, but if Joe Pillsbury marries Judy then we’re made, as a family.”

Darren suddenly didn’t want to talk about Judy, Pillsbury, or any of what might be happening inside the Levy family.

“Is Elvis coming?” he asked, more to change the subject than anything else.

Darren’s emotions were racing everywhere, and he didn’t know how to control or understand them without getting time alone to spend in his room or seeing Jimmy to have him interpret what might be going on.

“He’s coming,” Mrs. Levy said. “This Friday. I told him the whole story, all of it. He loved it. You are being paid off by the Air Force to make it all happen. He particularly loved that part. So, you and Jimmy can come and ‘break-in’ on Friday at about five.”

Darren’s emotions were on a roller coaster. He’d dived down into the depths with the news that he was dumped for Joe Pillsbury, or rather for Joe’s family and money. Slowly Mrs. Levy had guided his roller coaster car back up a big hill, and then let the brake lever go and he was screaming down the tracks



toward another bottom, with an unknown climb coming up in the far distance.

Elvis was coming, and he'd meet him again. Maybe he could steal his parents coveted Argus 35 mm camera and take a picture of the great rock star.

"Okay, I know you have to go home and have dinner and then work at the club," Mrs. Levy said, pushing her chair back and standing up.

Darren's relief was palpable, all of his worries about Mrs. Levy's strange attractiveness toward him put at ease.

"Come and give me a hug," she said, holding out her arms.

Darren stood up, unsure about what to do. Once again, mixed signals shot back and forth through his mind.

Mrs. Levy didn't wait for him to move, stepping forward, and around the edge of the table. She clasped him tightly and close, both her arms circling his torso, her perfume overcoming his senses, her face pressed hard into his neck.

He stood, frozen in place, not knowing what to do or what to think. He could not help but feel her substantial breasts pressing into his own chest, the intimacy of her hug beyond any he'd ever received, and that included from Judy or Gail before her. Only his fright kept Darren from being truly aroused. He wasn't her son, and he wasn't anything else to her that he could think of, but the fact that she obviously felt so strongly about him, he could not ignore or keep from his mind.

She let go and he stepped back, trying to make it appear that he was not escaping, although he was.

She didn't follow him to the door. Darren opened it and once again felt the warm aroma embrace of the Plumeria tree out front. He walked out, closing the door soundlessly, and stood under the tree, breathing in and out gently. He had to somehow keep his job by making the Elvis party happen. He also had to rid himself of any feelings he had about Judy. He knew he'd been right to be afraid of her, as Star had so brilliantly pointed out.

Darren walked home and, upon arriving there went to his room. He could not close his door because that was not permitted, but at night he could lay on this bed, stare longingly at the surface of the moon reflecting at him from the huge poster on the wall at the foot of his bed. The cold moon, orbiting in the night, somehow felt like a place of relieving warmth to him.

“Dinner,” his mother yelled from the kitchen.

Darren eased up out of the bed and headed for the dining room.

“You weren’t here to set the table,” his mother said, attacking as soon as he walked into the room.

“Sorry Mom,” Darren got out, knowing better than to offer an excuse that would not be accepted no matter what it was.

Darren sat at his usual place at one corner of the table. His sister and brother came in silently and sat at their own places. Finally, his dad came into the room and sat at the head of the table. His mom would not sit. She waited at the table for every meal, only eating herself when the meal was over, which was always announced by his dad. However, while she hovered and worked away at serving everyone, she talked.

“Your little dark-haired sweetheart came to see me at the shop today,” his mother began, causing Darren’s heart to beat faster and his facial expression to freeze in place.

“We went surfing,” Darren responded, weakly.

“She was delightful,” his mom replied, causing Darren to almost fall from his chair.

“She was?” was all he could reply.

“Yes,” his mom went on, bringing out the main course, a fully cooked whole chicken, and setting it in the very center of the table. The chicken would have to be cut, which his father would do, but only after the other elements of the dinner were on the table. “She said you were a troubled young man with an outsized ego, and it was likely that you’d wet the bed to an advanced age.”

Darren swallowed hard and then tried to keep a big smile from appearing across his features. Star had read it all right. If she'd complimented him then his mother would have torn him and her apart in her presentation. There was nowhere for her to go, however, with such an attack being delivered by a supposed friend of Darren's. Once again, how the 'little dark-haired sweetheart' had somehow been able to figure out Darren's miserable family life and make a comment that would help rather than hurt him. How Star was able to understand his situation so well was a mystery, he realized, but then just about everything about the strange girl was a mystery.

The rest of the family dinner went on in silence. Darren worked at light speed to clear the table and wash the dishes after dinner. Drying them would simply have to wait until later in the night, although both his parents believed, for unknown reasons, that it was not healthy to 'air-dry' washed crockery. He had to make it to work and be ready for whatever was going to occur there. The big Elvis night would happen in two weeks if Elvis agreed, which it looked like he was prepared to do. Not long after that, Darren would head off the island to attend St. Norbert College and leave Oahu, Waikiki, and all his experience there well behind him.

He thought about the four-hundred-and-forty-dollar bonus that the Air Force might unaccountably pay him. That amount of money would change the whole first year at college, giving him room to breathe and allow the time to really work and study instead of working three jobs just to stay in the place.

## Chapter Twenty-Nine

Work at the club was different. Darren could sense it as soon as he walked in. The waitresses did not look at him or talk to him. It was like he was not there at all. Normally, their chatter was all over the place, since there were, as yet no customers to remain silent around. And that chatter always included him until now. Darren felt his importance had grown too rapidly and too high, so they were afraid of him, and could no longer assign the lowest tasks to him. After about fifteen minutes of grousing around to himself, having nothing to do, he walked back to Sergeant Cross's office and stuck his head around the edge of the door jam.

"Dinner service begins in an hour and a half," he said.

Sergeant Cross looked up from the paperwork he'd been paying attention to.

"Yes," he replied, his expression blank.

"Ah, is there something you want me to do between now and then?" Darren asked, embarrassed that he was even asking the question.

"Do whatever you want to do, but be back in time to cover the dinner load," Cross said, going back to looking down at the surface of his desk.

Darren couldn't believe his ears. Sergeant Cross didn't care if he stayed at the club or left until dinner service. That was simply unheard of unless someone took ill or was injured.

"I need the hours, so I can't punch out," Darren replied, knowing that it was also a terminal or mortal sin not to be on-premises when punched in.

"So, do what you feel is right," Cross said, "and close the door."

He walked through the restaurant until he got to the back door. Darren didn't go through it and then turned and entered the kitchen. Wu was working away behind his array of big iron stoves and steel plate ovens. He didn't hear Darren enter so he simply stood and waited. The place was a wonder of great aromas, cooking noises from open fires, and sizzling meats and vegetables. Until working in the kitchen, Darren never understood just how much cooking had to be done before the dinner customers ever arrived. Fully sixty percent of the meals the club offered on the menu was at least half-cooked long before a real customer walked in the doors.

"What, you Elvis boy," Wu shouted through the smoke pervading the place and the din of so many pots and pans heating and producing cooked products.

The gas fires in the stoves alone made it difficult to converse in the jammed together space.

"Anything you want me to do, Wu?" Darren yelled at the short Chinaman through cupped hands.

"You make Wu famous," Wu said, with a giant smile on his face. "Whole family know I meeting Elvis, and soon will become famous."

Darren sighed, but silently, and only to himself. The pressure and expectation Wu was evidencing and laying down upon me was the same as so many others were also only too happy to apply.

Darren backed up, and the spring-loaded swinging door opened, then closed as he exited, first the door, then the hall, and then out through the back entrance to the club. He had an hour and a half to kill and he knew where he needed to go.

As Darren walked toward Jimmy's house I had to smile. For the first time in his life, he was being paid not to work, and in fact, he was being paid to entertain himself anyway that he wanted.

Jimmy was home, practicing on his organ. He was playing Beethoven's Ninth, one of my all-time favorites, even when

played on an organ. Darren heard the music from a block away, and always wondered how he got away with playing so often and so loud in a military officer compound. Darren's parents wouldn't even allow him to play his small transistor radio outside the confines of our home, and the neighborhood was a hundred percent civilian.

Darren realized that he was not his usual excited and expressive self, as he entered Jimmy's front door. Things were reaching a critical state and some sort of climax was in the distance, and the distance was one not far off.

Jimmy stopped playing the organ, said hello, and then led Darren out of the house into the front yard.

"Well?" he asked, but said no more, taking a seat on the top step of the stairs leading down to the sidewalk.

"Well, what?" Darren replied, knowing full well that Jimmy was excited to know about the likelihood of the coming Elvis meeting, and Darren's meeting with Mrs. Levy, and all of the likely lurid details.

There was a moment of silence between them.

"When's the meeting?" Jimmy asked, finally, "and don't give me that 'what meeting' crap. If there was to be no meeting, then you'd be hiding in some hole somewhere licking your wounds. When did she arrange it for?"

Darren hated for Jimmy to be able to read him so well, but there was nothing to be done for it.

"Okay, it's set for Friday," Darren replied, a bit dejectedly.

"We can do that, but why us, why are we being invited over again?" Jimmy asked.

"So we can talk Elvis into doing the party," Darren responded, not understanding what Jimmy was talking about.

"She shouldn't need us," Jimmy said. "Why doesn't she ask Elvis herself, on our behalf of course. It seems that she has a powerful ability to reach him right through or around the colonel and his other handlers. Why us?"

“I don’t know,” Darren replied, thinking about the lack of logic that seemed to prevail over everything they did to try to arrange the special party.

“The truth is in the detail,” Jimmy exclaimed, pointing upward with his right index finger and making his eyes grow big and round, like some mad scientist.

“Tell me about the meeting you had with Mrs. Levy, and don’t leave out a single detail,” Jimmy said.

Darren cringed inside. Talking about Mrs. Levy and the meeting he’d had with her wasn’t something he wanted to do, partly because he felt that Jimmy would repeat every word to Star or worse; make Darren tell Star in person.

“I’d rather not discuss it,” Darren said, about to go on before Jimmy stopped him cold.

“Really, the last time you revealed all. Star and I were able to guide you through the roiled up and troubled waters stirring all around you. It’s obvious.”

“Obvious?” Darren said, a small bit of anger coming through in his tone.

“Yes, obvious,” Jimmy replied, “like figuring out that the meeting was a success, and it now seems likely there actually may be a party,” Jimmy said, before stopping to look over at his friend. “You met, and she did it again.”

“What again,” Darren shot back. “You can’t know what happened because you weren’t there.

“All I have to do is listen to you and look at you,” Jimmy replied. “You’re a mess of pouting expression and you don’t look too good either. And what the hell are you doing here when you’re supposed to be at work?”

Darren was relieved to have the subject changed.

“I’m paid now to do whatever I want until it’s time for customers to show up at the club,”

“What?” Jimmy said, shock in his voice. “Cross runs that place like a well-oiled Swiss watch, built and operated by

Germans. I would never have imagined that you could have so much power over him.”

“Or, when I fail, I’ll have so much anger directed toward me,” Darren replied with a voice almost too low to hear, staring down at the red dirt patches among the rough badly kept grass between the sidewalk and the curb.

“Give it up and tell me,” Jimmy said, “and don’t be so afraid of everything. She’s only a middle-aged woman of great beauty and sexuality, and you’re a twerp of a teenage kid. What can happen there?”

“What do you mean, what can happen?” Darren blurted out. “What if I have to, well, do something with her because of the favors she’s doing for me?”

Jimmy got to his feet and started to laugh out loud. “I can’t believe it. You date the girl with the biggest chest on all of Oahu, and then her beautiful mother takes a shine to you. What kind of dream life are you living that you somehow have come to believe it’s not a dream but a nightmare?”

“Joe Pillsbury,” Darren replied, glumly.

“Who the heck is that?” Jimmy asked. “And what does he have to do with anything?”

“She’s dating Joe Pillsbury of the Pillsbury flour company or something like that,” Darren said. “He’s probably fabulously wealthy and going to the same rich people’s college on the mainland that she’s going to.”

“Mrs. Levy told you that?” Jimmy said, his laughter fading away.

“Mrs. Levy dumped me,” Darren finally got out.

“Mrs. Levy dumped you?” Jimmy’s tone had gone from caring to humor once more. “That’s so cool. Did she keep all her clothes on this time?”

“That’s not funny,” Darren replied.

“Well, something sure as heck happened in that house,” Jimmy said. “What was it?”



“It was no big deal,” Darren replied, standing to join his friend on the main surface of the porch. “She gave me a hug, that’s all,” he finished, after a pause of a few seconds.

“Ah, the hug,” Jimmy laughed again. “You just gave it away. That little delay before you answered and your ruffled state, reveal it all. That was some hug, I’ll bet.”

“It was too long, too tight and she was just like in me or on me even though we were standing in the kitchen.” Darren gushed the words out, spoken almost too fast to be understood. “I couldn’t go home when I got off because my mom would show up from work and smell Mrs. Levy’s perfume all over the house. The perfume’s all over me. If I work the night, then I can take a dip in the pool afterward with my clothes on. The chlorine will fix everything.”

Jimmy leaned toward his friend.

Darren jumped back. “What are you doing?” he asked.

“Hmmm,” Jimmy murmured, you do smell pretty good.

“It’s called Diorling. The perfume. Judy wears it sometime. It’s way too expensive for my mom ever to have or use it. If she wore the same stuff as my mom, then there’d be no problem.

“You worry about the strangest of things,” Jimmy said.

“You know my family, so how can you say that?” Darren replied.

“Good point,” Jimmy concluded. “You better get back to work. Don’t take any favors from Cross. If he lets you go then you stay. It’ll make him think you are contributing when you don’t have to, and you are dependable and a team player. You don’t want to owe him anything if this goes south.”

“Hey,” Darren said, with a hurt tone, “I’m all those things.

“Ha!” Jimmy exclaimed. You contribute nothing, you’re undependable as heck and you don’t know what a team is. You have a great memory, so everyone thinks you’re smart, that’s all.”

“I’m as smart as you,” Darren replied, stung by his friend’s analysis.

“Oh, really?” Jimmy asked. “How about Star Black?”

“That’s not fair,” Darren said, “she’s smarter than both of us put together, but she’s a girl.”

“But?” Jimmy replied, instantly. “I think her being a girl is pretty terrific.”

“That’s not what I meant, and you know it,” Darren got out, but his voice had become weaker as he spoke.

“We’re not done with that subject,” Jimmy said, “and I’m headed over there right now. I’ll drop you at the club. Star’s brain is the best among us, of that there’s no question, so she gets to know everything so she can advise us on how to proceed, and guess what, she’s a girl, advising us about girls. Go figure.”

The Corvair started without any trouble. It started so quickly that the starter motor caught for a few seconds and spun so fast it whined.

Darren had his front shotgun seat back, and he smiled to himself with satisfaction.

“Maybe the car doesn’t like Star,” he said, although his words were lost, as Jimmy took the Spyder’s turbo motor up to maximum R.P.M.

The Cannon Club was the same as he’d left it. When he entered through the real alley door, Darren was ready. Ready for whatever Cross might say, and ready for whatever the women making up the rest of the wait staff probably would not say. He knew he somehow, by accident, stepped into some sort of Twilight Zone sort of existence in their minds. He was neither one of them nor one of management. He was alone. He noted to himself, ruefully, that the Twilight Zone television shows he so loved were shows where a whole different story was told, beginning to end, in only half an hour. When would his own show be done?

Darren went into the steaming hot kitchen to see Wu, but Wu was too busy to bother with him, ignoring his presence

almost completely while he bent over his cooking instruments, tables, and devices. He looked up once, while Darren tried to figure out how he was going to kill most of an hour.

“Pot washa, no show,” Wu yelled at him as if somehow Darren had been morphed into Sergeant Cross. Wu went back to work without saying anything else. Darren looked over at the stack of pots. Usually, the pot washer did half the pots at night and soaked the difficult ones for washing the next day, well before dinner service time. Darren knew the routine well because it was behind that sink, below that shower spigot, and in that heat that he’d begun his employment at the club.

He moved to the area, examined the pots, and then moved to begin work. He challenged himself to finish all the pots before it was his time to turn into the busboy he really was.

Darren began to feel better about life the longer and harder he worked. Pot washing was a life-leveler. He had no status, he was covered in food smells of all kinds, and the pots neither hugged him nor asked him to arrange parties for them.

## Chapter Thirty

The night's work was one of intent busy work, Darren running back and forth to the kitchen from all dining positions out on the open floor. A small musical group played on the small stage set behind the open-air dance floor. Darren avoided the dancers and the floor, for fear of any moisture causing him to lose traction and potentially unloading a huge heavy tray of either filled dinner plates waiting to be consumed from or empty crockery and silverware.

The night passed, and Darren was able to get dressed and get out of the house before the morning dawn was in all of its full glory. He had nowhere to go at the early hour, so he went to Jimmy's house to once again, wait for Jimmy to get up.

He sat in front of the house, admiring the flowers fanning out over the front yard, like a giant umbrella made of thousands of much smaller umbrellas. The aroma was one so pleasing it was very easy to close his eyes and simply breathe in and out slowly. He could not help smiling and then wondering what Wisconsin would smell like. The coming fall would be the first in years where he would need to be staying mostly one of wearing heavy coats and staying indoors for almost half a year. Jimmy finally came out, although it was just after sunrise and to Darren, who'd been waiting more than an hour, it felt like several hours had gone by.

"I figured you'd be out here," Jimmy said, laughing lightly, before sitting down next to Darren on the top step of the front porch.

"What'd you do, pee the bed again?" Jimmy asked.

Darren was instantly hurt by the facetious question, having shared with Jimmy his experiences with the bed-wetting issue

he'd finally gotten over. It had been such a pleasure to move to Hawaii and get his own bedroom with a floor made of polished wood. The 'cure' he'd devised had been based on that floor's hard surface and an overhanging quilt cover. Instead of sleeping in the bed, Darren would go to bed every night, and then stay awake until it seemed like everyone in the house was asleep. At that point, he'd crawl over the side of the mattress, pull up the hanging cover, and settle himself on the hardwood surface under the bed. In the morning it was only a little inconvenient to clean up any mess he might have made in the night before anyone else got up. The best part, other than not being humiliated for wetting the bed or having to launder the mess and air out the mattress, was that the bed didn't have to be made. His dad did take note of the fact that the rate of use in toilet paper in the hall bathroom was more than the other two bathrooms combined, but that mystery was never solved. Only through the last three months had Darren finally escaped from the scourge of wetting the bed. He could sleep a whole night through in his bed, finally without fear of spoiling it. He didn't know why and had come not to care why only wishing that the time he'd spent sleeping badly and fewer hours than normal under his bed had created an unexpected result wherein he only seemed to need a few hours of sleep a night instead of the eight or nine he'd once craved. The hours when he wasn't asleep in his house were fraught with danger because he had to stay silent, without light, unless he went out into the night.

"I still go out," he replied to Jimmy, although the words did not belie much of a reply at all to the question Jimmy'd asked.

"Yeah," I haven't forgotten," Jimmy replied, looking over at Darren's profile. "I didn't mean anything by my smart-ass remark," he continued, seeming to indicate that he was aware that the comment had hurt his friend.

"Tomorrow's the big day," Darren said, changing the subject.

“More like big night,” Jimmy came back, “given that seven’s around sunset and considered late in this strange culture we’re living in. If you go visit her today she might just change her mind and do the work for us without us having to show up.”

“You don’t want to see Elvis?” Darren asked, surprised.

“Not if it costs you the money and your job,” Jimmy replied. But I think it’s a moot point, anyway.”

“Why is that?” Darren asked.

“There’s this strange thing about you,” Jimmy said, his voice getting gentle but serious. “Not about me, but about you. Some people like to spend time with you, for no good reason at all that I can see. I mean, I do too, but I’m not certain why. What I’m getting at is that Mrs. Levy might just be one of those people who simply like to have you around and so your presence, probably much more than mine, is important to her. You want to take the chance that I’m wrong?”

“I don’t want to take any chances at all with this,” Darren replied. “I need the money and the rest of what’s left of my job. I can’t be certain of getting a job on campus when I get to St. Norbert’s. My uncle is head of the music department and got me in with my mixed grades but that doesn’t mean he can or will get me a job. He once loaned me a trumpet but only for two days. He came back, listened to my first notes, and then quietly took his trumpet, put it back in the case, and left.”

“I didn’t know you played the trumpet,” Jimmy said, surprise in his tone.

“That’s a whole other story,” Darren said, nearly sighing at the end.

“Judy and Joe Pillsbury have it a bit easier than us,” Jimmy said, no laughter left in his tone whatsoever.

“Yeah,” Darren replied, glad to have his friend back, even if the conversation had gone in a direction that was much more serious.

“We’ll go over there before the dinner to see what we can do, and if Judy’s there, then fine, and if her mother likes to have me around, then fine too.”

“Hey,” Jimmy replied, “this isn’t like being led to your own execution, or anything like that, you know. We are going to college and we’re making that happen almost all on our own, both of us. There’s got to be something said for that.”

Darren looked up and down the street. There were a few cars pulling out of driveways and one pulling from the curb further away. There was only one human figure visible, however.

“It’s too early for her,” Darren said, nodding his chin in the direction he was looking.

“Star,” Jimmy exclaimed. “You’re right. She sleeps in. Always, and she’s headed here.”

“Your romance is heating up,” Darren observed, not looking forward to Star’s arrival.

“No, she’s like Judy, except a lot smarter and nicer,” Jimmy said before the beautiful purposeful girl was within earshot. “She’s headed back east to some upscale school, and I’ll never hear from her again. Oahu’s an island, physically and socially.”

Star unaccountably waved, smiling as she came closer.

“Good morning,” Jimmy said, getting to his feet, and waving after he did so.

Darren stayed seated and said nothing.

“Who’s your dour down and out friend?” Star asked, stopping when she got to the bottom of the steps.

She leaned on the railing and bent toward Darren, her smile getting bigger.

Darren couldn’t help himself. The woman was simply infectious and her uncommon and unusual positive attitude impossible to ignore. He smiled back at her and got to his feet to join Jimmy.

“What, exactly, does the word dour mean?” Darren asked.

“Relentlessly severe, stern, or gloomy in manner or appearance,” Jimmy quoted as if reciting some memorized stage line.

“I’m not relentless,” Darren said, his smile fading away. “I change all the time.”

“Yes, that’s true,” Star agreed. “You change from severe, to stern and gloomy all the time.”

Darren was struck dumb. He tried to reply but realized he had nowhere to go with her comment. It was like he’d been set up by both of them and fallen right into their trap.

“Lighten up on him Star, he’s having a bad day,” Jimmy said.

The short lighthearted defense made Darren feel instantly better.

“Why are you up and here so early?” he asked, not really caring but happy to change the subject.

“Because the Duke called and wants to see us, I mean in preparation for our visit to the Levy household for the purpose of getting Elvis to do whatever it is you really want Elvis to do.”

“The Duke called you at this hour of the morning?” Darren asked, wanting to ask more questions even before she answered that one.

Why would the Duke call Star at all, and what did she mean by ‘our visit’ to the Levy household? Star was somehow invited or self-invited or what? He breathed in and out gently to get control of himself, as he waited for her answer to his first question.

“No, silly, he called last evening,” Star replied.

“How come you didn’t come by last night then?” Darren asked back, forgetting the other questions he wanted answers to.

“Come to your house?” Star said, her tone one of derision. “Like I want to run into your father. He looks at me funny. It gives me the creeps.”

“Do I look at you funny?” Darren blurted out, her answer shocking him.



“Nope,” Star answered. “You are funny.”

She started to laugh to the point where she was nearly bent over. Jimmy began laughing with her. It was contagious and soon Darren was laughing, although he really didn’t know why.

“Okay, okay,” Jimmy said, getting himself back together. “So, when are we supposed to be at this meeting and where’s it to be.

“Just about now, at the Moana out on the lanai for breakfast,” Star replied. “We better get going, I mean if your dad lets you have the car.”

“Dad left at five this morning and he took the other car,” Jimmy replied.

“I can’t eat breakfast at the Moana and I don’t have that kind of money, anyway,” Darren said, disappointment in his voice. “The Moana is expensive and my mom works there. Employees aren’t allowed to stay or eat there.”

“You’re such an idiot,” Star said, laughing again. “I told you that you were funny. Your mom works for Lewis of Hollywood. That place rents space from the Moana. Your mom works for Lewis, not the hotel, and you don’t need any money, which you’re lying about, anyway. It’s not like the Duke’s going to let you pay for anything. He wouldn’t reduce himself enough to let any of us pay. Do you know anything about the operations of the social order out here?”

Darren was amazed, too amazed to be angry, although he felt he ought to be. He’d never thought the employment thing through. His mother said her family couldn’t eat or stay at the hotel and that had been it. He was also immediately intrigued by Star’s comment about the social order and how it might work that the Duke would never let them pay. It was a new thought to him. Star was right. He’d been on the island on and off for seven years and still had little or no idea how the rules of the mixed societies on the island worked to influence conduct.

“Okay,” he whispered in response, eliciting more laughter from Star.

“Funny,” she breathed out. “I mean funny. Okay, he whispers out, stunned to stupefaction, and then innocent silence,” she went on, still laughing.

“Let’s go,” Jimmy said, taking her by the arm and heading toward the garage. “Don’t pick on him. He’s absolutely defenseless, which is why he’s my best friend.”

Jimmy pulled up on the garage handle, got into the Corvair, and turned it over. Darren expected to have to do his magic trick on the carburetors as the engine whined away but didn’t start.

“Stop,” Darren said to his friend.

Jimmy stopped turning the starter over.

“Wait a few seconds, and then hit it lightly,” Darren ordered, having paid close attention to the sound of the starter and the engine turning seconds before.

“Now,” Darren said.

Jimmy twisted the key quickly for just a second before turning it back. The turbo engine turned over and almost started.

“Now, do it for real,” Jimmy said, hopping over the back and into the rear seat.

The engine caught and Jimmy spun the engine up to a high rpm, while Star ran around to open the door and get into the passenger seat.

“Your dad was going to take the car, I’ll bet,” Darren said, as much to himself as to his friend. “It was flooded, which means he had his foot on the floor when he tried to start it. Never do that with a turbo. That asks the carburetors to dump a full load of gas right down into the chambers.”

Jimmy backed the car up and stopped. Darren was about to get out and close the garage door but stopped at Jimmy’s command.

“Leave it open, because we’ll be right back, I think,” Jimmy said, then roared up the driveway and onto the street without slowing, slinging the heavy rear of the Spyder swiftly around the corner without the tires sliding.

“Up, up, and away, High Ho, Silver,” he yelled, blasting the Corvair toward Monsarrat and eventually the Moana Hotel.

# Chapter Thirty-One

Jimmy's usual parking place was available, without any cars in the slots in front of or behind it. No parallel parking was necessary. Jimmy pulled right in, slightly sliding the rear end almost into contact with the curb before stopping.

Darren climbed out, knowing the parking job was a showoff move for Star, and for no reason he could figure out, and not liking it.

"Do not go in and visit my mom," he said to Star, as she came around to the sidewalk from the passenger side of the car.

"I didn't do too badly last time, did I?" Star commented, however making no move to enter the shop as she had before.

"You couldn't have really known that," Darren replied. "My family isn't predictable, and I don't need any more trouble."

"They're perfectly predictable," Star replied, as they walked toward the grand main entrance to the hotel part of the building. "You won't be out of trouble, as you call your life with them until you get to college. I notice you chose to go off to university nearly four thousand miles from them. Couldn't find a college more distant?"

"It's not the university," Darren sullenly replied, not wanting to go into the intricate detail of why he was really going specifically to St. Norberts. "University, the word, when used without the 'a' modifier is the European way to construct the phrase, not the American way. I'm not going to university. I'm going to "a university."

"You are so very funny and trying to be snobby while I'm laughing at you," Star said, as they entered the elaborately beautiful lobby area.

“I’m right,” Darren said, stubbornly.

“Well, sort of,” Star replied.

“Stop picking on him,” Jimmy chimed in. “He’s the only best friend I’ve got.”

“I’m still right,” Darren said, buoyed up by Jimmy’s seeming defense.

“You’re not going to a university,” Star said, almost absently. “A university is a collection of colleges. You are going to a single college, and a small one, at that.”

Darren almost stopped dead, as they ambled down the back veranda stairs toward the open area near the beach where the breakfast buffet was set up. Star was right. How could he have forgotten or missed that salient fact in the heat of his wanting so badly to find the young girl wrong? He trailed behind both Jimmy and Star, looking at her back, but not in resentment. He knew what it was he had missed. Star wasn’t a young girl at all. She wasn’t even a girl. She was a woman like Mrs. Levy was a woman and both women had the ability to think outside a box. He felt contained within the box.

As they approached the local island woman obviously running the breakfast area, Star looked back at Darren.

“Don’t feel so bad,” Star whispered over her shoulder. “Stop fighting it.”

“Stop fighting what?” he whispered back, wondering why they were whispering.

Jimmy could hear every word they were saying and the local woman at the counter, standing stoic and waiting, likely wouldn’t have cared less about anything they were saying.

“Fighting what?” Darren asked, unable to stop himself, even though he found the conversation to be deeply disturbing.

“Stop fighting the fact that you can use smart experienced people to your advantage instead of trying to make believe you’re one of them,” she gushed out, this time not bothering to whisper.

“He’s just a boy,” the local woman said, surprising all three of them.

Darren read her pink name tag. It said “Henrietta.”

“Thanks, Henrietta,” Darren murmured to the woman.

“You the three the Duke’s waiting for?” Henrietta said, moving to the side of her small podium, her wildly flowered Muumuu dress sweeping around, as a gust of early morning trade wind blew right through the whole restaurant.

“This way,” Henrietta said, throwing her left arm outward and then bringing it around to direct them inside toward the ocean.

Darren smiled to himself as he followed Jimmy and Star. One of the things he truly loved about the island population was the way they were able to turn just about everything into some sort of song or dance.

The Duke sat at the only table with a view of everything. The breakfast serving area, an area about a quarter of the size of a football field, had only the one corner. The view of Diamond Head to the left and then sweeping out and across the entire visage of Waikiki until being limited only after viewing all the way out to Pearl Harbor on the right was stunning. The morning sun was still out over the back of Diamond Head’s lower rear flank. Darren guessed that it would rise shortly over almost exactly the position where his house was located. Whether that was a good or bad omen he didn’t want to think about.

“Three more Kona coffees,” the Duke intoned, without saying good morning or anything else. For some reason, Darren noted, he also sat with his back to the corner, instead of facing into it. His only view was the interior of the breakfast area and possibly a bit on into the seaside of the lobby.

“I don’t normally drink coffee,” Jimmy said, taking the chair nearest the sand.

“I’m just ordering it, not having you drink it,” the Duke intoned, as if he was ready for such an encounter... “and

also...what makes you think there's anything normal about any of this?"

Star sat down in the chair next to Jimmy. There was one more chair, the one at the right hand of the Duke, but Darren didn't sit down in it. He waited.

"Sit," the Duke finally said, after taking a sip of his own coffee from a mug that was obviously and specially kept for him. On the side of it was written: "Duke of the World."

"Thank you," Darren replied, taking the seat.

"Good to see that manners have not been lost to all of our young."

Darren looked over at Jimmy and Star, but both looked out toward the small shore break just a few yards away. Conditioning from home had forced Darren to wait to be seated, not his respect for the Duke, but at the very least it'd also one-upped Star for the first time he could remember.

Henrietta showed up with a local boy, no older than ten. He carried three steaming coffee mugs, none of them with any writing on them, plus two clear glass beakers of what appeared to hold cream or milk.

"Sugar on the table," Henrietta sang. "Kahala Boy brings you coffee and cream to your taste and at the Duke's command."

The older islanders' perfect pitch and beautiful voice made the strange singing bit work, at least for Darren. He noted that the Duke rolled his eyes slightly before joining Jimmy and Star to look out over the wonder of the early morning Waikiki scene.

"Kahala Boy seems a rather strange name for a Hawaiian kid," Darren commented to Henrietta, as he poured a liberal amount of the cream into his mug.

"No," Henrietta sang back, using four syllables instead of one. "He's all Hawaiian and that's his nickname. He gave it to himself."

"He's from Kahala?" Darren asked, surprised since Kahala was the most expensive single neighborhood on the island.

“No,” Henrietta said, “he just wants to live there someday.”

“Play the music,” the Duke instructed, and then, at our pleasure, we’ll serve ourselves from the buffet.”

Darren was expecting local Hawaiian music to come from the outdoor speakers spaced all around, but after about two minutes since Henrietta and Kahala Boy disappeared, the music that came from the speakers was that of the Four Seasons, Jimmy’s, and Darren’s favorite group.

“Walk like a man,” was playing. The second stanza, which Darren knew by heart although the single had just been released, bit into him. “*He said walk like a man my son, talk like a man, walk like a man my son, no woman’s worth...*” Darren tried to get his mind out of the song and back to the table. The song seemed to mimic the situation Darren was in with Judy, except here was his supposed father advising him to move on...which his real dad would never bother to notice much less advise.

“You like the Four Seasons?” Jimmy asked, near breathless with enthusiasm.

“Not necessarily,” the Duke replied, sipping more from his coffee.

Star put her mug down in front of her.

“So, this Elvis party has real deep meaning for you, doesn’t it?” She asked, staring straight into the Duke’s eyes.

“Not much gets by you, does it, Miss Black,” the Duke replied.

“Don’t Miss Black me,” Star shot back, no warmth in her tone at all. “You invite us here, play that music, including a song you somehow know, will strike deep, and talk like you’re some sort of eastern guru rather than the great man I know you to be.”

“You’re all leaving,” the Duke replied as if he’d not heard a word Star had said. “I’m here for life. I was just let go as sheriff of the island and now I’m some sort of decorative greeter



or doorman to the culture. I need to make some moves unless I want to be stuffed to make a statue down by the beach.”

There was a silence. Darren was blown away. The Duke was talking truth and baring his soul to three teenagers. It was as sad as it was wonderful. How could anyone rise as high as the Duke had and then become what he considered only a decorative flower? More like a lei, to be brought out for special occasions, worn for a short period, and then thrown into the sea to wait, and watch, for its possible return. Leis that were tossed into Honolulu Harbor from departing cruise ships were watched closely by their former owners. If the lei returned to pier nine, where visiting cruise ships berthed, it meant that the person who’d thrown it was going to return to the island again at some future date.

“We’re going to help in any way we can,” Darren suddenly said. “All three of us. There’s a dinner and we’re going to crash it with Mrs. Levy’s permission, in order to be there so she can convince him we’re worth his doing it for.”

“I thought as much,” the Duke replied.

I noted that neither Jimmy nor Star said a word or made any assent to the loyalty to the Duke that I’d exhibited.

“That’s not why you’re here, however,” the Duke said.

“What’s going on?” Jimmy asked.

“Let’s get breakfast first,” the Duke replied, getting slowly to his feet.

The buffet was sumptuous, only possibly surpassed by the buffet offered by the Royal Hawaiian, located a few steps up the beach, and known as the only real five-star hotel in all of Hawaii.

The Duke came back to the table fully ten minutes after all three teenagers were engulfed in downing the biggest breakfast of their lives. Half-eaten plates littered the table. The Duke came back with a small bowl of Miso Japanese soup, filled with all sorts of weird-looking vegetative matter, or that’s how it seemed to Darren.

The Duke didn't speak as they all continued to eat. He finished his soup and waited. Slowly, Jimmy, Star, and Darren finished their meals. Henrietta attended the table, singing questions about anything else they might want, while Kahala Boy did all the work of clearing the plates and silverware.

"Guava juice," the Duke stated.

"I'm not much on guava juice," Jimmy said, before recovering himself. "Oh, of course," he said after a few seconds of looking into the Duke's eyes. "I forgot. I'll have a guava juice too."

"You're here," the Duke said, very quietly, after Henrietta and Kahala were gone, "because of what might happen if this all goes the wrong way."

"Oh Jesus," Star whispered across the table.

"Ah, I don't understand," Darren said, with Jimmy nodding his head.

"He can't take the hit, the fall," Star murmured, her eyes only on the Duke.

The Duke slowly shook his head.

"You got too far in to back out," Star went on. "I should have guessed, but I didn't."

The Duke sighed, as Henrietta escorted Kahala to the edge of the table and then distributed the overly tall glasses filled with the strange pinkness of pure guava juice. The Duke waited until they were gone again. He said nothing, before taking a glass into his hand and drinking. He sighed deeply after putting the glass back down.

"What do you want us to do?" Darren finally asked, interested, and afraid at the same time. Each time his path seemed cleared ahead something came along and created an impassible, impossible monster of a logjam.

"You have important fathers; you know important men who live near the edge of the netherworld. I need someone or some group to take the heat if this doesn't work out."

Darren's interest disappeared, instantly overwhelmed, and buried by fear. Just the phrase 'you know important men who live near the edge of the netherworld' terrified him. He knew he knew those men, all around him in his small high school life, but he never ever thought about them. His own father, Jimmy's father, Colonel Banks, the Special Forces team nearby, the base admiral, and more.

"Can we talk about this among ourselves for a bit?" Star said, sounding, for the first time Darren could recall, unsure of herself.

"Of course," that's why I assembled you," the Duke said. "I have no idea what to do, but I knew you three would come up with something, with those you know, with those you have used.

Darren wanted to run, to apply to St. Norbert's to take him now, to escape on some rich man's yacht sailing off to anywhere, but he knew, in his heart of hearts that he wasn't going anywhere. Neither Jimmy nor Star would be thinking their way through this one. There was only one underrated, nearly unknown, and fully unpalatable person. Darren sat, waiting for them to break up and leave, his breakfast sitting like a giant Civil War cannonball in the middle of his distended stomach. He didn't feel bad, however, only afraid, and he was becoming used to being afraid.

## Chapter Thirty-Two

Darren staggered out from the breakfast, his face so white that Henrietta ran after him to make sure he was okay.

“You Haole boy, but you okay,” she said when he stopped briefly to respond to the grip she had on his left forearm. “Your mom Irene. She tough Haole so you must be tough too. Duke is good man but caught in circle that’s kapu, keep out, no go there.”

She let go of his arm, and Darren immediately headed for the Moana lobby without answering her. Half of what she’d said he could not understand, her pidgin English so bad as to make her words nearly incomprehensible, even after the years he’d spent on the island.

Jimmy and Star followed in trace behind him. Once Darren got to the Corvair he leaped into its rear seat and then collapsed, nearly into a ball in the seat’s passenger side corner.

“I’m just a kid,” Darren said to no one in particular. “I don’t understand what’s happening or how it came to happen. How can I be responsible and ‘take credit’ for Elvis not showing up? Nobody cares or even really knows about me. I don’t matter, or at least I shouldn’t matter. I’m in so much trouble.”

Jimmy and Star got into the car, each using a door instead of climbing over the side as Darren had. Jimmy didn’t start the Spyder though.

“You’re not in trouble, at least not yet” Star said, twisting around to face Darren. “The Duke’s in trouble, somehow, or soon may be. He put way too much energy and reputation into this Elvis party, although we don’t know and aren’t going to know much about that.”

“My dad and Jimmy’s dad and the ‘nefarious men’ we know?” Darren asked back as if he hadn’t heard a word Star said.

“We’re still considered just kids to all of them, so don’t forget that”, Star replied, turning back around in her seat to face the dash. “The Duke talked to you like an adult. That’s both good and bad. He thinks more of you than he should, and your ability to influence the other adults around you is extremely limited.”

“Well, Darren’s managed to get almost complete control of both Wu and Cross, and he’s met Elvis and nearly made love to Judy’s mother,” Jimmy said.

Darren groaned, knowing his friend was kidding him about Mrs. Levy, but he also knew that Jimmy might not be far from the mark. Mrs. Levy was an unknown, just as so much of what had happened since the strange surprise meeting, they’d had at the Levy home when Elvis was there.

“So, what do we do now?” Darren asked, getting his body unwound and sitting up straight in the center of the bench back seat.

“You’ve got just over a week to make this thing happen,” Star replied.

Darren looked at the back of her head. She’d been using ‘we’ for quite some time about the whole Elvis affair, but now she was backing the conversation down to whatever it was Darren was going to do.

Jimmy started the Corvair, and it fired right up. “We’ve got the whole day ahead of us to come up with something,” Jimmy said, turning the Corvair out into the light traffic on Kalakaua.

Diamond Head was straight in front of them. He headed the car right at it, not taking the left turn up onto Monsarrat.

Darren watched the Natatorium, the aquarium, and what few stretches of beach viewable from the road would allow flow by on his right. For once Jimmy wasn’t driving the car above

forty miles per hour. The rise up to the Coast Guard Station at the bull back of the ridge around the mountain was behind them in seconds. Darren's Dad had once been stationed there when the light was still functional. Not every kid had ever looked through a Fresnel lens bigger than he was. The light had long ago been passed into the ages by higher technology, and the useless Fresnel lens with it. Coast Guard Stations, especially the lighthouses, had mostly all been repurposed and a Warrant Officer Four had no place in such a station.

"It's not Sunday, but what the heck," Jimmy said, even the lower wind making it difficult for him to speak loud enough for Darren to hear him.

"Diamond Head it is," he laughed, rounding the turn to head back around the Koko Head side of the mountain, the Spyder's speed climbing back to more 'normal' levels.

"We climb up there, ignore that secret Army Base built inside, go around the top, and sit and listen to a radio," Star observed, not sharing Jimmy's enthusiasm at all.

"Got a better idea?" Darren said into her left ear, her black hair blowing all over.

"Elvis is still here, on the island," She replied, unaccountably.

"What's that got to do with anything?" Jimmy asked, slowing the car's charge past the Army National Guard center.

"He's at the very center of this whole thing," Star added, "and he's filming in Waikiki, and you still have Judy, hanging on by a thread, not to mention her sister and mother."

"I still don't get it," Darren said.

"We go down there and stop fooling around trying to get other people to do what we might have to ourselves."

"What do you want to bet that Lewis of Hollywood is doing everyone's hair in this picture too," Star said.

"What?" Darren asked, incredulously. "My mom would have said something at home?"

“Your mom is a piece of work and, not only is she tough but when she talks, she says nothing at all. She should have been in the CIA.”

Darren leaned back into the seat, his mind working at full speed. Could that be the truth? It sure sounded like truth, what with the name of the shop, only a few yards away from the set being what it was. Would the movie people really fly all kinds of hairdressers to Oahu instead of using the facility right at their doorstep?

“That means my mom, or maybe Lewis himself, could get us on the set if what you say is true and if they would,” Darren mused more to himself than to Star.

“Forget your mom, but not the part about who’s hair she occasionally does do,” Star said “Doris Duke, just about the richest woman in the world only has your mother do her hair, and Ethel Mertz on I Love Lucy has flown your mother to the mainland many times to do hers. But she won’t help, no matter what, so we’re not going to ask her. Lewis doesn’t really know me, and he’d just go to your mom if you went to him directly. No, I’ve seen the way that man looks at me and I think I might have a shot.”

“What about the rest of us?” Jimmy asked as the Corvair slowed to head back down to Monsarrat without any conclusion being come to by the three of them.

“What rest of you?” Star replied, derisively. “It’s about the message, not the messenger. If I can get one minute of Elvis’ time, without being pushed aside by the Colonel and any of this sycophant lackeys, then we have a chance. Better than depending totally on Mrs. Levy. Who knows what she’s said or will say. I don’t trust that woman. Her interest in you,” Star said while pointing over her shoulder’ is weird and not a good thing.”

“There’s nothing wrong with that,” Darren complained.

“It’s an indicator of trouble in other areas of her brain,” Star replied.

“Do you ever think like a regular girl?” Darren asked, shaking his head, as Jimmy guided the convertible back toward the exact spot where they’d come from in front of the Moana.

Jimmy’s favorite parking place was filled. A great large and angular car sat in the space, it’s obviously large engine idling away. A man with a gray coat and small naval type hat sat in the driver’s seat. Jimmy parked the Corvair a few places away.

Jimmy walked right up to the driver’s window, which was down. “Whose car this and what kind of car is it?” The man looked up and down at Jimmy but didn’t reply. He turned to look straight ahead again.

“He’s not going to tell you,” Star said, backing toward the entrance to Lewis of Hollywood. “The car’s a Bentley Silver Spur, or at least that’s what it says on the side of it.”

“I’ve never seen a Bentley before,” Jimmy said, awe in his voice.

“The passenger is too important for him to tell you,” Star said.

“Elvis?” Jimmy whispered.

“No, more important,” Star replied. “The Colonel is here.”

Star walked over the side of the car.

“If we were to wait here, would we have a chance of talking to the Colonel, or would we be better off going inside the beauty shop, since his Darren’s mom doe’s so many of the star’s hair on the set.” She patted Darren on the arm as she spoke, producing the biggest smile he’d ever see cross her features.

“Ten minutes,” the man said, looking around like he was giving away a state secret. “He’s always punctual.”

Star led us a short distance away from the Bentley, closer to the main entrance to the Moana.

“We may, be approaching this all the wrong way,” Star said when they were far enough away from everyone for no one to overhear.



“You lied to that guy,” Darren said, spewing the words out with a tone of righteousness.

“Maybe, maybe not,” Star replied. “If the Colonel will give us the time of day, and if the Colonel is the total manager of Elvis, then this might be just exactly the man to get this thing done for certain. I have a feeling that Elvis escapes his control from time to time, like showing up at the Levy house, but not often. The man has piloted this small-time southern truck driver into the biggest thing since Jesus walked the earth.”

## Chapter Thirty-Three

Jimmy and Darren climbed the steps onto the small, long lanai that ran out from the center of the main building, and a low white fence made of what looked like narrow bowling pins. There were Koa wood chairs, of the most expensive sort, lined along, just inside the railing. They took the two near the entrance which generally has nobody sitting in them because people in crowds with luggage and everything else required to stay in a hotel were too busy moving things from their rental cars into the hotel or vice-versa. It was from there that they could keep their eyes on the brilliantly painted car, see part of the driver's arm sticking out the window and also Star, who wasn't sitting at all. She'd left the area near the car and then walked over to lean against the white alabaster of the hotels outside the façade. There was no way that Colonel Parker or anybody else headed for the Bentley, was going to evade her.

"There he is," Jimmy said, grabbing Darren's left forearm very quickly and very hard." I don't believe it," he went on, as Star darted forward like a striking snake. "She was right. How does she know things like that?"

"The big deal is if he'll talk to her," Darren said, as both boys rose to our feet together, almost involuntarily.

"There's nothing we can do," Darren said to Jimmy, neither boy moving toward the car.

The older gentleman in a strange Panama hat was fatter than Darren would have imagined.

Star approached him just as the Colonel got to the car, where the driver had already gotten out to open the rear door. The driver was dressed in a totally non-Hawaiian outfit that looked more like a tuxedo than anything else, except the material seemed to be made of light blue wool.

“Wool in Hawaii?” Jimmy asked out loud, echoing Darren’s thoughts.

“Star spoke to the side of the Colonel that was visible once he got in and the driver was about to close the door.

They were too far away to hear what was said, or if the Colonel even answered.

To the shock of both boys, the Colonel slide deeper into the car and Star climbed in. The driver slammed the door, which sounded more like a bank vault door than a regular car door.

The driver stepped through his own door and suddenly the Bentley was slowly moving, feeding itself neatly into the traffic and headed toward Diamond Head.

“Come on,” Jimmy yelled and raced toward the Corvair, parked not thirty feet from where the Bentley had been parked.

The car started even before Darren had leaped over the passenger door.

“What are we doing?” he asked, hanging on to the top edge of the door with both hands.

“I don’t know,” Jimmy roared back, his neck craning around and back to launch the Spyder into the traffic, “We’re rescuing her, or following her or spying on her, I’m not sure.”

“The Bentley parted the traffic ahead of them as if it was a ship out on the sea among small boats. The car was so big, ungainly but dignified in its frightfully expensive presentation. But the Corvair turbo howled at high RPM. The Bentley was probably way above the Corvair in both top speed and acceleration, but somehow the stately car seemed like it would never lower itself to race something as low cost or small as a Corvair.

The Bentley eased its way toward the Natatorium, slowing when it was just outside the huge concrete arch that was the pool’s entrance. Jimmy inserted the Corvair in right behind the big car. There was no way to see inside the big Bentley without pulling up next to it, which became impossible once the thing

passed the Natatorium without stopping and Kalakaua become a one-lane asphalt road.

“Give them some room,” Darren advised. “They’ll see us, and we’ll blow the whole thing.”

“What ‘whole thing’ are you thinking about?” Jimmy replied, letting off on the gas and letting the red convertible slip back a few car lengths. “We’ve no idea what’s going on in that thing.”

“That’s what I’m afraid of,” Jimmy said, a small bit of worry creeping into his tone. “My dad said that powerful men don’t always treat attractive women very nicely.”

“I’d be a helluva lot more worried about the Colonel than Star Black,” if I were you.

“She’s only eighteen, maybe nineteen, tops,” Jimmy replied.

“You don’t even know her birthday or her age even though she’s basically your girlfriend,” Darren shot back.

“She doesn’t think in terms of boyfriends and girlfriends,” Jimmy said as if such a concept was some sort of alchemy or black magic, or, at the very least, something Albert Einstein might have said.

“Where do you think they’re going?” Jimmy asked, frustration written all over his face and even his driving, which had slowed to a crawl behind the big Bentley.

Finally, he had to brake to a halt, as the car stopped. The driver slid out the door, removing and then replacing his flat blue cap back on his head. He opened the back door and Star stepped out. The driver said nothing, closing the door and getting back in the vehicle himself. The Bentley pulled off. Three cars started beeping horns behind the stopped Corvair. Star laughed out loud and ran to the side of the Monza, stopped at the passenger door, and stared into Darren’s eyes for just a few seconds. The cars continued to complain behind them. Darren couldn’t take it anymore. He squeezed over the bench seat back and dropped onto the back seat. Star was in, up and over the door, and the car

took off at maximum acceleration. Darren was pinned to the flat back of the seat, wondering if the big powerful looking Bentley really could have beaten the Spyder in a flat-out race, not that any of them would ever know. The car had appeared in Waikiki out of seeming nowhere and very probably would be returned to wherever it was stored when people like the Colonel were not visiting.

By the time the Monza was up through second gear the Bentley was gone, either having accelerated up and around Diamond Head Road or turning off into one of the few mansions being constructed below and around the Coast Guard Station. The car finally came to rest at Diamond Head Beach Park, just down from the Lighthouse.

“What happened?” Jimmy said instantly, as soon as the engine died.

Darren waited, knowing that whatever Star waited so patiently to say would somehow deeply affect his life again.

“Actually, nothing,” Star said, stopping both boys in their tracks. “I told him what we needed and why and the planning that had gone into it. He said that normally he would charge a private party about a hundred thousand dollars for a special appearance by Elvis, but that we seemed to have a special relationship with him because of Judy’s sister.”

“We don’t have a hundred thousand dollars,” Darren whispered, his thoughts of getting the extra four hundred disappearing into some tiny hole never to be seen or discussed again.

“But he did give us something,” Star replied.

Neither Jimmy nor Darren spoke a word, too busy holding their breaths.

“We can go on the set tomorrow afternoon, as long as we are with the Duke, and then, even if Elvis can’t make the dinner, which the Colonel is not going to stop him from doing, he might do something else less time consuming and spectacular to help us out.”

“And then he basically threw you out of the car,” Darren added while trying to take in everything Star had gasped out. “What did he say when he stopped the car like that?”

“He didn’t talk to me anymore,” Star said. “He talked to his driver, whose name is Aoki, like the Japanese bean.”

Jimmy and Darren waited again.

“He told the driver that we were done and to stop the car and let me out, and then he puffed on his cigar, and I got out.”

“I wonder if there are more like the Colonel in Hollywood?” Jimmy asked, slowly turning over the Monza’s engine until it caught. “They kind of don’t act like regular human beings at all, do they?”

Jimmy pulled the Corvair back up onto Diamond Head Road, once again, this time turning it to point back at Waikiki.

“Where are we going now?” Darren asked.

“We can’t get onto the set without the Duke, for reasons the Colonel didn’t say,” Star replied, “but he was very serious about that point.”

“So, we’re back to the Duke,” Darren replied, shaking his head at the strange unpredictable turns their lives had taken since meeting Elvis.

“The Natatorium,” Star said. “It’s morning. The part there, where you got hit, that’s where he usually hangs out with his friends.”

“What about the dinner Mrs. Levy’s putting on?” Darren asked, a plaintive note coming through in his voice, as he leaned forward to be heard against the wind.

There was nobody on Monsarrat so Jimmy held the Corvair to about fifty miles per hour, which was twenty over the speed limit.

“You know,” Star came back, “most of this has all been to help you out, so we’re trying everything we’ve got. Going on the set may do nothing, with or without the Duke, just as Mrs. Levy’s party, where somehow Elvis is supposed to show, and then we are to make some sort of weird Robin Hood kind of

entry. It's bizarre, to say the least. Maybe the best thing, if nothing pans out, is that you've secured yourself in a position to complete your tenure at the Cannon Club and get off to college without going to prison first."

Darren wondered how the woman could sound so rational but so very cold at the same time like he was some sort of Machiavellian manipulator of everyone's life. He decided not to tell her the truth, that he was just a high school kid who was trying to survive in situations he had little understanding about.

"I guess so," he settled on.

Jimmy decided to come around into the downtown strip by racing down Ala Wai Boulevard that ran next to the Ala Wai Canal, the canal the Army Corps of Engineers had dug, dredged, and built-in the nineteen twenties. Without the canal, the development of the entire Waikiki strip would have been impossible, as the entire area had remained a deep swamp since before the island was inhabited.

The two-mile run took about one minute, or so it seemed. He pulled the Monza left, across traffic to head toward the beach on Lewers, before heading toward the hotel on Kalakaua once more. Why Jimmy took the different directions to get to the same hotel they'd been driving to for years always surprised Darren, but they never discussed it. Lots were selling along the course of their travel, and Darren liked to read the homemade things. Fifteen thousand seemed like a lot of money for a rather small lot on Kalakaua Avenue but real estate value wasn't something he had much of any knowledge about.

Jimmy's parking spot was open. He dived the Monza into it, and they got out of the car and started walking toward the Natatorium. Once they got to Kuhio Beach they went down onto the sand, down to where the water lapped, and the sand was harder and easier for walking. The entire stretch in front of the Moana was closed, not just to beachgoers but to anyone trying to pass by that portion of the sandy part of the beach. The Elvis

movie set had taken it all over, with big giant canvas tent-like structures to keep anyone from seeing inside the huge set.

A small group of locals was gathered at the collection of five tables just off the sand at Kaimana beach, where Jimmy had had his altercation.

“The Duke?” Star asked, walking right up the table. Jimmy and Darren hung back a bit.

“Outrigger Canoe Club,” one of the men said, pointing toward Diamond Head.

Jimmy looked over at Darren, rolling his eyes. The Outrigger Canoe Club was about the classiest private restaurant and club on the island. The membership was astronomical in price and selective to the maximum.

Star set off, back through the park to Kalakaua, since the beach area ended at the Natatorium. The Canoe Club could only be reached from the street.

“We’ll never get in there, so why are we bothering,” Darren asked, catching up to the fast-moving Star.

“Like we have something better to do,” Star replied, with a snort. “Besides, I am not you and, in this case, there is no we. I’ll get in and bring him out. You can’t go inside without proper shoes, and neither one of you has a shirt on that could get you inside much of anywhere, even on Oahu.”

Darren noted Star’s attire, which was much more qualitative in the material than either Jimmy or Darren ever wore, but still, she too had go-aheads, or flip flops on her own feet. He said nothing as they approached the attendant at the entrance to the impressive-looking rock wall that served as the entrance to the place. He secretly hoped that she’d be denied entry, but she merely smiled and walked right by the big, uniformed man. The man looked intently at Jimmy and Darren, stopping them as effectively as if he’d put a hand on each of their chests. They made no effort to enter, instead, walked further down the wall to where a low number of big rocks surrounded a palm tree base. They sat down and waited, not



looking back at the doorman for fear he would drive them further away with one of his poison stares. The term for the look in Hawaii was ‘stink-eye.’ The term fit the description of the man’s gaze perfectly.

It only took Star a few minutes to return. Darren’s stomach fell inches within his abdominal cavity when he saw her coming. The Duke, with Judy Levy, her mom and sister surrounded him, all laughing. Jimmy wanted to run but there was no place to go.

## Chapter Thirty-Four

Darren hadn't even seen Judy since the very first discussion he'd had with Mrs. Levy and he instantly regretted that their first encounter would be in such an exposed and potentially embarrassing place and situation. He decided that, since there was no place to run away to, that he'd face straight into the fire.

"Judy," he began, but didn't get past that word.

"Judy," Judy imitated, deepening her voice, and drawing the word out.

Darren could not stop his face from instantly reddening.

"You sound like a mortician, using that tone," Judy went on, laughing.

"And the prognosis is bad," her sister added, causing everyone but Jimmy and Darren to laugh.

"We came to get you," Darren said, straight to the Duke, stepping forward and blocking everyone's path. "It seems that the Colonel is letting us back on the set, but we have to be accompanied by you."

The Duke stopped laughing, his expression going serious, as if taken immediately from the social setting back to the business of getting the Elvis party put together, which for unknown reasons was vitally important to him.

"We'll walk to the Moana from here," he murmured, disengaging himself from the arm of Star.

"Well, okay," Judy said, "let's keep this serious."

Darren looked Mrs. Levy directly in the eyes, wondering about her strange relationship with him, and yet her obvious distance when anyone else was around.

Mrs. Levy looked away.

The walk to the Moana was accomplished in silence, the sound of their assorted footwear making a collective hushed but tapping whisper against the steady flowing patterns the trade winds shaped, as the wonderful moving air twisted and turned over the sand and then around the many trees that lined Kalakaua.

The Moana was its usual hive of activity. The Duke cut such an important local figure, however, that the workers and tourists alike parted like the Red Sea as he walked through them. Once through the lobby and out onto the back lanai, the great canvas shields blocked all views. What was normally the Banyan Court outside bar was completely hidden, as was any view out toward the open ocean.

There were two blue clad security guards standing at the canvas opening that lead into the Banyan Court. Both nearly came to the position of attention as the Duke approached.

“They’re with me,” the Duke said, as the big local men in blue instantly moved apart to let him, and then the rest of us, pass. The Duke himself held the canvas door open. His eyes met mine, as I went through last. I seemed to feel the man’s very essence in that one transmitted look. He was a nice fair man, my senses told me, but he was also very paternalistic, and it was that part that clearly came through in our impossibly quick exchange. He felt protective of me, and it was a warm feeling. I didn’t know how or why but I smiled as I entered the Banyan Court. If it was within the Duke’s power, and he had a lot of power, then I thought I might be okay if he chose to use it in my favor.

The Banyan Court was filled with pockets of people, some working on the tables with papers and small equipment while others maneuvered larger pieces of lighting or sound stuff that Darren barely recognized for what it was or might be.

“Elvis is out on the set proper,” the Duke said, quietly, to his small, assembled group that included Darren and Jimmy.

Darren looked out to the long stretch that lay between the outer step from the hotel's lanai across about fifty or sixty yards to the edge of the lapping ocean waves.

A hand gripped Darren's left upper arm tightly as he gingerly lowered his right foot down to the warm sand, and the real active body of the movie set.

"Come with me," Mrs. Levy hissed into his left ear, and then he was physically pulled backward off the sand and back up to the flat rock surface of the lanai. She didn't let go once she had him there, instead walking him toward the wading pool, around it and on into the very back part of the hotel where Lewis of Hollywood was located. Once there she turned him around.

Darren looked over his shoulder, wondering what everyone who'd been present when he'd been 'removed' might be thinking, but no one even looked his way, their interest on being part of the set overtaking every bit of interest they had.

Mrs. Levy turned him to face her, finally letting go of his arm.

"What are you doing?" she asked, her clear bright eyes unblinking as they bored into his own.

"What do you mean?" Darren sputtered out, brokenly, not understanding the question.

"You know exactly what I mean," Mrs. Levy said, lines forming on her nearly perfectly smooth forehead. "Elvis is coming to dinner and that's the place he needs to be approached, not down in this mess of a movie scene where he's never going to be alone, away from his handlers or in a mood to be generous about anything."

"I didn't..." was all Darren could say, before Mrs. Levy cut him off.

"You didn't do anything, I know, because I got to you first. Now get back down there to the set and stop Star Black. She's dangerous because she always has her own agenda, and believe me, her agenda has little or nothing to do with your agenda. She's nineteen going on sixty, but still nineteen and

she's never had any contact with the hard-bitten sort of people who run Hollywood."

Darren had everything he could do to keep from backing up, Mrs. Levy's delivery was so sharp and harsh when it came to discussing Star. Darren had thought the two women to be the closest of friends, or at least on friendly terms, but there was nothing at all friendly in Mrs. Levy's inflection when she spoke about Star.

"Okay," he got out. He was going to turn and head right back for the sand, in relief if for no other reason but he hesitated. He needed to know what to tell Star to stop her if she went it alone with Elvis, but he was too late. Mrs. Levy turned, as if on a dime, and was gone into the rear entrance to the beauty shop.

Darren walked slowly around the pool and headed through the gathered teams of movie workers back toward the step down to the sand. He felt in his bones that Mrs. Levy was right. The only thing she didn't know about was the hundred-thousand-dollar price that Colonel mentioned to Star about Elvis attending private parties. Darren didn't think the Colonel was kidding and Star, in all of her brilliance probably should have thought better of telling the Colonel where and when the dinner was expected to take place. Star had, no doubt, assumed that the Colonel was talking about the party at the club, but Darren didn't think so. The dinner Mrs. Levy put together was just another party to the Colonel, as far as Darren was concerned.

The movie set was a mess of activity but neither Elvis nor any of the actors were visible. Jimmy, Star, and even the Duke wandered aimlessly among the many people working on different parts of either set construction, lighting, or laying rails for cameras to ride on. They all ignored anyone not directly connected to their work. Three small trailers had been towed to one end of the sand and set in a row, running from the concrete step down to toward the water, but not close enough to either to

block foot traffic or be at risk from a high wave. A generator ran constantly, set up between two of them.

Jimmy walked over to join Darren. "Air conditioning," Jimmy said. "The stars stay inside the trailers because it's too hot and windy out here for their makeup, hair and all that. Cool. That's where we'll find Elvis."

"We're not going to find Elvis," Darren said. "Mrs. Levy is right. This was a mistake. The Colonel is re-directing us away from the dinner, which he'll probably try to screw up now, and onto this sandy set which can't work at all. There's no way we're going to get into Elvis' trailer here and when he comes out it'll be to say or sing his lines and go right back inside."

"Star," Jimmy said, trying to say more, but Darren interrupted him.

"We need to back off and go with Mrs. Levy on this one," Darren said, looking his friend straight in the eyes. "This is no place to ask Elvis for anything. This is a ruse by the Colonel to throw us off as he finds a way to make sure Elvis doesn't show up at the dinner. No dinner, no party. No party no job, at least for me."

"You can't be sure of that," Jimmy replied, still looking for Star, who seemed to have disappeared into the mess of the set area.

"Star told us what the Colonel said," Darren went on doggedly. "He said that Elvis had to be paid about a hundred thousand for such an appearance, and I don't think that man was distinguishing between an informal dinner at Mrs. Levy's or the party."

"That wasn't good, but maybe this Colonel isn't such a bad guy," Jimmy replied.

"He threw Star out right onto the open street," Darren said, exasperation beginning to come through in his tone.

"True, I'll give you that," Jimmy replied, "but it was in the middle of the park and there wasn't much traffic."

“You think he even bothered to look to see where they were or how much traffic there was?” Darren asked.

“Ah, I guess not,” Jimmy said, growing obviously more and more uncomfortable as Darren talked to him.

Darren looked over to the trailers where Jimmy’s concentration had shifted toward. Star, Judy, and her sister stood right at the door to the trailer as if waiting at some fast-food joint to be served in turn.

“What do we do?” Jimmy asked.

Darren looked at his friend for a brief second, realizing just how great a friend he was. In only a few seconds of conversation, Jimmy was on his side and ready for action.

Darren surveyed the crowd until his eyes fell upon the Duke. He was the only man wearing a straw hat and flip flops with open white shirt and white trousers. He showed like a diamond sparkling in bright sunlight.

“The Duke,” Darren whispered.

Both boys took off, walking as fast as they could through the deep sand. Darren reached down and pulled off his go-aheads, as did Jimmy. Then they moved. In seconds they were at the Duke’s side. The Duke was engaged talking to some members of a particular work crew, but he noticed the boys immediately.

The Duke disengaged, almost immediately, and walked over to confront the boys.

“What is it?” he asked.

“You’ve got to stop Star from trying to talk to Elvis,” Darren said, his voice lowered, but a bit of stress coming through in his tone. “If she confronts him by surprise, in this environment, he’s probably going to blow her off, and then we can forget about everything right here and now.”

“You’re right, of course,” the Duke replied, his own voice gentle, as he looked over to where the three women stood ready and waiting. “This is a place to watch, listen, and not speak, even for me.”

The Duke turned and moved toward the women without saying anything further.

“Hope he gets to them in time,” Jimmy said, just as the Duke reached the women and the door to the trailer housing Elvis began to open.

Jimmy and Darren were too far away to hear what the Duke might be saying but there was no missing what he did. He grabbed Star by her left arm and literally pulled her over toward the ocean-facing side of the trailer. Elvis climbed down the three temporary steps to the sand, closing the trailer door behind him. His head was wrapped in a towel as if he was wearing a turban and he held another towel in his hands. Judy and her sister rushed across the few feet that separated them, but Elvis seemed to ignore them, beginning to walk toward a group of men and women surrounding a camera mounted on a tripod that was set on some miniature rails across the sand.

“The Duke has Star trapped and Elvis is ignoring Judy and her sister,” Jimmy reported the obvious, although he sounded more like he was talking to himself rather than Darren.

“Thank God,” Darren breathed out.



## Chapter Thirty-Five

In the short time that it took for the Duke to isolate and pull Star aside, and Judy and her sister were treated like they didn't exist on the planet, Darren considered what had happened, and what had almost happened. His mind ran at light speed, going back and forth from the short visit Star had with the Colonel and what was occurring on the set of "Girls, Girls, Girls". The insidious intellect of the Colonel became totally obvious in those seconds. Elvis would not want to be bothered while working on the set, his mind on his lines, and taking directions about what to do and how to do it from almost everyone. Star's proposition would not have been heard much less acted upon, and the Colonel had to know that. He himself hardly ever appeared at the Moana or on the set, Darren was certain. He had no place there, just like they had no place here, other than to gawk and be supporting fans. Without Mrs. Levy they'd have walked right into the trap the Colonel had set and that would have been it. As it was, he realized, they were back to the hundred-thousand-dollar problem. Just as the Colonel had coldly jettisoned Star from the Bentley on Kalakaua and plotted the movie set trap, so he would have a backup plan just in case Elvis really did attend Mrs. Levy's dinner.

"We're in trouble," Darren whispered to Jimmy.

"Yeah, this isn't working at all, and I don't much care for being on the set either," Jimmy replied, craning his neck around to take in the whole surreal scene in front and around them.

"No, about the dinner tomorrow night," Darren said.

"What do you mean?" Jimmy asked.

"I mean that Star blabbed our whole plan to the Colonel," Darren replied, speaking low and fast. "If the hundred-thousand-

dollar comment he supposedly made is real, then there's no way he's going to let us pull off getting Elvis to agree to the party at the club. Look how clever he was in leading us into this snake pit trap, and Star's no dummy."

Darren looked out past the security guard when the canvas was pulled back to let someone else in. He spotted Mrs. Levy, standing very still, staring back at him through the small crack that opened and closed very quickly. Her eyes, in those few seconds, bored right into him. Star was smart, Darren realized, but Mrs. Levy was smart and had a lot of life experience, as well. He needed her advice on how to proceed, and he was coming to believe more and more, that she already knew. She waited outside the set and Darren understood. She was waiting to see if he'd gotten the message she was trying to convey and stopped the potential disaster from happening.

Darren walked back toward the canvas slit, pulled it open, and went through. Mrs. Levy still stood, leaning her left shoulder against the 'Treasure Island' banyan tree, waiting.

"Okay, you were right," Darren said when he was close enough for her to hear.

"Anybody talk to him? Mrs. Levy asked.

"If you mean Star, then no," Darren replied. "The Duke stepped in and pulled her away."

"I'm afraid of what the Colonel will do next," I said, getting as close to her as I felt safe. The woman was very attractive, and Darren had become fully aware that a lot of her attractiveness wasn't physical. She was brilliant like Jimmy and Star were brilliant, but in a different and deeper way.

"He's a good one to fear, but I think we're looking pretty good at this point," she said. "It's about fifty-fifty that Elvis will show for dinner tomorrow. Then, it's about fifty-fifty, if he shows, that he'll accept the invitation to the big party at the club. After that, I can't figure the odds on whether he'll show up for the party, even if he promises to appear.

Darren told her about the \$100,000 comment the Colonel had made to Star inside the Bentley.

“A hundred thousand to these people is peanuts,” Mrs. Levy laughed. “No, it wouldn’t be about that kind of money. It’s all about control, which is where the really big money is.”

Darren thought about what the woman was saying and couldn’t help but agree.

“It’s only fifty-fifty that he’ll come tomorrow night?” he asked, finally occurring to him that those were not the best of odds.

“As you said, the Colonel is a very capable player and he’s going to do what he can to make sure that the hand he’s dealt himself in this game is well and fully played. If Elvis doesn’t come then it will be because the Colonel was able to steer him clear, and part of that’s because Star Black has no clue about what she’s dealing with here and you shouldn’t be listening to her.”

“What time should Jimmy and I come by,” Darren asked, purposely leaving out Star, and knowing that there might be problems over that omission.

Star had said that ‘we’ would be attending the dinner, or at least breaking in on it, and keeping her from attending might be problematic, to say the least, which, with Jimmy’s infatuation with her would likely add fuel to the fire. In his heart of hearts, however, Darren knew that Mrs. Levy was right.

Darren made a promise he would contact Mrs. Levy the next day, well prior to the dinner, although he was fast coming to the belief that there was no place for him, Jimmy, or Star, for that matter, at that dinner. Mrs. Levy was going to make the Cannon Club Party happen or not on her end. The only real concern was in adding more of a group adulation thing to the event at her home, so Elvis would be totally comfortable. The only time Darren had met the man; however, he’d seemed a long way from really wanting that kind of thing. He’d seemed most

happy just to be in a rather normal environment with normal people.

With Jimmy's car parked where it was, right in front of Lewis of Hollywood, Darren couldn't exactly hang out waiting for Jimmy and Star. In no time his mom would be notified, no doubt, that he was out there 'loitering,' if he was seen. Instead of doing that sat in one of chairs up on the slim lanai that jutted out on both sides of the Moana's main entrance. The koa rocking chairs were very comfortable and there was nobody else around, as it was too early for the tourists to begin packing the lobby and everything nearby.

He sat for half an hour before Jimmy and Star finally showed up.

Darren waited for a few minutes, watching them stand near the Corvair looking for him. They were very comfortable with one another, which surprised him. Obviously, there was more to their relationship than simple coy flirting and verbal carrying on. Darren walked down to meet them.

"Did the Duke wave you off too?" Star asked, as soon as he got within earshot.

"Yes, in a way, except it was Mrs. Levy, really," Darren replied, climbing over the convertible's door edge and into the backseat of the car.

"The set was a mess," Star replied, opening the door to get in. "The Duke was right."

"Seems like this is a whole lot more complicated than we thought," Darren offered, and then waited.

"Yeah, no question about that," Star said. "I was wrong. We're totally out of our element here. Should I not go to the dinner and just let you two carry the ball?"

The question took Darren by surprise. His opinion of Star was one of arrogance and competent selfishness. The competent part seemed to be taking over, he surmised. Maybe there was more to Star than he'd previously thought. It was obvious that she wanted to be at the dinner operation but was willing to

forego attending if it interfered with the mission. That spoke of intellect and having a heart.

“No,” Darren replied, almost involuntarily. Star was as beautiful as Judy or her sister, if not more so, and that alone could not possibly hurt when it came to surrounding Elvis with glowing followers, and thereby hoping to make him more agreeable and comfortable. It was apparent from the Colonel’s last move that he either could not, or would not, order Elvis, not when it came to his star attending personal events. Darren didn’t know what the Colonel’s next trick would be, but he was certain there would be one.

Jimmy dropped Darren off at home after an unusually silent ride, so he could get ready for work; work that Darren hoped would be like it had been before, without special treatment, either positive or negative.

With one month to go before he went off to St. Norbert it was still vital that he pick up two more paychecks, his share of the tips, and hopefully, the bonus Cross had promised. It was hard to believe that the Elvis party was more than a week ahead of him, although that could change abruptly at Mrs. Levy’s dinner. If Elvis didn’t show for that then there would likely be no party. If he showed and said no, then there’d be no party. The chance of the party occurring at all, except for the attendance of all those notables invited, was fast becoming a choice between slim and none.

For some reason work that night was not only a relief, but was like the Elvis party had been forgotten, even though it was tentatively scheduled for a week and a day from the following night. Saturday was the busiest time for the club, except for early morning Sunday breakfast. It would be difficult to allow for a private party of the size that was necessary to serve Elvis, his retinue of currently unknown size, and then the admirals and other higher officers who would have the proper amount of pull to secure entry.

The waitresses were treating him well, Sergeant Cross was nowhere to be found, Wu was deep into his cooking, and the pot washer had showed up. Darren could have worked at anything he wanted, but the simplicity and service of being nothing more or less than a busboy, carrying trays of food one way and dirty dishes the other, suited him just fine.

But that all changed when the Duke came through the front door of the club. His military escort was the Rear Admiral of Pearl Harbor along with an Air Force General in full uniform. He caught a glimpse of them coming through the club's big double doors, and swallowed hard, before trying to disappear into the kitchen. He didn't get far, as the hostess found him in no time at all. Josephine was from the Philippines and tough as nails.

"You are now waiter," she said, her voice low and hard, "so you will take care of your friends, who have come in here to sew discord among the patrons and staff of this wonderful establishment." Her English, since she'd also been through the Maryknoll Academy, was local but nearly flawless in its meaning.

Darren went into the locker area and pulled out his formal red coat with gold buttons that made him look like he was in some really old Bogart movie hawking Pall Mall cigarettes from a shelf hanging out in front of his belly.

He went out to wait the table, and was a bit buoyed up by the two waitresses who came right along with him, except for staying a few paces back. Darren had an ironed white linen towel over one arm, bent and extended before him. Everything was as it was supposed to be until he saw the Colonel. His smile was so big, as he stood with his companions, that his super white teeth gleamed, and appeared to glint a bit from the light shining down from the illumination installed along the top edge of the dance floor.

Darren knew at that precise moment; the Elvis party would only happen if the Colonel made it happen. He was like a force

of nature, as well as smart as could be and soaked in Hollywood and show business life experience so deeply that no group of teenagers, stuck out on an island, could ever come close to being.

The table had been set well before the group arrived. Darren waited, respectfully standing a few feet away from the head of the table.

“Saw you at the Moana,” the Colonel said, as he passed by, smiling his giant smile over at Darren.

Darren was shocked. The man hadn’t even been that close to Darren at the Moana, and certainly not close enough to be so easily recognizable in his waiter costume.

“Yes, sir,” Darren replied, stepping forward with his order notepad. “Can I get you some drinks?” They made their drink orders. Darren wrote them down and then gave them to the two waitresses, his mind racing to figure out how the Colonel could not only recognize Darren on sight but be there at all.

Prime rib was the special, which all the men at the table ordered, while all the women, the few that were there, ordered the lobster. Darren was quite used to the mix, although on lobster special nights everyone who showed ordered the lobster, since the three tail Australian cold-water lobster tail special was the largest, best and cheapest on the entire island.

Midway through the meal, Darren checked on the group’s progress, as was required. He asked if their meals were satisfactory and got the usual positive answer from everyone. It was hard to argue with a pound-and-a-half prime rib serving or the three giant lobster tails. The Colonel waved him over.

A shiver instantly quivered its way up and down Darren’s spine. He moved toward the man, seated at the far end of the table. The Colonel motioned for him to lean down. The Colonel whispered into his left ear.

“See me when we’re done here, right outside,” he said.

“Yes, sir,” Darren answered, not knowing what else to say, although all he really wanted to do was run home and hide.

The group stayed for a full hour after finishing the meals. The Air Force general took the bill Darren presented him, signed it and then everyone at the table got up to leave.

“What do I do with this?” Darren asked over near the dance floor, extending the signed bill out in his hand to one of the long-time waitresses.

“Never seen nothing like that before,” she replied, looking at the bill, “but I guess he’s the commander of the base here too, which means he’s our big boss, which means it’s Sergeant Cross’s problem, not ours.”

“What about the tip?” Darren asked since the bill was large, by normal standards.

The waitress began to laugh softly, walking away toward the kitchen.

There was no time to bus the table, as the group was heading toward the front double doors to leave. Darren followed them, so nervous that he had trouble breathing right. Short gasps came to him noticeably instead of the smooth movement of his lungs he usually experienced, and seldom conscious of.

The Colonel stood alone, off to one side, near the doors, while the others in his party either waited for their cars or were making their way down through the full expanse of asphalt where customers parked.

Darren walked to where the Colonel stood, a lit cigar in his mouth. When Darren was six feet away, he stopped and waited.

“Closer,” the Colonel said, holding out one hand.

Darren stepped a few feet closer.

The Colonel unfurled his fingers and a five-dollar bill and extended it out toward Darren.

Darren gingerly took the crisp new bill in his hand, not looking at it as his eyes were glued to those of the Colonel.

“Now, that’s for your tip, and let me give you another tip. Stay out of it from here on in.”



The Bentley showed up in front of them, as if on command. The driver quickly exited the vehicle and opened its rear door. The Colonel tossed his unfinished cigar into a nearby bush and crawled into the back seat of the Bentley. The driver closed the door and got in and the stately vehicle and slowly crept away.

Darren looked at the new bill he held in his hand. He almost recoiled. It was a fifty-dollar bill, not a five. Darren had never handled a bill bigger than a twenty before. He held it up close to his eyes, trying to figure out if it was real, but then realized that he wouldn't know if it wasn't.

What had the Colonel meant with his 'stay out of it' comment? Stay out of what? The tip was more than a tip for dinner, as it was extremely unusual for any of the staff to get a tip of more than ten bucks. Darren wished he could keep the whole fifty, but he had to turn it in for the split with the other wait staff. It was their deal and it required honor for the deal to work. Worse than turning it in would be trying to explain to the other staff members about why it had been given to him in the first place.

## Chapter Thirty-Six

Darren walked toward his home, wanting nothing more than a hot shower to remove the nearly ingrained aroma of cooked meat and shellfish following his shift at the Cannon Club. The waitresses had been stunned by the fifty dollar tip the Colonel left, but seemingly more stunned, silently, about the fact that Darren had turned it in at all. The looks of disbelief they gave him before he left told a sad story, or at least that's how he took it. His credibility, as the only Haole working at the club, was so low that they had little expectation he'd act with any sort of honor towards them. Their reward for his turning in the Colonel's tip money lined his left front pocket. He should have received no more than four dollars of the fifty-dollar tip (tips were divided nightly based upon hours worked, seniority, and kind of work performed) but instead had been given a twenty-dollar bill. Twenty dollars was half what it cost to fly from Honolulu to St. Norbert College round-trip. Whether Darren wanted to accept the Colonel's bribe or not, he knew, in a way, he already had.

The lights at Star's house were all on downstairs so Darren had no compunction about knocking. Star came to the door, then through it when she realized it was Darren. Neither he nor Jimmy had ever been invited inside the house, and Star's parents were only ever seen entering or leaving it. Star always came out or nobody answered the door.'

"I'm sorry," Star said before Darren could say anything.

"What for?" Darren replied.

"For getting it so wrong with the Colonel and Elvis at the beach and all that. I know you figured it all out. I could see it in your eyes before you left with Mrs. Levy."

Darren wondered about surveillance. He seemed to be the object of everyone's attention when it didn't appear that anyone was watching him at all. How could Star have seen him with Mrs. Levy outside the canvas when she was inside with Judy and Elvis? He shook his head ever so slightly, to clear it and get back to why he'd stopped by. Star was the best advisor Darren could think of, even if she wasn't always right.

"The Colonel was at the club tonight," he began and then detailed everything that had happened following the dinner.

"You kept the twenty?" is all Star asked.

Darren nodded, ready to explain that he couldn't fail to accept without insulting the entire body of wait staff at the club.

Star hesitated, before going on. "The Colonel is threatening you, but with a bit of an offer, as well. Interesting."

"Why interesting?" Darren asked.

Star moved to sit on the top stair edge of the porch. Darren joined her, waiting for a reply to his question

"Because you're nobody, out here, in Hollywood, or anywhere else," Star finally answered. "Why is this situation important enough for him to threaten you? The fifty-dollar bill is immaterial, as that much money, although it's a lot to you and me, means nothing to him."

"Why does any of it matter?" Darren said, after almost a full minute of thinking about the situation and wondering why in the back of his own mind he couldn't get over the fact that he now had half the plane fair back and forth to St. Norbert. If he worked just a bit longer and got a job once he got to college, he might just be able to fly home for Christmas. Family life was almost never good at home, but it was a whole lot better than spending Christmas in some holiday abandoned college dormitory, and then have other more blessed students return to campus only to feel sorry for him.

"Whether Elvis comes to dinner tomorrow night, and or the party next week, what does it really matter to anyone?"

“You stepped into something you have no understanding about, and neither do I, really,” Star replied. “Not only do we not understand most of this, but we also don’t understand why we don’t understand, if that makes any sense at all.”

“It makes perfect sense to me,” Darren said, a small smile forming.

“I haven’t really understood from the beginning.”

“This all has something to do with the Duke and his ragtag bunch of local Hawaiians, or whatever they are passing themselves off as Hawaiian,” Star replied, with a snort.

“The Duke’s not Hawaiian?” Darren asked, astonishment in his voice.

“Of course he’s Hawaiian,” Star shot back, “but his followers are a collection of other ‘locals’ who are local only in their declaration that they are. The Duke is a true Hawaiian by blood, and there are very few of them left.”

“What could the Duke want from Elvis or any of this?” Darren asked, his tone going from astonishment to bewilderment.

“They want their island back,” Star said. “It’s called the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement and Duke is a big-time player behind the scenes.”

“What scenes?” Darren replied. “I’ve never heard of the Hawaiian Sovereignty Movement before and I’ve been out here for a long time.”

“So, how does Elvis attending a party at the Cannon Club help them, or even the Duke, in any way?” Darren asked.

“The Duke took a real hit when he was removed as the Sheriff of Hawaii,” Star replied. “He’s now got a highly paid but mostly honorary position with no power and nobody to influence any power he might have over. He hangs out at Queens Beach and the Outrigger Canoe Club, where we picked him up. He obviously wants to be more than a socially accepted local figure of some historical import, but not in any line of succession for anything. His relationship with Elvis could change all that in an

instant, but he probably must force the issue because the cold-hearted and blooded Colonel probably doesn't want him, and certainly doesn't need him."

"Wow, all this stuff," Darren said, a bit of disappointment in his tone, "And I thought talking about the origin of the universe at the East-West Center at the university was complex and sometimes weird."

"Hawaii is just starting to be fought over," Star replied. "It's only been a state for four years, in fact, this month. The preachers came to convert the Hawaiians but fell in love with the islands so much that they took a good portion of it for themselves, and then the military came and did the same thing. Now the Japanese and Chinese want a good portion too. There's going to be big trouble out here for generations to come."

"Where do you get stuff like this?" Darren wanted to know.

"I read a lot," Star replied, sniffing into the air in front of them, before changing the subject.

"What are you going to do?" Star asked.

"I don't know what to do," Darren replied. "That's why I came to see you."

"Figured," Star said, but then didn't go on.

"What do I do?" Darren finally, after almost a full minute, asked.

"Mission," Star said, and then paused. "Go ask Colonel Banks or maybe Jimmy's father about their mission. What is the mission? It's the answer to the question 'what am I doing here? So, what is your mission?'"

"My mission?" Darren asked himself, even more than of the woman he was sitting with. "I think my mission is to keep my job, get paid as much as I can, and then leave here."

"Those are objectives to accomplish your mission," Star replied, almost instantly. "What's your mission? Answer the question behind the word."

Darren sat and thought, not only about his ‘mission’ but about Star. She was extremely intelligent, although fully capable of great gaping errors in her judgment, like telling the Colonel everything about their plan without knowing him at all. His mission, he knew full well, was to get to Saint Norbert College, off the island, and be able to pay for his higher education. He had no other reason for being not only where he was but in being alive at all. He could not say that to Star, he knew. She had guessed his mission, he knew too, so why did she want him to verbalize it? So, she could repeat that he’d said it, and thereby make him appear to be cold-blooded about any decisions he made about any and everything else. All decisions could then be described as merely serving objectives to accomplish his mission.

“I don’t know,” Darren replied, tentatively, his hope that she would tell him his mission. He could then deny it. But she was too smart for that.

“Think about it,” Star whispered, getting up and walking to the screen door of her house. “I’m certain I’ll see you and Jimmy before tomorrow night,” and then she was gone, the screen door gently banging when it closed.

Darren walked toward the Fort Ruger back wall, feeling the same exact relief he always felt when he left Star, or when she left him. The woman was scary, in a different way than Mrs. Levy, but still at nearly that same level.

He climbed the wall with ease, rolling right over the barbed wire that had slowly crumbled away with time. It looked like barbed wire but more resembled one made of rigid decaying cookie crumb spikes when you encountered it physically.

He walked down his deserted street toward his home. He saw the lights in the distance and stopped to take the neighborhood in. Through the spaces between the homes on his right, he could see the lights that ran along Kalanianaʻole Highway all the way to Hawaii Kai and Koko Head. He felt deep

inside himself that one day such cheap WWII structures he was looking between would cost fortunes to buy.

His mission, he thought. If he were to tell the real foundational truth, which he could not ever do to or with anyone, was to leave his family as far behind as was possible. Going off to Saint Norbert was merely the top objective to the accomplishment of that mission. Star would more than likely never guess that because he gave her no opening or data to support that, and Jimmy had little knowledge of it, as well.

Darren would never abandon the family, but he would, he hoped and prayed, be able to structure his life in such a way that he only had to encounter it in selected dosages of short duration. He would, very soon, never be hit by his father again, or have to watch his father hit his mother. He'd never have to endure being locked in a closet and then forgotten in there because he was too hurt and angry to let anybody know they'd forgotten him.

Saint Norbert was waiting for him and there was no way he was going to be swayed or deviated from his secret mission to get and stay there. Saint Norbert, Darren had studied and discovered in shock, was the Catholic patron saint of children. Saint Norbert was his saint and, if a saint could be dedicated to anybody, then it had to be dedicated to Darren. He'd told Jimmy that secret only to have his best friend laugh and tell him that he wasn't a child anymore. Darren had been complimented by his friend but also disappointed. He was a child. He expected that college would teach him how not to be a child anymore. That subject was not in his freshman curriculum, but it didn't have to be. His brother would be a sophomore when he was freshman, and as unlikely as it seemed, would have to serve as his guide in finally reaching any kind of acceptable maturity. If his brother could not serve or would not serve then he would go it alone, as he'd done for so many years.

"What's my mission, Star Black?" he said, before laughing out loud, as he made his way to the front door of his home. "Wouldn't you like to know?"

## Chapter Thirty-Seven

Darren stopped at the wall, waited a few seconds before leaping up, and then, once atop the wall, sat down on a projecting rock instead of jumping over the wire and down to the other side. He had to think the whole thing through, as best he could. Once again, he realized he didn't want to think it through alone. Although Star made all the sense in the world, every time he talked to her about almost anything, it wasn't always possible for him to put her words into any kind of rational action he could live with, but still, he needed her wisdom, but first, he had to get Jimmy's opinion. Darrel climbed down, back into the base proper, and loped toward Jimmy's place, only a few minutes away. Jimmy's house was dark, even though it was early evening and the sun, although down, was still emitting plenty of red light, bleeding from over the horizon.

"Red light at night, sailor delight," Darren breathed as he knocked on Jimmy's bedroom windowsill.

The window was open, as it always was, and the screen secure. Jimmy didn't like it if Darren yelled through the screen for him. He said it was low class.

"Front door," Jimmy whispered out to him. His desk faced right up into the inside of the windowsill and his small lab-type light shone brightly, so bright it was impossible to see Jimmy beyond it.

Darren entered the front screen-door, cushioning it so no noise was made. It didn't seem plausible that Jimmy's parents were sleeping, but stranger things were known to occur regularly inside the military housing complex of Fort Ruger. Ruger and Bellows were both totally uncommon military bases, in that they catered to multiple services. Ruger was an Air Force base but was filled with Navy and Army personnel. Bellows was also Air



Force, but the Marine Corps occupied most of its surface and sea area for beach landing and assault training operations.

“What’s going on?” Jimmy asked, hearing Darren creak his way into the bedroom.

The base housing, built of local unseasoned wood during WWII, was of the cheapest single layer variety. On a windy day, it was possible to see through the cracks between wall planks when the force of the wind made those boards bend.

Darren sat on the floor next to Jimmy’s desk, leaning forward to cradle his arms around his knees. He detailed all that Star had told him only a few minutes earlier, and then her conclusion...about his mission.

“So, what did you tell her your mission was?” Jimmy asked, turning to face Darren for the first time.

“I told her that I didn’t know,” Darren replied, somehow depressed about having told Star that, but not certain why.

“So, you lied,” Jimmy laughed. “I’ve never met anyone who is more capable of defining what his mission is than you. You always have a mission, and you always know where you are in working with respect to it.”

“School,” Darren replied, his voice small in telling the truth. “My only life, my future, everything, is about getting to Saint Norbert’s and then staying there.”

“Doubtful, that that’s your true mission in life,” Jimmy replied, “but I can understand how you might think that way right now. My dad says, anytime I feel like you do, that I should just wait ten years and then I’ll not only have gotten through the difficult period in fine shape but won’t be able to remember how intensely I worried about the outcome at the time.”

“You’re not helping,” Darren replied.

“I’m not here to help,” Jimmy laughed. “I’m here to be your best friend. What are you doing tomorrow to pass the time? Obviously, you won’t be working, not if Sergeant Cross has anything to say about it, not if we’re heading over to the Levy house as planned.”

“I’ll be here first thing in the morning,” Darren replied, getting to his feet and heading for the door.

“Don’t hang around outside if the lights aren’t on,” Jimmy said, not turning around when he said the words. “Mom freaks out...and I don’t know about dad. Just go down to Star’s place and wait there. I don’t think she sleeps like a normal human, at all.”

Darren walked to the rear security wall running around the base and scaled up to the old broken barb wire. He stopped and sat again, this time facing in the direction of his home. The city was quiet. From the wall, he could still see Jimmy’s room window, where his friend sat working on another unknown and unrevealed project. Jimmy loved secret projects. Jimmy had been kind enough not to indicate that Darren didn’t have the best sleep habits either. Even if their sleep habits were similar, there was no way Darren thought he and Star could ever be anything, not as a boy and a girl together. He smiled grimly at the thought. He suddenly surged upward, looked both ways up and down the street, and then jumped over the wire and dropped all the way, a full fifteen feet, to the surface of the sidewalk below. He landed as Colonel Banks had once demonstrated, by letting his knees and ankles bend all the way until his butt nearly hit the ground, before rolling to his right and exhausting the force of the fall by balling up and performing a couple of rolling summersaults. He jumped to his feet and brushed himself off. Doing the stunt wearing a short-sleeve shirt, shorts and flip flops was not something Banks would ever have recommended he knew. The thought was another thing he had to smile about as he made his way home.

The next morning, after a decent night’s sleep, as his parents hadn’t bothered him at all and there’d been no fights between them, Darren took off from home at a run, before anyone else was up, and made it to the front of Star’s house in a near-record seven and half minutes.

Darren waited under the plumeria tree, taking in its usual welcoming aroma, the very gentlest of trade winds blowing so softly that he felt like the small area near the side of the house was doing its best to keep him company. He leaned against the substantial trunk of the short but stout tree, wondering, not for the first time, if vegetable life, or flora, as scientists called that kind of life, was sentient at all. In high school, he'd learned that the true most distinguishing difference between plant and animal life was movement. Animals moved, and quickly, while plant life, for the most part, did not, unless one considered movement at only the very lowest level, move much at all. Plant life seemed to offer Darren more than that though, as he massaged the tree trunk lightly.

Darren heard the Monza before he saw it, the Corvair's four-speed transmission remaining in first gear as it made its way down the slight hill, and around the ball field that was the very heart and center of the base. Star had not come out, so he stepped into the street to be picked up.

"You ready?" Jimmy asked, grinning like he usually did early in the morning.

"For what?" Jimmy asked back, moving to jump over the door and get into the passenger seat.

Star came out of the house suddenly, the screen door to her home banging a few times as she walked the short distance to where the Corvair sat idling. Without comment or expression, she gently moved Darren aside, leaped over the top of the door, and slipped into the passenger seat.

"You coming?" she asked, looking straight ahead.

"Good morning to you too," Darren replied, climbing into the back seat. "I don't even know where we're going," he went on, exasperation in his voice.

Jimmy put the car in gear and pulled away from the curb.

Darren noted the portable transistor radio next to him on the bench seat cushion. Jimmy only put the radio in the car when they were going to visit the top of Diamond Head, but the back

trail up the spine of the mountain started near where the Cannon Club was located, which was a walking, not a driving, distance away.

“We’re going up to the top to reconnoiter and get our plan down for tonight,” Jimmy said, as he dived the Corvair out through the main entrance to the base and dashed for Monsarrat. “First, we’ll circle the wagons and see what’s around us,” he went on.

“If you mean, by circling the wagons, we’re going around Diamond Head, then the reference is all wrong,” Darren said.

“Details,” Star replied, her voice drifting away as the Monza accelerated down the highway.

Darren leaned forward, so he could speak directly into Jimmy’s right ear. “Just how are we supposed to get up there if we don’t climb the club trail?” he asked, wishing he’d worn his tennis shoes instead of flip-flops. The trail across the top of the mountain’s spine always bothered him but it would be worse without proper footgear, he knew.

“Star will get us in, using the tunnel,” Jimmy laughed, poking Star in the side with the index finger of his right hand.

“Maybe. Those guys don’t always do what I want to do,” she said, “and it’s early. They may all be in bad moods or hungover.”

Jimmy guided the Corvair around the mountain, driving unusually slow. Darren looked out over the edge of the cliff as they passed along Diamond Head Drive. He saw Molokai in the far distance, which wasn’t usually visible unless they were up on the top tip of the mountain. The surf was up, and the trade winds were building, the breeze overpowering the wind generated by the car’s movement through the atmosphere.

For whatever reason, the lone guard at the outside cubicle set up near the tunnel entrance didn’t even have them slow when Jimmy drove up. With the gate up, he simply leaned a bit forward, peered at the car’s windshield, and then waved Jimmy through.

“Dad’s colonel sticker worked,” Jimmy laughed as he drove the car very slowly and carefully through the rough-cut tunnel.

“I thought your dad was a major,” Darren said, the tone of his voice quizzical in expression.

“He is, but he likes to have the little eagle over his sticker, anyway,” Jimmy replied. I don’t know how he got one, but they never give him any grief anywhere, not even at Pearl. Besides, Mom says he’ll be a bird colonel in no time at all.”

Jimmy parked the car at the base of the inside path leading up to the fortified tip of Diamond Head. The walkway had been lined on the side with pipe railing so the normally difficult, dusty, and windy hike up the outside along the exposed ridge became merely a relatively easy stroll.

They spent most of the rest of the morning and part of the early afternoon doing nothing more than listening to music blaring from the radio and exploring some of the fortifications that branched off to each side of the pillbox on the very top of the mountain’s ocean-facing edge.

They only talked briefly about a plan for the looming dinner, to be held at the Levy house, and only hours away.

“So, the plan is to show up and basically play it by ear,” Star concluded after they’d kicked around the fact that almost nothing was known about whom would be there or what their arrival might portend in causing acceptance or rejection.

They drove out of the secure facility inside the crater the same way they’d come in, except with their direction reversed. The guard was still there, and the gate was still wide open. The guard made believe he didn’t even notice their passing as Jimmy slowly guided the car out.

Returning to Fort Ruger was short and uneventful. Star went to her home, after which Jimmy parked the Corvair at his place. They’d decided, since the dinner was due to start at five-thirty, that they’d all show up together at Jimmy’s house, and then go to the Levy home from there.

Jimmy made the decision to drive the short distance to the Levy home instead of all three of them walking. They would arrive together as one unit and not seem, if seen, as if they were street urchins coming in to, as Jimmy put it, ‘graze for free in the Levy pasture.’

Darren’s heart fell when he saw the Bentley parked ostentatiously right out in front of the Levy home. The driver had backed it up into the driveway, making sure to leave no room for anyone else showing up. He was outside the car, wiping the exterior down with some sort of towel, white gloves on his hands. Darren noted that there were no other cars parked anywhere nearby, except for Jimmy’s dad’s governmental vehicle, and an official white car with the writing; “Department of Hawaiian Commerce and Consumer Affairs” on the driver’s side door.

“What a show,” Star murmured. “Most definitely Hollywood, all the way.”

For some reason Darren thought, as they walked toward the front door, it hadn’t occurred to him the Colonel would show up or even be invited. He couldn’t begin to imagine that the Colonel would gatecrash the event like they were doing, yet, if he’d been invited, then why wouldn’t Mrs. Levy have warned him? The only consolation prize in the whole developing mess was that if the Colonel was there then Elvis was likely attending the dinner too. There was still hope.

Star didn’t knock, instead merely opening the screen door and stepping through. Jimmy and Darren followed behind her.

## Chapter Thirty-Eight

Darren followed Star into the home, expecting a party atmosphere, or to hear Elvis singing off in some corner of the living room like had been the case the previous time he'd met him. But there was none of that. Instead, once he made the turn from the hall into the living room, there was a nearly silent collection of people filling every seat available. There was only one person talking, and that was the Colonel. He looked up briefly when Darren, Star, and Jimmy edged their way through the opening leading in from the hall.

Mrs. Levy got up and walked across the room when she saw them. "Elvis isn't here," she needlessly whispered over her shoulder, as she led the three of them into the kitchen.

"When's he coming?" Jimmy asked, trying not to disturb any of the covered dishes that had taken over every exposed surface of the counters and center butcher block table.

"That's the thing," Mrs. Levy replied, stopping to turn and face them. "He's maybe coming or not coming at all, according to the Colonel. Apparently, he's a bit tied up with some contractual discussions back in Hollywood over the rights to some of his songs."

"Contractual rights and his manager is attending this party while that's going on? Star asked. "What's wrong with this story...it sounds all wrong?"

"I don't know what to say," Mrs. Levy said, her voice low and contrite. "I don't have much idea of how all of what they do works. The Colonel is explaining it as best he can, I think if you want to go back in there and talk to him.

"What's the point of that?" Darren asked his tone one of despondence.

“He’s made sure that Elvis won’t be coming and that probably extends to the party at the club too.”

“It’s not over until it’s over,” Star replied, “but you’re right about this not being the place or time. Let’s go outside and wait. Out there, with the car and the driver, is the place and when he has to come out of the house is the time.”

“Can’t we just find out what hotel Elvis himself is staying in and then go to his room?” Jimmy asked.

“He’s not staying in a hotel,” Star replied.

“He’s staying in a motor home parked down in the underground garage of the Outrigger Hotel by the beach, and he’s got hotel security at his door at all times, day and night,” Star recited as if she was some sort of expert on the whereabouts of the visiting movie star.

“Can’t we go there and just wait until he comes out?” Jimmy asked.

“It’s private property under there,” Darren added. “All security will do is call the cops and have us escorted off the premises and then the hotel will ban us from the grounds forever.”

“Oh,” Jimmy replied, obviously deflated.

“He gets up every morning at five-thirty, goes for a walk alone on the beach, and then heads over to the Rock Island Café across Kalakaua,” Star said. “Paul, the owner, serves his two eggs, sunny side up, with bacon and two scoops of steamed sushi rice, every morning. Elvis then walks back to the Outrigger and the motor home to get ready for his day.”

“What about just leaving and waiting out by the car for the Colonel?” Mrs. Levy asked, “not that I want you to leave at all, but with Elvis not coming the whole dinner thing doesn’t really work.”

“The Colonel isn’t Elvis, and Elvis isn’t here because of him,” Darren said. “If he has anything to say about it, we’ll never see Elvis again in this life. He gave me fifty dollars as a tip



to pay me off at the club last night, and he wasn't even supposed to be at the club."

"If Elvis is able to walk the streets alone early in the morning, which I'm surprised at, then it makes sense to reach him along that route or even at the restaurant on Kalakaua," Star concluded. "Waiting at the car for the Colonel just makes us servants to be dismissed, once again."

Without another word, Star turned and headed for the front door. Jimmy followed her down the hall but stopped at the swinging door to hold it open, before turning to wait for Darren.

"Didn't work out," Darren said to Mrs. Levy.

"I tried, really, I tried hard, but I can't fight that man," Mrs. Levy replied, her voice fading to a whisper. "He knows things and I can't afford to have my husband hurt. And my daughter doesn't know she'll probably never see Elvis again once he leaves the island."

Darren suddenly realized why Mrs. Levy seemed too vulnerable every time he met with her. Her oldest daughter was extremely beautiful but not very smart at all, while her other daughter was smart but strange in so many ways. Her husband was simply not there most of the time, but the key in maintaining the stature and income of the family.

"I can't tell you how much I appreciate all you've done," Darren said, it suddenly coming to him that he was way out of his league as a therapist for the woman, or being the son, she'd always wanted, or even remaining in contact with the family as Judy moved on and away from him.

"I hope the party can still go on, and I'll stop by to keep you posted during the next week leading up to it."

"You're living a life of adventure, even at your young age, and it's enjoyable to me to be along for the ride, sort of," Mrs. Levy replied, walking straight into Darren and wrapping her arms around him.

She hugged him deeply for a few seconds, a hug like Darren had never gotten from his own mother in the totality of

his life, before stepping back and releasing him. It was like she was saying goodbye, he felt. She let him go and then turned and went back into the living room to join the Colonel and the others.

Darren walked down the hall, feeling like he was leaving the house for the last time. As he passed Jimmy, his friend whispered softly.

“You look like you’re coming from a funeral home,” he said.

Darren didn’t reply, instead headed for the waiting convertible wherein Star already occupied the front passenger seat. Darren climbed into the back. Jimmy opened the door and sat in the driver’s seat but made no move to start the Corvair’s engine.

“Wouldn’t it be funny now, if this thing doesn’t start?” he laughed.

Neither Darren nor Star responded in kind. Jimmy quieted and silence settled over the convertible like a small cloud. Darren reflected on the series of failures they’d suffered ever since engaging in their effort to somehow get back into the magnetosphere surrounding the big rock star. He knew he was taking those failures too seriously, but he also knew that his investment in pursuing the situation had put him solely at risk in several areas. He’d lost his girlfriend, even though that didn’t seem so bad in true reflection. He was about to lose his job, although he was leaving shortly for college anyway and had his first-year tuition, travel, boarding, and book expenses pretty much covered. And then there was the elusively promised four-hundred-and-twenty-dollars Cross had promised if he delivered.

Darren was about to reply that it wouldn’t be funny at all, but before he could comment Jimmy turned the key and the Spyder fired right up.

“Where to, oh great commander of the night,” Jimmy laughed out as he pulled away from the curb under maximum acceleration in first gear.

The independently sprung rear suspension, weighed down by the engine mounted at the back of the chassis, squatted but the tires did not squeal. Darren looked over to see the driver of the Colonel's Bentley stop polishing the over-polished surface of the car's hood to stare at them as they went by.

"Star?" Jimmy asked, pushing his head forward so he could be heard over the whine of fast-passing air and the rising and dropping roar of the engine as Jimmy went happily through the gears.

"I'm all in," Star replied, without turning her head.

Darren slipped back a bit, considering the strangeness of Star Black. With only three words she let on that she understood that Darren didn't want to go home and was considering having Jimmy take them somewhere else. She was agreeing to the conclusion she'd come to about the situation with almost no evidence at all. Star was hard to like for him, he'd realized early on, but her ability to see right to the heart of situations and problems and then come to nearly instant conclusions that were almost invariably correct astounded him. On top of her analysis and decision, she'd also managed to 'hit the ball' directly back at him as to where they might go and what they might do.

Darren wanted badly to ask Jimmy but couldn't do it. Star was forcing him to decide, and he couldn't avoid doing that without feeling like a coward. He pushed himself into the seat in frustration, watching Star's black flowing hair waft all around her head as the Corvair moved faster down Monsarrat toward Waikiki. Darren was coming to understand, he realized, what a love/hate relationship was really like.

## Chapter Thirty-Nine

The Blue Island waited, quietly tucked in between two other buildings, all three linked together instead of having any space between them at all. A small neon sign in the front window indicated that it was open, although, upon getting close, anyone would also notice that the light illustrated how dirty the window was on the inside. The sign blinked on and off, with about ten seconds between each five-second segment. Darren counted the time, as they stood near the curb, the three of them less enthusiastic about going inside than they'd been on the ride down from Fort Ruger.

"Well, it's your call Darren," Star said, shaking her head as if she thought the whole thing was a bad idea.

"Let's do it," Jimmy responded, "what have we got to lose?"

Darren reflected upon the simple obvious fact that only Darren had anything to lose, like his job, the four-hundred- and twenty-dollars Sergeant Cross was holding out for him, and any relationship he might survive with the Levy family.

He breathed in and out deeply but decided they really had no choice. If they didn't go in, then there was no chance Elvis would show up at the party and no chance Darren would keep his job or get the promised bonus. Mrs. Levy had been right when she'd talked to him, he realized. He was living a life of adventure although it seemed like, for all the world, he could only tell it was adventurous when whatever it was in the past.

"I'm going in alone," Darren said, turning to his two friends.

“You think that’ll work better for you?” Star said, the smile crossing her lips possibly indicating she thought the idea of his going it alone a bit ridiculous.

“We’ll be out here to claim the body,” Jimmy said with a light laugh, turning to walk toward a nearby bench at the bus stop only a few feet away.

Darren stepped opened the dirty screen door and stepped through the opening. He noted there was no other door and wondered if the owner was an idiot or simply unafraid of being ripped off.

The place was nicer inside than he remembered. The floor was made of a cream-colored linoleum and appeared to be spotless.

Darren looked down the long counter and spotted the restaurant’s only customers. Elvis looked up upon his entry, craning his head around. A smiling man sitting across from Elvis got up immediately. Darren noted the man’s distinctive battered straw hat and an awful aloha shirt. The man walked toward him. Elvis turned his head around and went back to eating.

“I’m...” the man started to say, but Darren stopped him.

“Yes, I know,” Darren said. “You’re Don Beach of Don’s Beachcomber.”

“The man stopped in front of Darren. “Actually, it’s called ‘Don the Beachcombers,’ he replied, the smile never leaving his face.

Darren noted just how good looking the man was, even with his dumb-appearing hat and other attire. “Don Beach,” he said, for some reason not being able to stop himself. “That can’t be your real name,” he went on. “You can’t be Don Beach and have a restaurant named Beachcomber on a beach.”

The man’s smile faded slightly. “No, I’m really Ernie but Don Beach has worked pretty well for me.”

Darren noted the faded smile and tried to recover himself. "My dad loves your place for the cheap but great Mai Tai drinks, and a whole lobster for only six dollars."

Don's smile bloomed anew, and he laughed.

"Elvis is busy with breakfast right now, so he's not having visitors or seeing any fans,"

"I'm the guy who arranged the party at the Cannon Club for him for his birthday and I'm about to lose my job because he probably won't show up and everyone will be mad," Darren blurted out.

"Your point being..." Don replied, not moving an inch from his position standing directly between Darren and where Elvis sat.

"Will you tell him that, at least?" Darren asked.

"Okay, but then you're out of here, right?" Don said, losing his smile completely.

"Yeah, I guess so," Darren came back, not knowing what else to say. Elvis was so close but so far away.

Don turned without another word and walked back to where Elvis sat. Darren thought about running across the short distance but then realized it would likely be a huge mistake. He could accomplish nothing by being considered a threat.

When Don reached the table, he leaned over Elvis and began talking. Elvis turned his head, looked over at Darren, and then nodded his head with a smile.

Darren's heart soared. There was hope. Elvis obviously remembered him.

Elvis looked away as Don finished talking. He headed back to stand before Darren once more.

"The Colonel will meet you in the lobby of the Moana at three this afternoon," Don said. "Be there. Elvis said you would be pleased by the results of the meeting." He turned to go back to the table but stopped short for a few seconds.

"Tell you Dad thanks, and you're Irene's kid, aren't you," he said. "Your mom does my hair and she's great." Don

removed his straw hat with his left hand and ran his other hand through a head of thick brown hair.

Why would a man with such great hair always wear a hat?" Darren wondered, even though his mind was in a bit of shock from discovering that he was much better known than he thought he was.

"Okay," was all Darren could think to say. He slowly backed up to the screen door, pushed it open with one foot, backing out of the restaurant, as if it was a saloon door in some old western movie set. The man with the phony name of Don Beach stood smiling, his hat back on his head. Darren wondered if Elvis would reward him for getting rid of an uninvited guest and potential troublemaker, or whether there was real substance to what the rock star had said through the famous bar owner.

Darren walked over to where his friends sat on the park bench, converted for use in allowing waiting bus riders to rest. The bench faced the beach, located across Waikiki's main street. The Kuhio Beach break wall provided almost all the sound there was, as the trade winds had yet to arrive with the coming of full dawn.

"What did he say, or was he there at all?" Jimmy asked as Darren swung around the bench to confront his two friends.

"I have to be at the lobby of the Moana at three, where the Colonel will meet me with whatever decision is to be made," Darren replied.

"You talked directly to Elvis?" Star asked, astonishment in her voice.

"No, he was having breakfast with Don Beach," Darren said, staring out into the ocean, listening to the sound of the waves hitting the breakwater. He looked up and around, waiting for the first whiffs of the trade winds, hoping that the Kona winds from the east would not make their presence felt. The Kona winds blew hot and were often filled with the remains of

volcano debris and dust, hence the name Kona, where the active volcano of Kilauea continued to erupt on a regular basis.

“Well, what’s the verdict?” Star asked.

“What ‘verdict,’ Darren replied, frustration in his tone.

“What do we do until three?” Star asked.

“We could go surfing?” Jimmy said, shading his eyes unnecessarily, as the sun was rising but completely hidden by the mountains behind them. A dull pale-yellow light barely illuminated by the white bubbles created by the breaking surf across the road in front of them.

“How about breakfast?” Star asked.

“We don’t have any money,” Jimmy replied.

“We go home to my house; I make breakfast and then we take it to the zoo parking lot over there and chow down.”

Jimmy and Darren looked at each other, both with raised eyebrows.

“I’ve never heard of a breakfast picnic,” Jimmy said, but the tone of his voice gave away a distinct uncertainty.

“Really?” Star replied, not laughing but not saying the word with a straight face, either.

“I’m in,” Darren said, wondering what kind of breakfast Star Black might come up with, but having no doubt it would be something good and memorable.

Jimmy said nothing, getting up and heading across Kalakaua for the Corvair. Darren and Star quickly followed.

The early morning trip in the low-level light was unremarkable, except for the fact that Jimmy drove the turbo Monza at reasonable speeds.

They drove to Star’s home in the Fort Ruger officer housing in moments. The light was growing in strength through the period of the drive. Upon arrival, Star climbed over the passenger door of the car and was gone. Both Darren and Jimmy had discussed, several times before, the fact that neither of them had ever been invited into or seen the inside of Star’s home.



Star was back in about fifteen minutes, carrying what looked like two or three paper grocery bags filled with stuff. She tossed a large thermos into Darren's hands when she climbed back into the Corvair.

The drive to the Honolulu Zoo was over in minutes. The parking lot was empty. The breakfast turned out to be many rolls of what Star called breakfast burritos. Neither Jimmy nor Darren had ever heard of them, but the rolled tortillas were filled with wonderfully made scrambled eggs, chunks of bacon, and some kind of chili that tasted wonderful, until a few minutes had gone by.

"What's the hot stuff?" Jimmy got out, breathing hard halfway through his burrito.

"New Mexico green chili," Star replied, reaching back for the thermos she'd tossed to Darren. She grabbed the big tube and unscrewed the cup at its top before pulling the rubber plug. She poured white liquid, filling the cup before handing it to Jimmy.

"Milk," Star said, as Jimmy drank the whole cup down next to her. "It's the only cure."

"God, but that's awful stuff, but tastes so good," Jimmy finally said, while Star refilled the cup for Darren, who's eyes had begun to tear.

Star's next idea was to head to Ala Moana Shopping center, the largest open-air shopping center in the world, according to her.

The day passed quickly, their final hours before three spent walking the beach and checking out the carts at the International Market place across from the Moana.

They stood waiting near the curb of Kalakaua, not far from where they'd started the day at the Blue Surf. The Colonels Bentley pulled under the Moana portico at precisely three o'clock. The big, elegant car stopped but nobody got out. The valet staff of the hotel ignored the vehicle, like it wasn't even there.

“Wait here,” Darren whispered to his friends, trepidation and a bit of nervous fear in his voice. He crossed the nearly empty street and walked up to the back door of the Bentley on the passenger side. The door thunked open, sounding more like a bank vault door than that of an automobile.

“Get in,” the Colonel said.

Darren slipped into the opulent soft leather seat, pulling the door closed behind him. It shut with an even deeper thunk than it had emitted when he opened it. He looked forward to where the driver sat, but the man remained stoic, not turning his head at all. Darren noticed that the passenger seat was also filled. He stared at the back of the man’s head until finally, he turned. It was the Duke. He smiled ever so slightly, but then turned back to look straight ahead like the driver.

“Here,” the Colonel said, extending a white envelope out between them.

Darren took the sealed envelope.

“Open it,” The Colonel said, sounding like he was talking to a fourth-grader or less.

Darren tore the envelope open, and cash poured out into his lap. He instantly grabbed the bills and started stuffing them back into the torn envelope.

“Four-hundred-and-twenty-dollars cash,” the Colonel went on, “not counting the hundred I gave you back at the Officer’s Club. Sergeant Cross has a check for a hundred and eighty dollars, what he calculates would be your remaining pay, with tips included, if you finished your tour there.”

“I don’t work there anymore?” Darren muttered, in shock, clutching the stack of twenty-dollar bills closely to his chest.

“No, your toast and Elvis isn’t coming,” The Colonel said, the tone of his voice turning from disgusted to angry. “The party’s over.”

“Where did the money come from if it isn’t from Sergeant Cross?” Darren asked.

“Get out,” the Colonel replied.

Darren didn't move, unable to quickly process what was happening.

"Open his door and toss him out," the Colonel instructed his driver.

Darren opened the door and got out. He stood at the opening.

"What..." he said, but that's as far as he got before the Colonel leaned over, grabbed the interior handle, and slammed the door shut. Darren jumped back as the big Bentley eased forward to re-enter the light traffic passing by on Kalakaua. Darren was surprised again, as he hadn't thought the car's motor was even running.

Darren watched the car disappear, heading back toward Diamond Head, the Duke's profile so identifiable behind the passenger seat window, but the man stared only straight ahead...

Darren looked over at his friends, waiting across Kalakaua to find out what had happened.

Then it hit him, and he was forced to smile to himself. He had the bonus; all his pay, and he was leaving for college in less than three weeks. Elvis Presley himself had taken care of everything, but it was the Duke, Darren knew, in his heart of hearts, who'd arranged it. Darren stuffed the money into his right front pocket, before winding his way across the street, trying to decide exactly what he might tell his friends. Saint Norbert College, located in DePere, Wisconsin, occupied most of his mind.

He was going to college and getting away from his parents, the local anti-Haole culture, and the subtly imprisoning paradise Hawaii offered, but at such a terrible price.