

VIII

A. J.
Llewellyn

Island
Bois

Swords



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Island Bois: Eight of Swords
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Island Bois: Eight of
Swords

By

A. J. Lewellyn

Dedication

To Madame Pele, Goddess of the Volcanoes

Author's Note

In the tarot deck, the Eight of Swords represents restriction. It is usually depicted with the frightening images of eight swords plunged into the ground surrounding a bound, helpless individual. The two of Swords, seen as a companion card to the Eight of swords, is traditionally viewed as restriction caused by others.

The Eight of swords implies self-imposed obstacles lying in the path of a goal. Decisions must be made, but the outcome of a cherished desire looks bleak.

The Mythic Tarot depicts a variation of this theme. It portrays Orestes, the son of the Greek king Agamemnon, dealing with thoughts of madness, the struggle to overcome the results of his own actions. The name Orestes itself translates to: *who overcomes mountains*.

Island Bois is based upon this interpretation of the Eight of Swords.

- A.J. Llewellyn

Chapter One

“What’s that smell?”

We came out of the airport terminal at *Hilo* on a dank, miserable looking day, the foul odor of rotten eggs heavy on the air.

“That’s vog. That’s volcano smell.” My traveling companion took a deep, appreciative breath and smiled at me. Byron Kojima was a good looking guy. He was a mix of *Hawaiian* and Japanese, he’d told me as we waited in line in *Honolulu* for the inter-island flight to the Big Island. His strong Japanese features gave him an unusual look since he was tall, over six feet. Most Japanese guys I met were much, much shorter. He pulled out his Blackberry, a new toy, I’d learned, and heaved his laptop messenger bag over his shoulder.

He sounded *Hawaiian* though. “Eh...my dad knows my schedule too well, he knows I’m already here, otherwise I’d say let’s go grab a coffee.”

I didn’t say anything because coffee with him

was the furthest thing from my mind. He had been fun to talk to, but I had flown thousands of miles to meet a different man, my new man. An online love about to become real. I didn't want to hurt Byron's feelings, so when he handed me his business card, I took it.

"Hey, I'm only here for the day, I leave at four. Got a couple of fires to put out, but I will be back on Thursday for the weekend and if you have time, I'd like to take you to dinner." He pushed his bag back over his shoulder again.

"Don't worry about the vog. You'll get used to it. *Kilauea* had a fresh eruption last Tuesday and that smell is sulphur dioxide. It even shut the whole park down. You can imagine the park rangers hated turning the tourists away."

"What did Madame *Pele* think of it?" I quipped. Even now I could see wisps of smoke coming out in puffy tendrils from the top of the volcano goddess's fiery home.

"Ah...Madame is probably enjoying the rest. It isn't easy being a gracious hostess every day, you know." Byron checked his watch. He was a coffee man, vice president of his family's Kona coffee farms. He was here to oversee a problem in one of their supermarket outlets. He had risen at four o'clock in the morning to take an *Aloha* Airlines flight at six, only to discover that *Aloha* Airlines had closed down that very morning.

“We can still use them for cargo, but I’ve lost all my frequent flyer points,” he told me on the plane. He’d been rerouted to Go! Airlines like hundreds of other inter-island folk, including me, and we’d had an interesting thirty minute discussion across the small *Hawaiian* island chain.

He extended his hand and I shook it. Something about him was sexy and inviting, yet I couldn’t tell if he was gay or not. He’d flirted with the female flight attendant, but spent the entire flight immersed in his conversation with me. I had no sense of his sexual orientation. Long flight delays for both of us with the closure of *Aloha* meant no food for several hours. We were starving.

Byron had opened up his laptop bag and produced chocolate-covered coffee beans from his family’s business and shared them with me.

“You not only provided the entertainment but the food as well,” I’d told him.

“It’s not entertainment until I do some pole dancing,” he responded, making me and the flight attendant laugh. She gave us the choice of tiny cups of orange juice or spring water while they bantered about the merits of brass versus plastic poles.

“Wood might cause splinters,” she joked, and moved on down the aisle to push her liquid wares on other eager travelers.

A black SUV approached and Byron grinned at

me. "Lovemore, it was a pleasure meeting you." His hand grip was warm. It almost wrapped itself around me. "You have got the coolest name of anyone I ever met."

"That's because you haven't met my sister."

"What's her name?"

"*Chinatsu*. It means a thousand summers."

"That's beautiful, too. But I still like your name." My hand was still in his. *Yep, gay for sure.* "Make sure you call me." His voice dropped. "And good luck with your guy, yeah?" Then he was gone. I was left alone with my mixed emotions, my broken luggage thanks to transit troubles, and I parked my butt on a stone bench and waited.

I stared into the path of oncoming traffic for the red pickup truck *Makaio* had described in our online chats and many phone conversations. I was a little upset that he hadn't been here to greet me, but, I reasoned with myself, my flight details had changed since I'd arrived in *Honolulu*, I should cut him some slack. I had not known about the *Aloha* closure until I'd arrived on the islands.

Though I'd called *Makaio* immediately, alerting him that I was stuck in *Honolulu*, he had not picked up his cell phone any of the times I'd called. I'd spent hours waiting in the terminal as almost every flight in and out of the city was delayed or rescheduled.

When Go! Airlines picked up my inter-island ticket, I didn't care that my arrival on the Big Island had been rerouted from *Kona* to *Hilo*. I had been so grateful for being one step closer to seeing my man, I ran all the way to the Go! terminal.

I checked my cell phone again, running through the text messages that had arrived since I'd boarded the flight in *Honolulu*. Still no word from him! Now this was weird. I had been prepared for just about anything thanks to the feverish emails and instant messages we'd exchanged for two months before finally talking on the phone, burning up each other's lines with talk of sex, books, love, more sex and life and love and yes, again more sex.

Makaio, a *Hawaiian* man of thirty-two, two years older than me, looked like the kind of guy you'd see in postcards of the islands way back before civilization claimed and tamed them. He was a landscaper whose thriving Big Island business kept him busy and prosperous. This wasn't my first trip to *Hawaii*, but my first to the Big Island. My friends thought I was crazy taking three weeks of unscheduled leave from my computer-based business to visit a guy I'd never met, but nobody had ever made me feel the way *Makaio* did with the mere sound of his voice and with his words.

Now I was feeling foolish. It was unusual for him not to even send a text message. Our last

words the previous night had contained our customary heat.

“I want to share myself with you, without any complications or drama,” he’d said. The drama was all his, work related chaos I was happy to talk to him about, letting him vent some steam when his clients at a big resort hotel development in *Kona* had chiseled thousands of dollars away from his landscaping budget.

“I want to explore your mind, body and soul. I hope we can explore every fantasy. I want you begging for more.” Those had been his final words before I went to sleep the night before my flight. We’d joked that he would be inside me the second he saw me, that we’d be arrested by the airport police.

About the only thing I was going to be arrested for at this rate was loitering. I checked my cell phone again. A rare burst of self pride stopped me from calling him again. Panic had started to settle in my chest and throat. My mother, smart Japanese-American woman that she was, had predicted my frisky little cross-country escapade was doomed.

No matter how many times I checked my cell phone, there was nothing new. My emails were all being re-routed to my cell. Again, nothing. A burr of activity. A text! A text was as good as a call. *Good news! Are you worried about your size? I*

deleted the cell phone spam. I might be Asian, but my penis wasn't. I was pretty well endowed and had never worried about my *size* until the plethora of emails and text messages started flooding my inbox.

I remembered the hours *Makaio* and I spent on the phone, pleasuring ourselves, imagining our hands being each other's, and I tried not to feel stupid and reckless. In the months we'd talked, he'd coaxed me into coming here to visit him. Our plan was that if things worked out between us, I would move to the big Island and move in with him. How foolish I suddenly felt.

When I called and got voicemail on his cell phone, I checked his land line again. I found those calls were being forwarded to his cell phone. I left a message telling him I was here.

And I waited some more.

Come on, Lovemore, I told myself. *Find the good and the positive here.* *Makaio* and I had decided, despite our mutual certainty that we would devour one another in an instant that I should check into a hotel or bed and breakfast until we knew for sure we wanted to be together. I had checked into the *Hilo Hawaiian* Hotel. He'd been upset, wanting me to stay closer to him, but there wasn't really anything very close to him, since he lived in the town of Captain Cook on the *Kona* side of the island.

And then my mother, who was in her own weird way supportive of my quest for love, had found friends of friends for me to stay with.

"If you like this man you can leave. If not, you will have a nice room in a family home," she'd said. The family lived a couple of miles from *Makaio* and we both felt encouraged by this arrangement.

I called my sister and best friend, *Chinatsu*, back in Los Angeles, and I could hear her huffing and puffing across the Pacific.

"Why are you calling me? You should be getting thoroughly fucked." She let loose a long moose laugh. "Or are you taking a well-earned breather?"

"He hasn't showed up. He hasn't taken my calls. Hasn't returned any. I'm getting a bad feeling about this, sis."

She was silent for a moment. "Are you kidding me?"

My lack of response told her everything.

"Hold on. I'm driving. I'm gonna pull over. I'm on PCH heading east. I'm going to pull a card." *Chin* and her damned tarot cards. "I just pulled the eight of swords." Her words were like thunder crackling over my head. "Oh, Lovemore. I don't know what to say."

I could hear the sounds of car horns and my sister muttered. "I gotta get back into the right

lane. Hang on.”

But I was anxious. “Eight of swords...that’s bad, right?” *Why, oh why hadn’t I let her give me a reading like she wanted to before I took this trip?*

“Bad.” My sister’s voice flitted in and out of range. “I’m going through a tunnel, babe. I might lose you.”

I’d already lost me and I was going through a long, dark tunnel myself. I knew without her telling me that, as unbelievable as it all seemed, I’d been duped.

Chapter Two

I did not want to spend the night with my parents' friends. I wanted to check into a nice clean, quiet hotel and regroup. But then I decided, *Makaio* might try and find me. *No, he won't*, I told myself. I walked across the road to Thrifty car rentals and listened to a lengthy and dire spiel about not taking the vehicle along Saddle Road and the necessity of island insurance if I didn't want to languish my vacation time away in *Hilo Jail*. I signed my life away, promising the sales assistant with the limp yellow hibiscus tucked behind her left ear that I would hand over my firstborn child to her. And I finally got a smile.

She handed me a paper wallet with a key and pointed in a random way to some vague spot in the middle distance. Okay. I trundled along with my broken suitcase and a guy in a business suit ran up beside me.

"The Thrifty lady was pissed. She liked you but you didn't ask her out."

I was taken aback. "What makes you say that?"

"She gave me her number to pass on to you. Rule number one in the islands. If a girl has a flower over her left ear it means she's single and looking. The right side means she's taken."

I almost said, "I'd rather have your phone number," but I was in enough romantic trouble as it was. For the second time that day, I took a business card and pocketed it. I was sorry now that I hadn't gone for a cup of coffee with Byron. His warm brown eyes and easy laugh flashed in my mind.

"Thanks," I told the businessman who ran down a line of identical looking cars. I located my car, a dirty blue Neon. It stunk of cigarettes and according to the man about to wash it, the car was not available. I stared at the line of shiny new, ready-to rent vehicles. Yep. That Thrifty lady hated me for sure. Hating everything about *Hawaii* now...the thick vog burning my throat and eyes, my broken suitcase, my tattered hopes, I struggled back to the Thrifty kiosk. My *Hawaiian* Holiday was turning into a nightmare.

This time, I found a hot island guy manning the desk. Since he wasn't wearing a flower anywhere on his head, I assumed I was safe, especially when I noticed his wedding ring.

"Sorry about that, sir." He handed me a new paper wallet and a new key. He'd upgraded me to

a convertible Chrysler PT Cruiser that had only one hundred and fifty miles on it. I sat in the driver's seat, luxuriating in the lingering scent of new car. It was not something I had ever experienced in all my years of being a driver. I always salivated over other people's new car smells. What to do next? My cell phone was turned on even though I was aware that *Makaio*, if there even *was* a *Makaio*, would probably not be calling.

I smoothed out the car rental map of the island and pondered my choices. Not taking Saddle Road, a long almost straight passage that cut right through the island, meant taking a zigzag method of roads that would probably take all day. The scent of new car was in my mind and I felt the need to get out on the open road. I would not heed my instinct to head to the nearest big hotel in *Hilo* and hide inside some expensive sheets.

Tapping the wheel with my key, I studied the map again. I already knew from obsessive research there was nothing wrong with Saddle Road. The US military had a base in there and did a lot of weapons testing on it, but from everything I'd read most of the island military was either on active duty in Iraq or poised in the main military base in *Kaneohe*, on the island of *Oahu*, in various stages of deployment. I was prepared to take my chances. I would drive to the other side of the

island and meet my parents' friends.

Pulling out of the airport road, I lowered the roof and felt an intense pressure leaving me as I took Saddle Road heading west. The air was thick with vog and a permanent drizzle, but I wanted the roof down. The drizzle came and went, though the vog got thicker as I came closer to the volcano.

I'd read all the stories about Madame *Pele* and how she frequently appeared as an old woman along this road, demanding rides. Woe betide the fool who denied her. I felt like enough bad luck was with me so I kept a close eye out for her and felt a sharp stab of disappointment when there were no little ladies anywhere in sight.

In my research, I'd learned that military police sometimes followed drivers along Saddle Road. Again, I was out of luck until I passed a roadside shrine for a twelve year old boy who'd been shot down in his hang glider for flying too close to the military base. I'd pulled over to the side of the road and crossed over to examine the macabre sight of the boy's torn and tattered football jersey hanging above a stone monument littered with flowers, candles, a statue of the Virgin Mary when a police vehicle pulled up beside me.

With visions idling in my mind of my parents having to fly to the island to bail me out of jail, I kept calm as they beckoned me to the passenger cop's window. As I approached, the window came

down.

“What are you doing out here? That your car over there?”

“Yes, sir.” I was trying hard to stop myself from shaking.

“You headed to *Kona*?”

“I’m staying in Captain Cook, just heading there.”

The two cops looked at each other.

“Get back in your car and keep driving. This air isn’t safe to breathe.” The window went back up and I returned to the car, not particularly enjoying the specter of the petrified trees drowned by lava or the miles and miles of nothing but boulders and rubble. I was starting to think that hotel room in *Hilo* sounded better and better. I was anxious to get off Saddle Road now and a good two hours later I was on the *Hawaii* Belt Road, swinging down towards to *Kailua-Kona* coast.

And there was not a trace of vog.

I found my way to Captain Cook, a sweet little upcountry town, naturally named after the British explorer. *Makaio* claimed to live close by it and my parents’ friends, the Kooyoshi family, were to be my hosts for the next few days.

Charmed by the town built entirely of lava, the green foliage of every plant a particularly brilliant, bold shade of green thanks to the rich nutrients of the volcanic soil, I kept stopping to look all around

me. No dirt, no grass, but it was beautiful and quaint. I pulled up in front of a sprawling ranch house on *Makai* Avenue and checked the street number. Twelve. Yep. This was it. I pushed open the gate as I heard a squawk and a loud thwacking sound and from around the side of the house a large white chicken ran toward me.

Headless. I stared in horror as the chicken ran in circles, brushed past me and back through my legs, leaving a bloody trail on my pants. It fell across my feet, its heart clearly pounding in its chest. An old Asian man peered around the corner, the chicken's blinking head in his hand.

"AARGGGGGH!" I screamed and turned around, running for my car. I started up the engine as the old man picked up the lifeless bird carcass and I took off for the highway again and drove, in tears, away from the house, away from the horror. I pulled over to the side of the road, collecting my breath.

I knew where *Makaio* lived. I had his address. He didn't know I had his exact address, but he had described so much about his street that I was able to pinpoint his home via a topographical map I had purchased online. Turning my car back around, I headed to the neighborhood where my possibly ghost lover lived. I had to find out. I had to know. Who was the man who'd stolen my heart?

Chapter Three

I called my sister and told her I was planning to go to *Makaio's* house.

"It's the only thing to do," she agreed. "I'll pull a card and see what I get." She asked me for his address and I recited it to her, losing cell phone range as I veered into the mountains of *Kealakekua*.

On his street, I slowed down and was surprised at how unattractive and half-baked the houses all looked against the staggering backdrop of *Mauna Kea* mountain. Some of them looked like they were ready to fall apart. Some were even missing glass in the window frames and cheap curtains hung in the windows. These weren't people with money, I could tell. These were reclusive, possibly longtime island folk, and I was chasing a dream.

I stopped several houses before his, fingering my cell phone screen. His photo was the first thing I saw when I flipped it on. His big smile, black hair and gleaming brown eyes usually melted any qualms I had. Not this time. We'd talked last

night, planning the moment we saw each other. Then I was chastising myself for having no faith. *There had to be a mistake. There was a good reason he hadn't come to meet me.*

High above the street, a rainbow arced over the mountains that framed the upcountry area and I felt a tingle of anticipation ripple through me. I was really here. My emotions were at war with my head. *Stupid man*, I told myself. *What did you think, that he'd stroll out the front door and drag you inside for some hot man on man loving? Yes! I did. That was everything he'd promised me.*

I re-read his last text on my Blackberry. *We will do all the things we said we would do to each other. We will be lovers. It will happen!* It was so hard when I was so near, and yet so far from *Makaio*.

Should I knock on the door of the house? It, like the rest of my arrival so far, wasn't at all what I'd expected. It was very suburban and, in truth, dilapidated. *Makaio's* red pickup wasn't in the driveway.

My *Island Boi*, as his computer screen name was called, had pushed and prodded for me to come. Yeah, we hadn't met and yeah, my friends said I was crazy. But after three months of the most intense, erotic correspondence and conversation I'd ever had with any man, I had to come and see him. I wanted to feel his hands and mouth on me.

My expectations had been high. We had

resisted phone sex until the final two weeks before my departure. Not my doing. I would have been having phone sex all along. At the age of thirty, I was fully engaged in the pursuit of happiness, of happily ever after. Most of my experiences online hadn't even amounted to *happy for now*.

I hadn't banked on meeting somebody like *Makaio* and I was a surprise in his world, too. A sports memorabilia collector, he'd bought some things from my online business store and after a few respectful emails were exchanged, friendlier ones flew across time and space. Within a week we were saying things to one another I'd never said to anybody.

Would I finally get to meet my *Island Boi*? When we started having phone sex, he told me he might look *Hawaiian* and Asian, but warned, *I have an Asian Penis*. I didn't care when he told me it *only extends six inches*. Frankly, this suited me fine. I am no size queen and when you love somebody, as I believed I loved him, size didn't matter. Only what he did with that Asian Penis mattered.

Loved him... now I knew I'd lost my mind. What had I been thinking?

My cell phone vibrated, surprising me as I'd lost reception the second I'd entered the town of *Kealakekua*. I checked the readout. A text from my sister Chin.

I pulled a card. You're not gonna believe it. I got the

Eight of Swords again! What you want is not within reach. I say take the plunge and knock on the door. I have his address and will send help if I never hear from you again.

My sister had a sense of humor, that's for sure. I took her advice and walked to the door. I knocked, but nobody was home. I knew it was his place from his description of being the only house on the street with a huge array of succulents planted in the hardened lava. He told me his sole preoccupation, before he met me, was tending his garden. As I waited by the door, I noticed an old Japanese woman coming out of the house next door. I was going to ask her about *Makaio*, but she vanished into a beat up old white pickup and roared off down the street.

Disappointed, I went back to my car. I had always sensed *Makaio's* presence, weird as it may sound. I could go online and know without looking if he was around. I knew if it was him when the phone rang. The funny thing was, sitting here in front of his alleged house, I didn't feel him at all. I got back into the car, debating my next move.

* * * *

The *Hilo* Hawaiian Hotel was as pretty as it looked online. I had driven back along Saddle Road

without incident this time, booked a room via my cell phone once I was within range close to *Hilo*, and I agreed to a four night minimum stay for a great deal of a hundred bucks a night.

A cute valet guy took possession of my car and I strolled into the enormous, elegant reception area. A pretty girl in a long *holoku* dress greeted me with a tray of tropical juices and I picked one up as I waited to check in. The juice was a thoughtful, classy touch considering the vog had left a dry tickle in my throat. I sipped the cool liquid, enjoying the soft *Hawaiian* music drifting in from the outdoor bar area. I paused, trying to identify the song.

Kalua. I smiled to myself. I recognized it from the old movie *Bird of Paradise*. My mother and I had watched it a million times. Debra Paget played a young South Seas maiden whose village is in the path of a volcanic eruption. To appease the angry volcano gods, she elects to throw herself into the fiery pit as a human sacrifice.

How apt, I thought, considering Madame *Pele* was still making charred art out of her volcanic home. This band had a sense of humor.

I'd stepped forward to the smiling concierge when a voice said, "Well, look what the vog blew in."

"Byron!"

"You look happy to see me." He lounged

against the check-in counter, laughing. He gave me another of his lingering handshakes and when our eyes connected, I knew for sure that he was gay and I knew he liked me.

“What are you doing here?” I asked him.

“About to have lunch with a supermarket manager. We’re a man down this week and he hasn’t been getting his supplies.”

“Ah. One of the fires you had to put out.”

He smiled. “Things are still a little smoky. I had to do some fast talking. If I can’t dazzle them with that, I stuff them full of food. The restaurant here is excellent. What room are you in? If I have time after lunch, you wanna get that coffee?”

“I’d love it.”

The concierge told me that my room overlooked the ocean. “You won’t notice the vog at all.”

“Actually, it’s not so bad.”

“What a weirdo,” Byron deadpanned.

“You’re the one who told me I’d get used to it.”

He laughed. “Give me your room number, weirdo.”

I gave it to him. “Just so you know, my last name is Kendo.”

“Very nice. I hope I’ll be able to call you. If not, I hope you’ll be free to see me on Thursday.”

“I’m here for four nights,” I told him. “I’ll make time for you.”

He grinned. "So I'll know where to find you."

A big *Hawaiian* guy in an *Aloha* shirt and Big Daddy black pants came lumbering into the spacious lobby.

"There's my hot date," Byron muttered, and went off to meet his lunch companion. I took the elevator up to the seventh floor and was delighted to find that my room was elegant and lovely, overlooking the Queen *Lili'uokalani* Gardens directly below me, the ocean to my left and Coconut Island in the distance. I opened up the sliding glass doors of my private *lanai* to the majestic green foliage outside, marveling at the tropical tapestry before me.

My previous visits to *Oahu* had been fun but I had never had a sense of Old *Hawaii* before. It was here now and I stood, mesmerized as the sky started to deepen to a smoky gray. I thought about Byron and his business fire. There was something quite intriguing about him. It was flickers. Yes, that was it. One second he could look Caucasian, the next, so Japanese. I realized the smoke was from *Kilauea* and he was right, I was used to the smell now.

I was really here. I felt the tension fall from my shoulders and, although the smell of vog was strong, it comforted me knowing that *Madame Pele's* erupting volcano was telling me life goes on. I wanted to shower and order room service. I

wanted to be in my room in case Byron called me and then my room phone rang. It was Byron.

“Hey, you must be starving. Come down to the Queen’s Court restaurant, lunch is on me. Me and my friend Nappy would love to have you join us.”

Screw the shower, I decided, and ran down to the lobby.

Nappy, the big *Hawaiian*, turned out to be a wonderful guy with a large family he liked to talk about in detail.

“It’s Monday, brah,” he grinned. “Crab legs and steak. You’re in luck!”

Lunch was buffet-style and I gorged on crab and steak and everything else my eyes told my stomach it needed badly. Now. Multiple times. Beer or wine came free with the meal and I allowed my new friends to persuade me to try some Fire Rock Pale Ale. I was feeling no pain after two of those. The good vibes lasted until my loose lips prompted me to tell them my *Makaio* story and I saw the looks of mounting horror on Byron and Nappy’s previously happy faces.

Oh yeah, I sunk my ships.

I fretted that I had said inappropriate things in front of Byron’s business associate, but Nappy was the sheer essence of *Aloha*.

“What dis buggah’s name?” he frowned, and I could imagine him hunting down *Makaio* and giving him a permanent limp.

“*Makaio?* Dat be *Hawaiian* for Matthew.” I adored Nappy’s *Hawaiian*-speak. “You got one pitcha dere you can show me?”

I flipped open my cell phone and he took a look at tall, dark and...missing.

He frowned. “Yeah...he be a good lookin’ buggah. I seen him someplace, fo’ah sho’...don’t remembah where dat be...”

Byron left some twenties on the table and we walked out of the restaurant. I was feeling a little light headed and when Nappy toddled off, Byron walked me to the elevator and accompanied me up to my room.

“Wow, fantastic view.” His gaze swiveled to me. “Are you okay?”

I nodded and he came and sat beside me on the bed as we stared out at the gorgeous trees. Just another day in paradise.

“No, you’re not.” Byron’s voice was warm in the increasingly chilly day. I remembered reading online that *Hilo* and the volcano area got very cold in the late afternoon and evening.

“Yeah, maybe I’m not. You want another beer?”

“Save them for later. The day’s still young.” He lay back on the bed and yawned.

“Are *you* okay?” I asked.

“Me? I’m just tired.” He scratched at his head, raised his arms and stretched. I curled up beside him, my head on my arm, oddly comfortable lying

on a bed with him.

"I'm not judging you. Don't even think that for a minute." He sat up now and looked at me. "But this guy took things way too far. Show me that photo of him."

I showed him the photo on my cell phone and a couple of photos I'd downloaded from my computer onto laser paper. He snatched at the thick file I had of printed emails and instant messages and the expression on his face was one of deep sadness.

"He's a good looking guy." Byron glanced at me. "For what it's worth, I think he'll contact you. If you've been obsessively talking for three months, he'll start jonesing for you big time." He gestured toward my file. "He'll want the connection to remain intact, but he'll come up with some lame excuse why he can't see you."

"Don't get sucked into having phone sex in your hotel room with him. Keep it brief. Get him off the phone. Don't give him even a taste of what you normally give him. Make him sweat for it. Make him see you or leave you alone."

"You sound like you've been through this yourself."

"I have." He shrugged. "I'm with a good man now, but I've had my fair share of losers." He bent down and gave me a very sweet kiss. "For what it's worth, I would never have led you on then left

you here alone.”

“Thanks.”

He touched my cheek. “I still want to see you when I get back Thursday.”

Of course you do, I thought. You’re gorgeous and you’re taken. Why do I always attract unavailable men?

“Don’t get up. I can see myself out. Stay comfy.” Byron left me alone with my thoughts and I stared back out at my hundred buck a night view.

And then my cell phone rang. I reached out a lazy hand, checking the readout.

Makaio. My heart rate increased at frenetic pace as I scanned his text message. Something came up. Had to leave town. I actually laughed out loud at that one. I scrolled down. Will be back in two days. Will call. I miss you so much.

Dropping the phone on my bedside table, I turned my face back to the swaying palm trees. *Lame* didn’t even begin to address that text message. I kept my gaze on the swaying palm fronds that lulled me into a fitful sort of peace, until I slipped into a well-earned sleep.

Chapter Four

My lack of response sent *Makaio* into overdrive. I kept hearing my cell phone buzz and I ignored it. Actually, I was too zonked to even deal with it. It was like a persistent fly buzzing around my head. And then the phone in my room started ringing. It was late and it was dark when I picked it up, still gripped by a dead sleep.

"Hello?"

"Angel, it's me."

I sighed. How in the world had he found me?

"I called the people you were supposed to stay with, they said you never showed up and I figured you might have checked into that hotel. Why haven't you returned my calls? And why in the world did you book in *Hilo*?"

Checking the clock beside me, I saw illuminated numbers shift to eight eleven p.m.

"*Makaio*, what's going on? Why didn't you call me and tell me you were going to be out of town?"

"Something came up..."

"So you said."

"Look, don't be like that."

I said nothing. I waited and outside I could see night and her translucent veil of stars. It took my breath away. I had never seen so many stars, huge and bright and plentiful. It was a humbling sight.

"Please angel...I had to leave town. I'm in *Maui*. My Aunt, you know, I told you about her...My Aunt *Leilani* is sick..."

Something in my brain switched on. Aunt? There was no aunt. In all our emails and calls he'd stressed his lack of any family. No mother, no father, no sisters, no brothers...no *ohana*. No family.

I switched on the bedside lamp to rifle through the emails where we'd talked about family. He was rambling and I wasn't listening to a word. I glanced at the phone and realized his telephone number was showing up on the surprisingly sophisticated telephone. *My God, it was his number, his home number, the one that he always called me from.* He probably thought it would never show up on a hotel room phone. This jackass was in town!

"You wanna have some phone fun?" His voice was silky.

"No...I gotta go." I hung up on him and hoofed it to the valet guys. I was going to head over to *Makaio's* house and catch this lying sack of shit in

person. Outside however, it was dark and with few street lights, the idea of driving across Saddle Road without a single light and no amenities for a good two hours...I balked at my impulse.

Driving all the way across the island held no appeal, despite my burning need to confront *Makaio*, if that was even his name. That could wait.

The valet guy was waiting for me to take possession of my car. His expression was stern, but he was a good looking guy with spiky black hair, jets of black brow across both eyes which were a startling hazel and green combination. I've always been a sucker for a cute guy, so I gave him a couple bucks and told him I'd changed my mind.

"Hey," he whispered in my ear when I handed him back my car key. "I get off work in two hours. You like to have a drink?"

"I like." I grinned at the cute valet, whose name was Justino. He took my name and room number and two hours later we were driving back toward *Kona* in his car, a ramshackle beach cruiser that had a surprising amount of power for a vehicle that looked like it was held together with rubber bands.

"*Boa noite*," he grinned at me.

"Is that good evening?"

He nodded. "In Portuguese."

I was intrigued. I'd never been out with a

Portuguese man before, but my internet wanderings had led me to a few who seemed notorious cruisers.

“In the morning I have to be back at work and I can drive you,” he told me, and I was impressed with his assumption that he was going to get lucky with me. His hand went between my legs and he worked on the zipper of my jeans, his eyes never straying from the road. His fingers snaked into my boxer-briefs and he tsk-tsked over my iffy stiffy.

“How long has it been since you had a man?” he asked me.

“Too long,” I gasped as I became rock hard and his head went straight to my crotch...as he was driving! I helped steer the wheel to bring Justino’s car to the shoulder of the road, my hips and ass bucked and jumped under his tongue and determined strokes. He licked the head of my cock, ran his tongue along the sides of my shaft and held my balls in his hand as he started to suck in an expert way. When I started to come, he took his mouth off me, laughing as I shot all over the place.

“You make a lot of come. You need.” He stroked me to get the last of my juices, his large, expressive eyes lowered in concentration.

“For one hundred dollars you can come in my mouth, for five hundred, you can fuck me in the

ass. I don't usually like bumming, but for you..." He shrugged.

Bumming? I lost my interest in going anywhere with him, but we were both covered in my come. *What a crazy experience! Are there any normal gay guys in Hawaii?* My thoughts strayed to Byron and I wondered if his boyfriend appreciated what a nice guy he had there.

"You want me to pay you?" I asked Justino, who let go of my cock. He reached into the glove compartment and brought out a box of tissues. We wiped ourselves down and found ourselves laughing.

"Nah...I like you. You're *meigo*...sweet. We can have fun. You pay me if it's good. Yeah?"

"No. I'm going back to the hotel."

"Nah...come on, we make fun time." He gave me a hot kiss that left no doubt that we would have fun and he swung the car back on the road. I was a little more relaxed now. I let him chatter about his life, his Portuguese parents and their difficulty assimilating into the country island life of *Hawaii*. He talked about his job as we took a long, circuitous route to *Kona* and a bar called Mask. When we walked in it was obviously gay, with your standard gay bar karaoke and some twink in a pink tutu singing a Linda Ronstadt song, *Carmelita*.

I bought Justino a glass of wine and I stuck to

beer. We propped ourselves up at the horseshoe-shaped bar and he leaned into me as we perused the *pupus* menu, ordering some *poke* and tuna sashimi.

Justino got friskier with his second glass of wine and, after butchering a couple of songs on the karaoke machine, he settled down at a small table with me, giving me long, wet kisses with his hot, searching tongue. I was surprised we weren't fogging up the windows, but a quick glance told me everybody in the place was getting down and dirty.

"It's the only gay bar on the island," the bar tender told me as I took my mouth off my hot Portuguese man long enough to hit the bar and pay for another round of drinks. Justino lived close by. He was renting a room in a house on the beach *com amigos*, with friends, who turned out to be a ton of other guys with a lousy grip on hygiene, but a rocking taste in music.

He introduced me to everybody and invited me back to his room. As Cesaria Evoria sang her heart out over the stereo system, his amigos laughed and chattered as we got down to some man on man action.

"Rico cú!" His hands stroked my ass.

"What does that mean?"

"Nice bum!"

Justino had a nice body. He was a little bit

chunky for my taste, but he was thick in the right place, too. His cock was wonderful. What wasn't wonderful was his room and its stinky bed sheets. I doubted if they'd ever been washed, and there was a peculiar energy in the room as we lay down and gobbled at each other's cocks. I forgot about esthetics and really enjoyed putting him in my mouth, and I was relieved when he didn't take his mouth off me when I came this time. He put one finger into my ass, sending my orgasm into a spiraling high...higher than the stars over Coconut Island, and I struggled not to think of *Makaio*.

My brain screamed at the universe as I slaved over Justino's still rigid cock. It was a beauty. Uncut, big, hard and yet appreciative of my efforts, it nestled between big balls that kept me thoroughly entertained. When he came, his caramel colored thighs closed themselves around my head as he moaned.

"Oh...oh...that was good." His body shook and when his quaking subsided, he scooted over me, his head dipping to my chest. He licked his forefinger, rubbing it across my right nipple. It made my engine rev all over again and we started another round, Justino poised over my body as we slaked our mutual hunger for cock.

"Fuck," he gasped as his cock tore down my throat a second time. We slept entwined, but the

stinky sheets and a cold, weird presence at the foot of the bed kept waking me.

At one point, I was convinced somebody else was in the room and I awoke to a frigid presence that I could swear was pacing back and forth at the foot of the bed. Justino slept like the dead until the morning, around five in the morning when he shook me awake.

“Wanna take a shower?”

“Sure.” I stroked his body, but felt him stiffen. “Want to shower together?”

He shook his head. “You go first.”

My hand went between his thighs, but he shrugged my fingers away from him.

“Not now. We had fun last night. Say, did the ghost wake you up?”

“The ghost? You mean that’s what that weird feeling was? The cold energy at the foot of the bed?”

“Yeah, you felt it too, huh? He only comes when I’m getting laid. He’s an old perv. Dead, and he’s still a perv.” He got out of bed and walked naked out of the room. I took the opportunity to check my cell phone. No messages from *Makaio*.

I didn’t know whether to be pissed or extremely relieved. He was a phony, a fraud, but I’d met a different *island boi* in Justino. Maybe I could think about *Makaio* as being a conduit for bringing me to the islands. We’d had fun. Maybe

we could have dinner tonight. Maybe we could start something together. I swung my feet off the bed, my toes connecting with something rubbery on the floor.

“Oh, I see you found my Baby Jesus butt plug.” Justino was back with a grubby towel wrapped around his waist and I decided to wait for a shower back at the hotel.

“This is the Baby Jesus?” I asked him.

“Yeah. My ex calls him the Ass Whisperer.”

I laughed. “It turns you on having Jesus in your ass?”

“I’m into baby celebrities. I have a whole dildo crèche. Baby Cher, Baby Dolly Parton...you want a shower because I have to go back to work. I’m pulling a double today.”

Was he kidding about the baby celebrity butt plugs? “I’ll shower at the hotel. You got time for breakfast?”

He shook his head and I tried not to feel disappointment as we threw on clothes and headed back to *Hilo*.

Things were a little odd between us, that morning after awkwardness, but we soon smoothed it over with coffee I insisted on buying for him at a corner bakery, along with a bag of chocolate coconut muffins we munched on the road.

“You’re *gostoso*,” he suddenly said.

"What does that mean?" I was licking shreds of coconut from my fingertips.

"Hunky."

We swapped grins. I was encouraged. He dropped me close to the hotel since he wasn't supposed to fraternize with clientele, and we exchanged a hot little kiss.

"I want to see you tonight, Justino."

"Maybe."

"Maybe?"

"Yeah. Let's play it by ear, okay?"

If he'd hauled off and slapped me it couldn't have hurt more.

"I'll come and find you."

"Look. I like you. I'm not looking for anything serious. We had a good time. We'll see how it goes."

"Okay." I wrestled with the ancient, heavy handle and opened the car door.

"I'm sorry." Justino reached across me, pinning me to the seat with his arm. "You're a tourist. I wasn't looking for...you know. A relationship. I thought you knew that. Maybe we can have fun again."

What hung between us were the unspoken words, *if I don't find anything better*. I went to my room feeling pretty damned weird. There was not a single message waiting for me on the hotel phone and my room felt damp and dank. I had

forgotten to close the sliding doors the previous night and I hung out on the *lanai* for a moment, watching my evolving view of island splendor soaking up a tropical shower under a cloud-covered sun.

I called my sister and left her a message that I was alive and not suicidal. I felt in a strange, disembodied limbo. It had been so long since I'd taken a vacation, and all my plans had centered around *Makaio*. I had intentionally not scheduled any activities that didn't involve setting my feet on the ground. And now, the island and my time were my own. I dug through my suitcase and pulled out the two island guidebooks *Makaio* had insisted I wouldn't need and felt grateful that my misguided emotions hadn't rendered me completely stupid.

A shower. That would be a good start. I stood under a strong, hot jet spray for a long, long time, wondering why I kept picking unavailable men. I reasoned with myself that maybe Justino would change his mind. Maybe *Makaio* would not turn out to be a lying sack of shit after all.

Yeah, right. And seven years' leadership under the Bush administration would all turn out to be a horrible dream.

The shower helped buoy my spirits once again. I towel dried and dressed in long shorts and a button-down T-shirt and flipped through the

guidebooks. It was actually a nice feeling to have the whole day in front of me. Where would I go? What would I see? My gaze fell on the folder of emails and IMs. *Emotional spam*. Curiosity had me switching on my laptop and I was pleased to find the hotel had WIFI so I was able to log onto my email account quickly through some local free service called Shakanet.

Not one message from *Makaio*. The man who wasn't there anymore. My upbeat mood was slipping into despair again when my cell phone rang. It was my father. My father, the hero, the best friend my sister and I could ever have had growing up.

"Lovemore?"

"Dad." Emotion choked me.

"Oh, my son..." He paused and I could hear my mother in the background. "Chin told us what happened. Are you okay?"

"I'm fine."

"Your mother says she wants to kick this guy's ass."

"That sounds like her," I laughed.

"Why you didn't go to our friends in Captain Cook?"

I told him the chicken story and my father sounded appalled.

"Ugh. Gruesome. Geez, your vacation sounds like a horror movie." He was repeating everything

I said to my mother. My parents were married via a proxy. She had been a picture bride from Okinawa. They didn't think it was too farfetched for me to fly across the Pacific in search of happiness, they were just dismayed at the results.

"I wish you liked girls. Your life would be so much easier, son."

"Dad, no matter whether I'm gay or straight, the world is a tough place. It's hard to find love."

"I know, son. I had hopes..." his voice trailed off. "I hoped you'd finally found your someone. I am proud of you for trying, Lovemore. Next time, you make the guy fly to San Diego, to meet you at your parents' house. Then we know what's what."

"You've got it, dad."

My parents had really taken it hard when I came out about three years ago. My mother said she'd always suspected the truth. My father blamed his lack of affection toward me as I was growing up. It took a lot of convincing to make him understand that Chin and I both felt very loved. We adored our parents.

"This is not your failing," I'd told him. "This is who I am."

My mother held out hope that my sister would get married and bless her with grandchildren and that maybe, just maybe, one day I would adopt a kid or two with the man of my dreams.

My father's voice broke into my thoughts.

"You're a hunky guy son, you'll find somebody else."

"Hunky guy? Is that you or mom talking?"

He laughed. "That was your mother, but I back her up on that."

"You're the second guy to call me hunky today," I told him, glad that he had called.

"You didn't waste any time." My father chuckled, repeating my side of the conversation to my mom who was shouting about kicking somebody's ass again. "You're a fine man, don't let anyone capsizes you, son," were my father's parting words.

I felt such serious rejection and pangs of withdrawal from my epic sessions with *Makaio*. God, so much time wasted. I ignored the thick pile of printed protestations of enduring devotion. They were my only evidence that I hadn't imagined it. It had been real. Well, not really. In some small hole in the universe it had been real. I wondered what was going through *Makaio's* mind.

The odd thing was I truly suspected he felt bad. I had no idea why he allowed this to go as far as he had, and I should have been angry, but I wasn't. Oh, it went in waves. The disbelief, the hope, then anger, back to disbelief. *You didn't give me a chance*, I wanted to scream at him. *No matter who you really are, maybe I still could have loved you.* I

didn't believe it had all been a game. I believed he felt...*something* for me. I just had to let go of the idea that it could ever be more than that *something*.

I opened my guidebooks and planned my day. It was not going to involve driving back to Captain Cook and that strange, unsettling street that may or may not be his.

My cell phone rang. It was Nappy, Byron's supermarket manager friend. A text. *Your guy Makaio, I know where I've seen that face before. Call me ASAP.*

Chapter Five

It took all my concentration not to drive like a maniac to the address Nappy had given me for the market he managed, the KTA Superstore. My sister and I had been raised Buddhists and my parents had a very strong sense of spirituality. When I parked in the lot, squeezed between a woman selling live, squawking chickens out of the back of a dilapidated truck with a camper shell and a van full of kids fighting with each other, I thanked my lucky stars I was neither a farmer nor a parent.

I found Nappy standing beside a new display of coffee being assembled and the sign *Anuenue Farms Presents Fresh Kona Coffee*.

"Aloha," Nappy greeted me as the man on the floor unpacked cups, thermoses and bags of coffee. The man on the floor looked up. Byron.

"Hey," he grinned. "Didn't expect to see you here."

"I didn't expect to see you here, either."

We were smiling at each other in such a loopy way, I knew it wasn't my imagination. Byron liked me. And I liked him. Lord, I wanted to swap spit with this guy. I tried not to think of Justino's stinky sheets, his Baby Jesus butt plug or his caustic about-face on our drive back to *Hilo* in the morning.

I forced myself to make conversation with Byron and not just gaze upon his good looks. "Am I in time for a cup of coffee?"

"Absolutely. Give me five minutes." He scrambled to assemble his wares and Nappy tugged at my collar.

I followed him to a small dark office. "I know who your guy *Makaio* is."

My heart felt like it stopped. Then it started again. Talk about from zero to infinity.

"This is hard, but the guy wants to meet you."

"What's hard about it?"

Nappy sighed. "The person you have been writing to...look, I promised I wouldn't say more. Just be at Bears Coffee on *Keawe* Street at twelve o'clock. At least some of your mystery will be solved. Did you bring the photos of the guy with you?"

"Yes, I did. And Nappy, thank you." I paused. "I think."

"You'll be fine." He stared past me and I knew his focus was on Byron. "That's a good man out

there. He needs a friend. Not a headache.”

“Understood.” *I think.*

Nappy smiled at me. “Let me know how you make out.”

Back in the grocery aisle, Byron handed me a paper cup and the coffee was good. Better than good. It was fantastic. He looked pleased when I told him it was the best cup of coffee I ever tasted.

“What’s going on?” he asked me, his voice low.

I told him about Nappy arranging the meeting for me. Byron poured me a second cup.

“Man, I hate the idea of you going out there alone. Look, I wasn’t supposed to be here today but my father insisted I fly back to take care of this display myself. I don’t fly back until late tonight. Please tell me you’ll have dinner with me.”

“There isn’t anything I’d love to do more.”

“Cool. You call me when you’ve met this guy. Okay?”

“Okay.”

“Tell me about it later, I want to hear everything. I gotta charm the hand cart crowd now. If I can’t dazzle them with my flattery, I’ll fool them with my footwork.”

“You do that.” I laughed, but in truth I dreaded both unraveling the mystery of *Makaio* and also solving only half the puzzle and never knowing the rest of the story. I didn’t know what I was in for as I negotiated the twists and turns on the

hand drawn map Nappy had given me. I loved Hawaiian directions. They would say turn left at the Tip Top bread shop, not turn left on *Kamehameha Avenue*.

My sister called with the text message: *I pulled The Hermit, a secret to be revealed*. I pulled over to the side of the road when I realized I'd missed a turn and texted back. *Where was your magic before I came here?*

She did not respond.

I got back on the road. Then I was there and, with ten minutes to spare, I saw an older gentleman waiting at a street side table, drinking coffee, flicking through a newspaper. My heart sank when he turned and looked at me. It couldn't be, but it was.

Makaio.

* * * *

The man rose and shook my hand. He had to be in his seventies, easy. Time might have been kind to him in maintaining his hair color and good looks, but he was still, well...*old*. "Thank you for coming. I'm sorry we had to meet under these circumstances."

He held a chair out for me and I absorbed two things in the same second. One, his hands were shaking. From nerves, I knew. Two, his voice was

not the voice I'd exchanged all that scorching passion with night and day.

I sat beside him and a waitress scuttled out. "You want coffee?"

"Thank you," I told her, and she raced off with a look bordering on hatred. Now I was feeling really uncomfortable.

"May I ask your name?"

"I prefer not. This is difficult enough as it is." The old man shifted in his seat. I couldn't help staring at his face. "Did you bring the photos?"

"Yes." I slid across the two print outs I'd brought with me and flipped open my cell phone, showing him the picture there. He studied them for so long, and in such profound silence, I almost screamed in frustration.

"Are these photographs of you?" I ventured, finally.

"Oh, yes. It's me. About a hundred years ago." He smiled. Nice teeth.

The waitress came out with two cups of the house brew and it was terrible. I made a mental note to mention this to Byron. He needed to work his charm on the Bears. Maybe even the grouchy waitress.

"How long have you been corresponding with this...person?" The man sipped his coffee and I knew he was as uncomfortable as I was.

"Three months."

“And how did it start?”

I ran through my spiel on how he'd bought a couple of rare Japanese instruments from me through an online auction. I told him how things zoomed into the romantic stratosphere faster than a speeding bullet.

He asked a lot of questions about the online auction and asked if I might be able to trace 'Makaio' via a credit card used for his purchases. It was a good question, but a closed road.

“He registered with our company for two online transaction bids, paid with a Western Union money transfer. I shipped the items to a post office in *Kona*.” I paused for a moment.

“What?” the man prompted.

“I just realized what a difficult time he gave us because we don't normally ship to a post office address, but he made an extra payment for insurance and delivery confirmation and I sweated until his packages arrived in *Kona*. Once he received them, he shut down his auction account, but our conversations continued.”

“What did he purchase? I'm curious.”

“A *Shakuhachi* flute.”

“A what?”

“It's a very rare type of instrument. An Endblown Japanese bamboo pentatonic flute.”

The old man looked surprised. “I thought you were going to tell me kiddie porn or gay spanking

magazines.”

I picked up the coffee cup, resisting the urge to fling the contents in his eye.

“What was the other thing he bought?”

“A *Stroviols Ukulele*. A beautiful, amplified instrument.”

“So he wasn’t a complete heathen.”

“Far from it. We spent hours talking about music, art, books, movies. He writes poetry. I can show you a folder this thick.” I held up my fingers to indicate a couple of inches. “Beautiful words...he writes the best letters I ever received in my life.”

“And you had romantic...discussions with this man?”

“I did, yes. It was...wonderful. Until yesterday.”

“But you’ve never met him in person?”

“No, that’s why I flew here. This was supposed to be the start of a happy new life together.” I felt ridiculous even saying these things now.

“With a person you never met?”

I didn’t respond. I didn’t need to be judged by this stranger. I was having a bad enough time as it was. I struggled to keep my anger under the cooking pot lid.

“Nappy tells me he was supposed to meet you at the airport but never showed up.”

“Yes, that’s true.”

"But you've heard from him?"

"Last night. He claimed he was in *Maui* and wanted phone sex."

I saw the frisson of disgust crossing the old man's face. "You say *claimed*. You don't believe he was there?"

"His number came up on Caller ID. I know it's his landline, not his cell phone number. He didn't think it would show up on the hotel phone."

"You have his home number? Can you give it to me, please?"

"It's forwarded to his cell phone."

"I would still like to have it. Both of them, please." He waited as I scrawled the numbers on a corner of his newspaper.

"You seem like a nice young man, but forgive me...was there money involved?"

"Money?" I was taken aback. What was he talking about? "Well, he paid for his instruments, if that's what you mean."

The old man's tone turned brusque. "Did you send him any money? Did he spin some silly yarn about brain surgery to get you to send him cash? That's how these scams usually work, don't they?"

I understood it all then. He was afraid somebody had been using his photograph to solicit money from strangers. He was afraid of liability.

"No. Never."

"He never asked you for money?"

"No, never," I repeated. "He said he was a successful landscaper."

He relaxed a little and he took another sip of coffee.

"So, how did he get your photo?" I asked him.

He shrugged. "I used to be a swimming champion, local, nothing professional. I didn't even qualify for the Olympics. I was a pretty dedicated skirt chaser."

Swimming. Something about that nibbled at my brain. There was a connection there, somewhere. I tuned back into the man, who was tapping the photos in front of him.

"This picture here was taken for a local newspaper."

"How long ago?"

"Forty...oh wait, forty two years ago, when I was twenty eight. I still remember it. It was a local swimming pool up where my family used to live. I thought I was going to be king of the world."

I swallowed and felt a lump in my throat. I was gonna throw up. "It doesn't look like a forty year old photo."

"He's done a good job of cropping them. The thing is..." he hesitated. "I had a yard sale maybe six months ago and I got rid of a ton of stuff. Some of my athletic memorabilia. I mean, God...my career was over thirty years ago and this hurts me.

This will *haunt* me, that somebody used my pictures to lure a man into a gay online relationship."

Boy, was I getting smacked down in *Hawaii*.

"I am a...council member. I am on charitable committees. I can't have anybody thinking I did something so...disgusting. I'm sorry you were duped, but you see, I can't be involved in anything like this."

Nodding, I felt my numb lips frame words. "Absolutely, I understand. I am very sorry this happened. It wasn't my doing."

He stared at the photos. "Can you destroy the copies you have on your computer?"

"Yes."

"And the one on your cell phone, can you please delete that?"

"No problem."

"Do it now. I want to see it."

I quickly complied, feeling like I'd given a communicable disease to this man and was being punished for it. He picked up the photo printouts and crumpled them in his hand.

"You know what I wonder?" he asked me.

I just looked at him.

"How many other people has he done this to?"

For the first time since this nightmare began unfolding, I wondered about that, too.

The man got up, newspaper in hand, and fled

from the table, leaving me with the check and a bellyful of bad coffee.

Chapter Six

“You did not deserve that.” Byron shook his head, forking his shredded *kalua* pork with such fury, it was endearing. “Being gay does not make us disgusting people.”

“Not, it doesn’t,” I agreed.

I was sitting with him at a portable picnic table, wolfing down an awesome plate lunch of chicken *katsu* at a *Kaukau* truck courtesy of Byron’s thirty minute lunch break from selling coffee. *Kaukau* trucks, apparently an enduring island tradition, had my seal of approval. The lady who fed us out of her makeshift kitchen served up dozens of moveable feasts. She had produced a fantastic meal for us with plenty of chicken, the standard two scoops of rice, and one scoop of macaroni salad. She poured us homemade sweet lemon iced tea.

Byron had listened to the whole sorry saga of my crappy coffee meeting and continued to bristle at the things the old man had said to me.

Our hostess pounced on a rare break in our conversation.

“You like a little sample of my new soup? It’s chicken and papaya. You like.”

“Things like this never happen to me,” Byron moaned, practically licking his soup cup clean. “It’s only because I’m with you, Lovemore.” He glanced at the lady who watched anxiously for our reactions. “We like. Very, very much.”

As a thank you, he gave her a free pound bag of Kona coffee and she looked very surprised and pleased.

“Anuenue Farms...ono, good coffee! I like!”

Back in my car, I returned Byron to the supermarket. He put his hand on my shoulder.

“Let me take you to a wonderful restaurant, right on the ocean, for dinner tonight. Tomorrow, you’ll check out of the hotel and come back to Oahu with me.”

“I can’t do that.”

“Why not?”

“I haven’t seen anything of the island. Besides, you have a boyfriend, remember?”

“We’re friends, aren’t we? Can’t you come to Oahu and spend time with me as my new friend?”

“Of course. And I am happy that we’re friends.” *I have to rein in my see-sawing emotions.*

“I think we could both use a friend. And I mean that. Think you can handle that?”

“Absolutely. I’ve paid for two more nights. I want to see the island.”

“No problem. Then you’ll come to *Oahu* when you check out.”

“I’ll think about it.”

Byron grinned. “No, you won’t. You’ll do it or I’ll hold my breath until I turn blue.” As usual, he made me laugh and I wished he was single. *Dammit!*

He rubbed my neck. “Let’s meet in the lobby of the hotel at seven. That’ll give me time to clean up and relax a little.”

“Okay.”

He leaned over and kissed my cheek and I watched him walk back into the market. Why did it feel like I was losing my best friend? I shook off the feeling and sat in the car for a moment, studying the list I’d made of places I wanted to visit. I felt a pang of despair and reasoned that I had planned a different sort of vacation. Horizontal and horny. Well, I had to settle for vertical and still horny. I needed something physical and so absorbing I had no time to dwell on my hurt feeling. I settled on a sport I’d never heard of before, let alone tried. I decided to try kite surfing.

I called the instructors at a place called Launch Hour and they offered me a break on the two hundred and fifty dollar lesson since lessons

usually lasted all day. For a hundred bucks, I'd get a four hour lesson and, I was promised, the thrill of a lifetime.

The woman I spoke to gave me excellent directions to her side of the island, to 'Anaeho'omalu Beach.

"Phew, that's a mouthful," I told her.

She laughed. "You don't have to be able to pronounce it to find us, but here's how you go." She gave me directions that included a very pretty, scenic drive along the *Hawaii* Belt Road to the northwest coast. As I turned south and followed the instructions to look for the town of *Puako*, I was captivated by the beauty of the island.

'Anaeho'omalu loomed ahead and I followed the signs to a small parking lot. A large sign welcomed me to the historic place of ancient fishponds, petroglyphs and sheltered surf.

Welcome! Please, no fishing or swimming in the ponds! No animals, bicycles, skateboard. No open fires (use only hibachi). No climbing trees. I got a kick out of that one. You don't see that sign every day. And then a cute girl in a one piece swim suit sauntered over to me.

"Are you my kite surfing victim?"

I laughed. "That would be me."

"Come on, you brave man, let's shoot some curl."

I got a kick out of the girl, Anessa. She was a

state surfing champion and tough as nails. We laughed heaps as I put my feet into the straps of the short, boxy surfboard and held onto the kite, skittering across the ocean. Either her instructions were lousy or I was a total loser at kite surfing, but I kept body dragging, as she called it, skimming the ocean's surface with my belly.

Just when I was about to give up, I got a gust of wind, my hand-eye coordination kicked into gear and my kite caught the air. It lifted me high above the world, I skimmed a couple palm trees and came back to the sea with a splash.

"Nice going, white boy. Not bad for your first day out." Anessa applauded my efforts. "Wanna try again?"

* * * *

"You kite surfed without me?" Byron fake pouted as we met up in the lobby. "I love kite surfing. When you come to *Oahu*, I know the perfect spot to take you. We'll even take my kayak. There's a wonderful beach over at Chinaman's Hat."

I grinned, happy that he seemed sincere about my visiting him in *Oahu*. We sipped Mai Tais at the poolside bar, watching the sun set as an outdoor hula show started for our benefit.

The sun rented a pink-orange tint to everything and I felt I was in the middle of an old Hollywood

movie set, everything colorized in a heightened way. I glanced around and happened to look up at a *lanai*, spotting Justino, in nothing but a towel wrapped around his waist, standing by a railing. Our eyes met. Two seconds later, a middle-aged, paunchy, balding guy with sagging man-titties came out and threw his arms around Justino from behind. They disappeared into the room.

I realized then that Justino was a rent boy. Had he really liked me or had he hoped I was a young and rich mainlander?

“Ready for dinner?” Byron asked.

I would have been happy to stay right here, but he had other ideas. We retrieved my car from the parking garage and he drove, heading back the way I’d driven earlier, but this time we headed north up to the *Kohala Coast*.

“This was the birthplace of the Great King, *Kamehameha*, there’s something very special about the vibe here,” he told me. We had chatted nonstop and now I was speechless as we slowed down at the entrance of a magnificent waterfront hotel property called the *Mauna Lani*.

“Beautiful, isn’t it?” Byron seemed pleased by my awe. “This is a beautiful hotel and my favorite restaurant in the world.”

“I feel honored.” And I did. I bit back the urge to ask about his boyfriend and if he ever brought him here. The hotel was so elegant, but not

modern. It was a slice of old Hawaii and every single person who greeted us was gracious and gorgeous.

Byron led me to The Canoe House restaurant, where our table peeked out over crashing waves, black rocks and sand colored silver in the deepening night.

We indulged like starving savages, sampling each other's dishes, then ordered glasses of two different wines and sipped at each other's, each preferring what the other had ordered, each and every time. I loved his baby back ribs in black bean dragon sauce. He loved my slipper lobster tempura.

Working our way through the main courses of blackened *Ahi* tuna and sake steamed spicy shrimp, we oohed and aahed over the array of sea and land vegetables cooked at our table. I thought I would never be able to eat appreciatively at any other restaurant ever again.

"Try this." Byron held a sausage to my lips. "It's a *lup cheong* sausage. My favorite thing in the world, next to a penis." I had to laugh at that. He alternately turned me on, then made me laugh like a madman. It was an intoxicating combination.

Our waiter suggested bittersweet chocolate mousse cake, because "the caramel sauce that comes with it should be illegal." He also urged us to try the island fruit plate "because it comes with

the best Crème Brulee I've ever eaten in my life."

"You want coffee, honey?" Byron asked me, and the term of endearment seemed natural.

"I would love that, thank you."

When the waiter left, Byron leaned toward me. "I'm fascinated by this business you and your sister have created. You have an online auction company selling all kinds of things. You mentioned fire sales and estate sales. How does the fire sale work exactly?"

"Well, we have companies that want to liquidate or who need to liquidate. We've sold all kinds of things, but we market entire offices of furniture, computers, phones, you name it. That's the extreme end. A few months ago, we had a woman who makes caramels. She was going through a divorce, and since her husband had bankrolled what was essentially a home-based business, she was stuck with a lot of inventory and no means of distribution once he pulled his financing away from her.

"My sister, Chin came up with some wonderful packaging ideas and we sold the caramels in batches. Some were in portions of a pound, some bigger. The sales went through the roof. We actually found a manufacturer for her in Utah, that's where most candy is manufactured on the mainland. We still handle her online inventory and she has her financial independence." I paused.

“That’s one of the happiest business experiences I’ve had, helping somebody market a very good, saleable product.”

“Then I want you to help me. Help me sell the best coffee in the world to the whole world.”

I absorbed that thought for a moment. I loved the idea of being Byron’s friend. And I could get used to the idea of being in business with him. Our coffee arrived and we took a sip. It was wonderful.

“This is your coffee, isn’t it?” I asked him.

Byron smiled at me. “Oh, goody, I’ve won a convert already.”

Dessert arrived and with it, Byron steered the conversation over every subject in the world except his boyfriend. He was a good listener as well as a talker and on the drive back to the hotel, we agreed to talk more about the business plan once I was in *Oahu*.

“I hate leaving you here,” he told me as he walked me to my room. “I want you to come to *Oahu* with me in the morning. Will you please think about it?”

As I unlocked the door to my room, he stepped inside. “You got rid of all his photos, but you’ve still got this folder full of that idiot’s emails?”

“Yes,” I shrugged.

“You got any matches?”

“Matches?”

"Yes, honey. We're going to burn them."

"What?!"

"Yes! We're going to have a boyfriend bonfire. Didn't you ever see that episode of *Friends* where the girls had a boyfriend bonfire?"

I laughed. "I did see that episode. They burned down their apartment, didn't they?"

Byron grinned at me. "Yes, but they met some hot guys when the firemen came and put out the fire. Tell you what, let's burn the letters on the beach. Down there, at Coconut Island."

I had no idea what possessed me, but I allowed him to take me by the hand and we flitted out of the hotel down past the lagoon and the tropical flowers and over to the beach. I heard the hooting of owls and then I was letting him persuade me to collect wood for a fire. We laughed so hard, at one point we were falling over ourselves in the sand.

"Can't you make a better fire than that?" Byron asked me, tearing the matches away from my hands. He got a good one going and I threw the pages in the blaze as he did a crazy dance that would have made *Pele* proud.

"You're funny." I laughed when he tripped and fell on top of me. The flames raged and his face was inches from mine. I wanted to kiss him and I knew he wanted to kiss me. I pushed him from me, but he would not stop touching me. He wrapped himself around me from behind and we

settled into a cozy spooning position. I felt his hardening cock at my spine but I was so content...no...*exhilarated* at the feel of his closeness, his caring and warmth, that I wanted nothing more than this moment.

The crackle of the flames, his rapid breathing, his loving, tight hold soon had tears trickling down my face.

“Don’t cry, baby.” Byron’s voice was at my ear, his hand wiping the tears from my face. “I’m here.”

I didn’t want to say, *I’m not crying for him. I’m crying because you’re so amazing and you have to leave tomorrow.* But suddenly, the urge to say those words became impossible to resist and Byron kissed my ear.

“Honey, I’ll be back Thursday. I’m not that guy. I am not going to disappear like he did.”

“I know.” I felt him relax, and soon the pages were all crispy and black, and Byron was asleep. I had never slept under the stars in another man’s arms and I was honestly and deeply happy to be here with this good and kind man.

And it was enough. For now.

Chapter Seven

I woke Byron with reluctance and we walked back to the hotel around six in the morning. We slumped against one another in the elevator and he got out on the fourth floor, his floor.

“Please come with me to *Oahu* today,” he whispered as he hugged me.

“You said you’d be back in two days.”

“I did. And I will. Aw hell, I am gonna miss you.” His lips brushed my cheek and he was gone. The urge to tackle the man to the ground and rip his pants off was strong, but I manfully rode to the seventh floor and slipped into my own bed, missing his arms around me. I thought about his funny fire dance and I fell asleep with a big ol’ grin on my face.

At eight o’clock I was woken by the persistent ringing of my hotel room phone. It was a man identifying himself as an attorney. I was wide awake now.

He was very rude, warning me that I would be

liable – for what exactly, I didn't know – and to make sure that I did not email pictures of his client to anybody. It took me a moment, to figure out he meant the man I'd had coffee with the day before.

“Don't worry about that,” I said.

The attorney retorted with, “Oh, but I do worry.”

I was angry now. “I destroyed his pictures. As a matter of fact, I burned all the emails. I want to remind you I am the victim here and your client was not particularly pleasant to me. If you call me again, I am contacting the police.”

There was a sharp intake of breath on the other line and I hung up on the attorney. I had no idea where my boldness had come from but I was fed up with feeling bad, pissed now that I had been taken. I wanted to confront 'Makaio' not because he had hurt me and made me feel foolish, but because he had caused such disruption to the old man's life, too.

My room phone rang again. It was Chin.

“I pulled a card on you. I am still getting the Eight of Swords.”

“Well, aren't you the good news fairy,” I told her. And she laughed. We swapped news. I did not tell her about my growing friendship with Byron. I told her about kite surfing and my wonderful dinner with a new friend, skirting over the details. What I did not need was my sister

pulling a card that said, *he's taken, opportunity lost.*

She told me business was going well and not to worry.

"I'm not. I'm leaving it all in your capable hands. I'm planning to go to *Oahu* tomorrow."

"Oh, that's good. There's so much more to do there. I have a funny feeling you're going to meet a new guy there."

"I have a funny feeling you're just the most beautiful, wonderful sister a guy I ever had."

"Start with the beautiful part again. I quite enjoyed that."

I repeated it for her and she blew me kisses over the phone. I disconnected the call as my cell phone rang. Byron!

"I'm at the airport. ATA has now gone out of business. It's an epidemic this week. I've been bumped from my flight. I'm gonna be here until this afternoon. How do you feel about breakfast at KHOP?"

"KHOP?"

"You don't know what KHOP is?"

"No honey, I don't. How about I come and pick you up and you can introduce me to what I'm sure is another cultural tradition I won't wanna miss."

He laughed. "You do that. I'll be the big tall guy out front with a knife and fork in his hands."

* * * *

Ken's House of Pancakes soon became my second favorite restaurant on the islands. Byron and I poured passionfruit, pineapple and coconut syrup over heaping stacks of pancakes, drank lots and lots of coffee and talked nonstop. *We're luxuriating in each other's company*, I thought. We each tried making the other laugh when they had a mouthful of food and I won when I managed to get orange juice to come up through Byron's nose by telling him about my night with Justino.

Mentioning the Baby Jesus butt plug and the dildo crèche sent him into fits of helpless laughter.

He couldn't stop. Laughter, like yawning is contagious and the only way I could think to stop him was by grabbing his face and kissing him. That stopped him all right. He looked so shocked, his eyes actually widened.

Byron pulled away from me first.

"I'm sorry." A rush of guilt had me fearful that he would break all ties with me. That he'd never want to see me again.

"It's okay." He picked up his fork again, stabbing pieces of bacon in a methodical way.

"I shouldn't have done that. I know you have a boyfriend. I just...I..."

"It's okay, really." His eyes were kind. "You're a damned good kisser."

"How do you know? I didn't even get to slip

you some tongue.”

We stared at each other and both burst out laughing. We fought over the check and I won that battle, too.

“You’re so bossy,” Byron protested, and we wandered outside the restaurant.

“How much time do we have?” I looked at my watch. It was still early. Ten o’clock. We were back at the car and as we got inside, he surprised me.

“Slip me some tongue.”

“What?” I’d heard him, but I was afraid my ears were playing tricks on me.

“I want you to kiss me.” He leaned across the seat and, in spite of all my misgivings, I didn’t hesitate to move in for some lip locking and I was not surprised at the fiery furnace that greeted my searching tongue. We kissed the way lovers should kiss. We started slowly, but there was so much intensity between us, the way we went at each other left a lasting scorch mark on my soul. He moaned into my mouth and it inflamed me all over again. We broke away at last, breathing heavily.

Byron recovered first. “Wow, and we didn’t even take our clothes off.”

I wanted nothing more than to drag him up to my room and show him how badly I wanted to take his clothes off, but he started the car and then his cell phone was ringing.

“Hey.” He glanced at me and I guessed it was his boyfriend calling. “You got my message? Yep, I promise you, I’ll be home tonight.” A low chuckle. “You have a beautiful day, too, sweetheart.” Byron ended the call. “Where do you feel like going?”

“You were going to tell me how much time you had. That was before you gave me a Tonsillectomy.”

He laughed. “That was something, wasn’t it? Underneath that cool exterior of yours, there’s a heck of a fire going on...”

“Yeah, back at you, Byron.”

For some reason, I delighted in everything this man said and did. I didn’t care where we went, but he took the wheel and drove me around *Hilo* and *Puna*, showing me places of historic interest and great beauty. We drove to the Grove Plantation, and ignored all the *Keep Out* signs and hiked down to the ocean. It turned out to be a secluded, lovely beach and with nothing, not a building, not a person around, we convinced each other we were the only two people on a deserted island.

“Want a skinny dip before I leave?” he asked me.

We threw our clothes and caution to the wind and played in the surf, watching dolphins out in the deep water. He pulled me to him and kissed

me. He moved in for a huge one again and I felt his hard cock against my belly before we retreated from one another.

Climbing back out of the water, we sat in the sun drying off and I asked about his lover.

"You'll meet him," was all he would say. "Can I ask you something?"

"Sure."

"How did your parents feel about you coming out here to see a guy you'd never met?"

"Actually, my mother was a Japanese Picture Bride. My father fell for her based on one photo. There was no such thing as phone sex or anything in those days. They are still in love, very much in love. My parents are wonderful people. My father did say, though, that he expects the next guy I meet and want to be with to walk into my family home and meet my father, man to man."

Byron glanced at me. "He must love you very much."

"Oh, he does. Me and my sister. Now, she's a character. She's my business partner and she's very spiritual, into tarot cards and numerology."

"Really? What was her prediction on *Makaio*?"

"Funny you should ask that. I wouldn't let her do a reading on it until I got here and things were bad. Then she kept pulling cards and got the same card over and over. The eight of swords."

"Let me guess, a bad card, right?"

“Yeah. Not love and marriage, that’s for sure.” I lapsed into a mournful silence.

Byron nudged me back into good cheer. “Come on, I’ll race you. Last one back to the car pays for gas.”

Naturally, I won. He was such a gentleman. He never wanted me to pay for anything. After he shelled out a whopping sixty dollars to fill my gas tank, I dropped him back at the airport with a reluctance bordering on tremendous fear. I was honestly afraid I would never see him again.

“You’ve helped me lay some ghosts to rest,” I told him as he gave one of his fire starting kisses.

“There are a few ghosts left,” he whispered. “It was my privilege to help.” And then he was gone.

As I watched him leave me, I knew the remaining ghosts were all in my hands. I had to slay some of those ghost dragons myself.

I found my car had a mind of its own, hurtling back across Saddle Road heading to *Kona*. My sister groaned when I told her I was ghost hunting.

“That’s why I keep getting the Eight of Swords,” she told me. “Stay in touch with me, all right?”

I told her I would and I reached *Kona*, I plotted all my moves. First things first. I passed a huge hotel resort development on my left and remembered *Makaio* had told me he was working

on this project. In fact, he had gone on at length about his diminished budget and problems with the contract bid. I found parking on the side of the highway and I sauntered down to the construction site. It was definitely the place *Makaio* had told me about, but my heart sank to new depths when I realized the development had been halted. In fact, no work had taken place on it *for months*.

There was a big sign on the temporary fencing, and on it were pasted several notices. The development was being contested by three different community action groups and one civic group claiming a spiritual significance to the site. Several different hearings were planned, according to the various postings and updates. In our conversations, *Makaio* had told me about the landscaping problems. Nothing had been touched as far as I could see that could even remotely be labeled as landscaping. My God, was anything this man told me true?

For long moments, I stared at the dormant construction site. He must live in the area to know about it or feel the need to reference it. It was as if he snatched different threads of different fabrics together and tries to sew them into whole cloth. My cell phone rang. It was a local number, but I didn't recognize it.

"Hello?" Dammit. It was the attorney for the old man again.

"I've been trying to call this person you said you've been corresponding with. I left a couple of messages for him yesterday and now both his numbers are disconnected."

I'll bet they are. So now Makaio knows that I know the photos are not him. He must be in a panic. For some reason, this made me feel better, that he knew he'd been caught, that he wasn't getting away with everything. I hoped this would prevent him from hurting some other guy, find some new way of keeping his romantic heat aflame without such a calamitous ending.

"Have you heard from him?" the attorney asked me.

"Of course not."

"Well, no need for an attitude."

"Oh, you think I have an attitude?" I asked him. I snapped the cell phone shut. I took one more look around the development site. Everything about *Makaio* had a grain of truth to it. One slender thread from which he concocted believable lies. The answer, I was certain, lay in the town of Captain Cook. I had to go back there, back to that shabby, weird little street and see if I could find him.

I might be dancing with eight swords, but until the blindfold was gone from my eyes, I was fumbling in darkness. And it wasn't much fun.

Twenty minutes later, I was winding back up

that strange little street and there was the house again with the odd succulents sprouting all over it. I parked and walked over to the house, debating whether to knock on the door again when a little old Japanese man came out and asked me if I needed help.

“I was driving by and admired your handiwork. I’ve never seen a garden quite like this.”

The old man smiled. “I have been working on it fifteen years. You know, peoples,”—he pronounced it like *pipples*—“come from all over just to look at it. Backyard is best. You want to see?”

I hesitated until I realized he was opening a side gate. A large Mastiff dog was tied to a drainpipe. He was miserable and looked upon us with hope of being untied. It filled me with despair, seeing the poor animal tethered like that.

The old man noticed my expression. “I’ve got the gardener here helping me and this old boy is a biter. Actually, he’s got no teeth. More of a gummer than a biter, but dang he still hurt, boy.”

We passed the dog whose jaws snapped after me. The old man wasn’t kidding. We walked into the backyard and I didn’t know whether to be appalled or amazed. It was a mixture of both. I found myself standing in the middle of a field of succulents. Some of them were cactus with long

thorns the old dog must just love, I thought. I wondered where he roamed. There wasn't an inch of lava that didn't have twisted, tortured green limbs reaching towards the sky.

"Did you bring me a soda?" a voice said from the ground. I stopped and stared. I knew that voice. I would have known it anywhere.

Makaio.

He straightened up, wiped the sweat off his brow, and he saw me. Recognition swam across his eyes.

"Oh shit," he said.

Chapter Eight

“You two know each other?” the old man asked. “Yes,” I mumbled. “Sort of...” I could hardly believe what I was seeing. The man standing before me wore a mixture of terror and shock on his face. I knew he never, *ever* intended for me to find him and, of course, he was nothing like I expected. He must have been in his sixties, being kind about it. He was a big, fat white guy whose balding blond hair was nonexistent in front, long in the back, the strands scraped together into a ponytail with an elastic band.

Oh, and he had man titties. He wore shorts that barely did up over his gigantic belly and his legs looked like he had Elephantitis. He wore a sleeveless top, the edges digging into massive hambone arms and his face was florid, his eyes funny looking. *Oh my God. I just had to come looking for him.* He mopped at his dripping face with a big, grotty handkerchief and I just shook my head. *Ain't love grand?*

“Lovemore...wow...this is a surprise.”

“Malcolm, how do you two know each other?” the old man asked. “I mean, you never leave your house.” He gestured towards the ugly, nasty teardown next door and my knees started to knock against one another.

“We don’t really know each other...” Malcolm’s puffy fingers on one hand waved like little sausages up around his ears. “Ugh...Lovemore, look...can we talk?” The fat old goat was also wearing suspenders holding up his shorts. I was gonna barf all over his huge orange Crocs, roughly the size of ships. It was like looking at a cross-eyed Mario Battali on jungle juice. This guy gave me the creeps, big time. Any minute now, I’d hear dueling banjos and Ned Beatty squealing like a pig.

“No!” I barked, but he dropped his rake and grabbed me by the arm. He frog-marched me past the snapping dog, then outside the house he let go of me. My heart was pounding, I could feel it pulsing in my head. Was I about to have a stroke?

“Geez, babe...you could have warned me. How the hell did you find me?”

“I’m happy to see you too...*Malcolm*. What the fuck? Why did you string me along?”

“String you along?” he hissed. “Look...I love you!”

“Shut up!” I screamed. “You do not love me!”

Don't say that! Everything about you is a lie! I have some councilman getting his attorney onto me, and...and..." I was out of breath, out of words and way out of time. I'd wasted too much of it on this goon.

"Wait. Look, it's hard for a guy like me to meet other gay guys."

Man, it would be hard for this...monster to meet anybody who'd want him, except maybe an orangutan.

"At first I thought I'd diet, I'd lose weight. At least, that was my plan. I never thought you'd come out here and I panicked. Every day I wanted to tell you who I was...don't look at me like that, angel. I am still the same guy. Everything I said, everything I felt, was real. Just the package is not what I said it was."

"You left me at the airport like a piece of luggage. You tell lie upon lie..."

"I know. I'm sorry." He truly did look wretched. I shook my head again.

The person I knew as *Makaio* was dead. Gone. I walked away from him and this time he didn't stop me. I drove away from the house with the succulents and I did not look back.

A few miles out of town, I pulled over on the ocean side of the harbor, ran down to the water and cried. I called my sister, telling her the news.

"Oh sweetie, that's terrible. Are you okay?"

"Yes. Please tell me the Eight of Swords is out

of my life.”

“Yeah...” I heard her flipping cards. You’re about to have a whole new adventure.”

My other line rang. Byron. I told my sister I would call her back.

“Hey,” he said. “I miss you.”

“I miss you, too.”

A pause.

“Byron, I found him.”

“And?”

“He’s a fat old white guy.”

“Oh honey, I’m so sorry.”

“Yeah, me too. But I’m glad I know. I’m glad I know the truth.”

“Tell me everything.” Byron’s voice was strong and calm.

“Nah. Nothing much to tell. I’d rather talk about you. You still want me to come to *Oahu*?”

“Are you kidding? I even found you an awesome place to stay not far from me.”

“Really?”

“Really.”

“Wow.” I was a little surprised. For some reason I thought I’d be staying with Byron. But being near him was better than nothing.

“I’ll tell you all about it tomorrow night over dinner. You are going to have dinner with me, aren’t you?”

“Yes, if you let me pick the place.”

"I love when you get bossy with me."

We both laughed. I let him get back to work, and I got back to the business of getting on with my life.

* * * *

I filled in my time without Byron very well. I felt a deep sadness, but a strong resolve to be happy. I went through my computer, deleting every last email and saved IM session with *Makaio* and went snorkeling and swimming. I had dinner at KHOP, not only because I'd been there with Byron, but because I really liked the casual vibe.

The bell captain at the hotel gave me a ton of suggestions for romantic restaurants for dinner and I planned to go through the list, checking out the menus online. He also mentioned that the following day the *Kilauea* Volcanoes Park would be open to the public again on a strictly limited basis.

"They are taking booked walking tours only and our hotel guests are given top priority. Would you like me to book a tour for you, sir? It should be something to see, the volcano still so active. All that flowing lava."

"Sold." I grinned at him. I would be loading up my digital camera with photos, that's for sure. He handed me a list with items I would need for the

trek. Long pants, a hat, sturdy walking shoes, two flashlights were recommended, and a large bottle of water and light snacks.

“You’ve been wonderful,” I told him, giving him a twenty dollar tip, which seemed to thrill him. Up in my room, I went through the restaurant menus, unable to choose between two places that really appealed to me. Sandalwood Dining Room and Daniel Thiebaut both tugged at my heart strings and both promised to strip me of my finances. I didn’t care. They seemed romantic, sexy as all hell, and the menus were off the hook.

I drifted back to the lobby and was happy to see my bell captain was still on duty. I presented him with my problem.

“They both look wonderful,” I told him. “Which would you recommend?”

“Personally, I’d go for Daniel Thiebaut. If you are looking for the spirit of past *Hawaii*, there isn’t a finer restaurant.”

“Perfect.”

“Shall I book it for you, sir?”

I accepted his offer but he declined another tip.

“The last one you gave me was treasure enough. *Aloha*, sir.”

I spent the rest of my day prowling *Kona’s* beach community and its offbeat little shack-style shops. I bought new hiking boots and flashlights and a hat. I went crazy at a place called The Hut,

buying musical gourds called *ipu*, and the two women who owned the store gave me a paper bag with a few scattered gourd seeds they assured me would bloom into huge gourds once they were planted in my garden.

Now I knew I was in *Hawaii*.

I could hardly wait until Thursday morning. When it finally arrived, Byron let me pick him up at the airport and we agreed on a quick pancake breakfast before he was due to make supermarket rounds.

“You know, I took this earlier flight so I could spend a little time with you,” he told me, leaning over and kissing my cheek. I smelled minty breath and longed to kiss him at length.

We talked like it had been years since we’d seen each other. Parking our hungry asses into a booth at KHOP, we talked nonstop. He laughed at my physical description of Malcolm and told me a funny story about a bus load of Japanese tourists at *Anuenue Farms* on *Oahu*.

“Of course, they wanted to take photos of everything and my dog was with me that morning. Her name is Effie. And she is petrified of cameras.”

“How did that happen?” I asked him.

“I have no idea what happened to that dog before I found her, but show her a camera and she falls apart. My friend, *Lopaka* cracked a joke once

that maybe it was puppy porno pictures...you will love Effie, just don't try taking a photo of her. Oh, hey, remind me to tell you about *Lopaka* later. You're staying at his place in *Waikiki*."

"Great!" I liked *Waikiki*. "Is it far from you?"

"No, very close. I'm up on *Nu'uaniu Pali*. You and I have the same view of the beach at *Waikiki* and Diamond Head in the distance." He took a long look at me over the rim of his coffee cup.

"I like the idea of sharing the same view with you." I regretted my words as soon as I said them. The man was taken. Besides, I sounded like a sixteen year old saying that to Byron. It was a shock to realize that there was a sweetness to our connection that hadn't been there with *Makaio*. Funny how I'd just noticed that.

Byron just smiled. "You look better, honey, not so worried." His cell phone chirped, he checked the readout and took the call. "Jack, everything okay, sweetheart?"

So, his lover's name was Jack. The conversation seemed one sided, Jack was doing all the talking.

"You know I have to work," Byron said into the phone. "I will be back on Sunday." He listened some more, then laughed. "Okay, okay. Saturday." I left him alone to go pay the check, though he tried to take it from my hands.

When I came back to the table, he seemed troubled.

"Everything okay?"

He nodded.

"His name is Jack?"

"Who? Oh...yes." He was staring down at his unfinished bacon. He always ate his bacon.

"You can talk to me, you know."

That got me a half smile. "I know. I hate leaving him and he knows how to pull the guilt string." He blew out a breath. "You finished, honey?"

"I'm gonna purloin that bacon if you're going to leave it there."

"Purloin. I love it." I was happy to see the laughter back in his eyes. "You can't steal any, I gladly give it to you." He pushed his plate toward me. "Lovemore, I like you so much."

"I like you, too."

"Be patient with me, okay?"

I was startled but managed to eke out an *okay*.

"What are you doing with your day?" he asked me.

"I'm going up to the volcano. I hear they're opening it up again today and I want to get a look at it. There's supposed to be a walking tour with some park rangers."

"Please don't get too close to flowing lava. I don't want anything to happen to you."

Wow. He really did look worried. For a moment, we just gazed at each other.

"And tonight I am sneaking you away for a

sexy supper.”

Byron’s tired face creased into smiles. “Oooh. A sexy supper. Where?”

“I’m not telling you that. I want you to have something to look forward to.”

“Honey, I have been looking forward to seeing you since the moment you dropped me off at the airport two days ago.”

That made two of us.

His hand shot across the table and covered mine for a brief, warm moment. “You make me smile, Lovemore. You make me smile *a lot.*”

Chapter Nine

Byron said I needed protection for my epic meeting with the fire goddess, *Pele*. He checked into a room at the hotel two floors down from me, threw open his suitcase and withdrew a Spiderman backpack.

“This belongs to somebody very special to me. I love him, so it will protect and bless you. So will this.” He took my face in his hands, giving me the long, erotic kiss I’d been praying for, and I tried not to feel guilty about Jack.

Byron accepted the offer of the use of my rental car and went off to his meetings. I went off to meet the twelve people from our hotel booked on the first historic trek of *Kilauea* outside the hotel. A van waited to take us up to the volcano and, as I stood in line to board the van, I saw Justino taking car keys from a guy then watched him lean into his prey.

“Hey, you like to get a drink this evening?” It turned my stomach when the unattractive older

guy gave him a sharp look and brushed right past him. Justino's eyes connected with mine. No emotion. No recognition. He got into the car and drove into the garage. I thanked God I hadn't fallen in love with that man.

Everybody chatted like chickens on the bus and I found myself sitting beside the only other lone tourist, a guy from *Maui* who was apparently an ardent, obsessed and otherwise dedicated volcano chaser. He was excited to be visiting *Madame*, he told me, since this was her most important eruption since *Pele's* last big dance in 1993.

Loaded up with my purchased supplies in my lucky Spidey backpack, I felt a tremble of excitement as we climbed the vog-thick Volcano Road. I wondered about the wisdom of people bringing babies here. The two herbal looking parents with babies in backpacks didn't hesitate to head toward the active crater. I noticed they were also wearing flip flops. Two rangers came to greet us and we followed them in a brisk procession along hardened lava. We stopped and my eyes were getting used to the wisps of smoke, the stench of sulphur very strong as the heat seeped through my boots. The couple in flip flops started to look uncomfortable.

"Please do not feel even *slightly* tempted to take a souvenir of any lava stones," one of the rangers said. "It is considered extremely bad luck, and if

you don't believe me after our tour is over, I'll show you a tank full of stones returned from all over the world by people who thought they could outsmart the volcano goddess." The ranger smiled. "But I promise you, she'll put on a really good show."

Our excitement built again as we walked across the surface of *Madame Pele's* home. Something happened to me as we passed the point of the old, crusted lava and picked our way toward the area still being cultivated by the busy goddess.

I was amazed how the landscape kept changing. One moment the lava felt soft, then we'd come to vast patches of hard, bumpy stones, then mushy, spongy pools. We walked for a good hour, stopping along the way to admire points of interest...a new, gigantic lava tube forming, fern shoots already sprouting out of still moving lava, and the baby red fire birds flitting about, sipping nectar from tree top flowers endemic to the volcano.

The baby-carrying parents turned and walked back to the van with a couple of elderly folk and the rest of us plunged ahead. I understood why Mark Twain once described the volcano as a petrified sea. And then, up ahead, we saw the lava, running down the side of the jagged cliff in a long purple-red ribbon toward the sea. It was a strange and beautiful moment. All my crap, all my

life worries seemed so insignificant when I faced her magnificent, tragic beauty. I knew *Pele's* volcanic tears had taken away whole towns, but yet added extra inches to the land mass of the island. There were holes everywhere and the thickening vog made the going even tougher.

At the edge of one huge hole, the ranger let us get close enough to look down and see a red ball of fire churning, churning...and the heat coming from it was immeasurable. As we passed this spot, I heard a pop and I turned to see an arc of red velvet shoot to the sky. My finger pressed on the digital camera as I looked down at the pit. I couldn't believe what I thought I saw even as I took the shot.

Checking the view finder, I realized I had captured magic. I had the image of a woman's face. I had taken a picture of *Madame Pele*, reveling in all her volcanic splendor.

* * * *

"Show me," were Byron's first words when I saw him. We'd already spoken by phone and he knew what all my traveling companions knew. I had caught *Pele's* powerful, fireknife beauty.

"Jack is gonna love this," Byron sighed when he stared at the photo in my camera. I had a dozen email addresses to forward the picture to,

including the volcano chaser who urged me to sell it to the local newspapers. To me, the photo was a precious, rare gem I planned to cherish, not market for money. The goddess was letting me know I was welcome in her home.

Byron lay across my bed, checking through my digital shots. He was exhausted, I could tell.

"Are you okay? You look wiped out. Was it a hard day?"

He nodded.

He let me massage his shoulders and I slipped off his shoes and socks. Nice feet. He groaned when I massaged them.

"You are a great photographer, honey. A man of many talents. One in particular I have been thinking about all day." He put the camera on the floor and tried to draw me to him.

"Can you please relax? I want to make you feel good."

"You already make me feel good," he grinned. "I couldn't wait until my day was done and I could see you again."

"Me too," I said simply. Our eyes connected over that simple truth and he sat up on the bed, putting his legs around me.

"You smell so good. I smell smoke and fire and your skin always smells like...I don't know...wait, yes I do. You smell like cotton candy. How do you do that?"

I shook my head. I could not resist him. I let him kiss me because I'd hungered for him all day, despite the fact that I tried so hard *not* to think about him. Kissing on a big, bountiful bed when we'd clearly missed each other was a bad idea. Byron's fingers worked on my shirt and soon he had it off, his hands and lips roaming my midriff, moving down to my pants. I felt his rigid cock on my thigh.

"Stop it. We must stop. Please stop. Don't stop. Don't stop. Please don't stop." My words kept spilling, tumbling over us between hot kisses, and when his hands managed to get first my pants down, then his, I thought I would go berserk if I didn't have him that very second. Then my thoughts strayed to Jack.

"I can't do this, I can't," I gasped, and Byron kept licking my face, my throat, coming back to my mouth.

"Why not?" he murmured into my mouth. "I want you so much, Lovemore. God, you're all I think about."

"I can't do this to Jack. I want you, too...oh my god I want you, B...but I don't want to hurt him. He loves you."

Byron lay on top of me, taking my face into his hands the way I was starting to love.

"Of course he loves me." When I started pushing him away from me, his hold on me

tightened. “Honey, Jack isn’t my lover, he’s my son.”

Chapter Ten

“Jack is your son?”

“Yes. And I need you so much, please stop pushing me away.”

I was furious now. I pushed him off me and moved away from the bed. I was ready to leave the hotel, leave this island.

“You mean I’ve been holding back...you’ve been holding back...you *let* me think he was your lover. No...you *told* me he was your lover.”

“That’s not true. I said I had a good man in my life now and I do.” A small smile. “At least, he will be a man one day. Right now he’s a sweet little five year old boy and he’s my whole life. At least he was, until I got to know you.”

How could I be mad when the man was looking at me with those eyes?

He drew me back to him. “Honey...you came here for somebody else. I wasn’t expecting to meet you. And I know you weren’t expecting to meet me. Jack is my priority in life and I don’t

get...involved with every hot guy I meet. But this is different. I really care about you. I can't *stand* not talking to you. I can't stand being away from you."

My icy fire was starting to melt. "Oookay."

He put his arm around me. "Am I gonna get a nice little appetizer before dinner?"

"No, you are not."

"Mmmm...a tough customer. I've been dealing with those all day." He kissed me. "Is there any way I can persuade you to cancel our dinner reservations and order room service?"

"No way."

"Mmmm. You're my toughest customer so far. Is there anything I can do to change your mind?"

"Nope."

"Can I talk you into showering with me before we go out?"

"Can you be trusted to keep your hands to yourself?"

"Are you kidding?"

"No, I'm not kidding."

"I'm not gonna lie to you, Lovemore. I have some serious ulterior motives."

"I just bet you do." And then his mouth was on me. I let him feel his way around my body with his tongue. He took my clothes off like he was unwrapping a valuable work of art. He seemed surprised and enthralled by my cock and I

watched his mouth swallow me up in one gulp. His hand moved to my ass.

“Oh God...” I thrashed around on the bed as that beautiful body moved around mine and then I felt his tongue on my ass. I saw fireworks exploding in my mind as he swabbed at me. My legs opened up as he shouldered them apart and his mouth settled on my ass with an urgent tenderness I had never felt before.

I kept muttering, telling him how good it felt, begging him to let me touch him. I wanted to suck his cock, but then it was poking at my ass and I was begging for him.

In my helpless, hopeless need, I realized he was asking me something.

“I don’t want you to leave me. Promise you won’t leave me.”

“I won’t leave you,” I whispered, my hands moving up to his face, and the second he plunged that hot cock inside me, all the mental chatter stopped. He paused as we both savored that first moment, then he started to fuck me. It felt exactly the way I’d hoped it would feel when he was inside me. He attacked my mouth with his tongue and I bucked against him, pulling at him with my hands...I felt his molten heat inside me, that huge, thick cock filling me up, and then his fingers took hold of my cock. He held me with a reverence and possessiveness no man had ever touched me with,

and when I came in his hand, Byron smiled with satisfaction as I clawed at his back, screaming his name.

When we could finally speak, he put his mouth to my ear. "You still want to go out to dinner?"

"You have me at a disadvantage."

"What disadvantage is that?"

"I have you right where I want you."

He laughed then, kissing me playfully. "I think it's the other way around, honey. I have you where I want you and I am not about to give up control."

I laughed, too. "I'm seeing a whole different side of you, Byron."

"You are?"

"Yeah... I like it."

"Then let me order room service."

I sighed when he reached across me to snatch the room service menu. I hated it when he pulled out of me, but he grinned.

"And you thought we could spend the evening fully clothed, not being able to touch each other?" he teased me gently.

"I have no idea what I was thinking. I must have been mad."

He grunted and dropped the menu on the floor. "Yeah, you must have."

This time when he made love to me, it was just as fierce, just as exhilarating, but our emotions

were raw, our mutual need so apparent that when he came inside me the second time, I cried into his shoulder.

He put his face to mine and it was wet with his own tears.

“Lovemore...” he whispered. “From the second I saw you I prayed the other guy would be a goofball.”

I laughed, despite my erratically beating heart and my mind sending danger signals. What was I doing? I was a tourist. Sooner or later I would have to go back to the mainland and he would go back to his life, despite the promises we made in the heat of passion.

He took his time pulling out of me since we both apparently hated the physical separation, and as we ordered, then waited for our food, we bathed together. We were about to embark on a pretty hot romp in the tub when the food arrived.

“You’re a lucky man,” Byron grinned. “Saved by the bell.”

“Lucky? I don’t think so,” I pouted. “I was looking forward to some bathtub fucking.”

“Stay right there. I’ll be back. Don’t move. And keep that cock hard for me.”

His wish was my command. He took one of the hotel robes from the back of the door and covered that hot body. I heard him talking to the room service guy, heard the satisfying click of the door

locking and then he was back, a shit-eating grin on his face.

"I put the Do Not Disturb sign on the door."

"What," I cracked. "No mints on my pillow tonight?"

"I'll give you some candy, mister. Come here." He dropped the robe and I scooted to the edge of the tub to claim his cock with my tongue. He watched me for a moment. "Don't tease me, honey. Suck it. Please."

"Turn around."

He looked at me for a moment, but did as he was told.

"Spread your legs."

Again he followed my command. I knelt behind him and buried my face in his ass cheeks. I thought the guy would hit the ceiling he jumped so high. He steadied himself against the vanity, leaning into me as I took my time licking and sucking his ass hole. He kept moaning and I kept moving up and down, tracing a line to his balls which I sucked in one at a time, going back to his ass, back down to his balls.

"Give me that cock."

He quickly turned around, his cock rigid. It truly was a museum piece. Absolutely perfect.

I looked up at him. "I want some of that baby batter. Pony up, soldier." I took him all the way down my throat, my fingers pressing at his slick

and slippery ass hole. He went crazy, bucking and humping at my face and hands, rewarding me with his thick syrup.

He fell to his knees and I climbed out of the tub, my mouth still glued to him.

“Get the fuck up on my face,” he growled, turning me around so that we were in a comfortable sixty nine right there on the bathroom floor.

We spent all night mauling each other and doing a pretty decent job on our steak and lobster dinners. In bed, we ate chocolate mousse and he talked about his son. His story came out in fits and starts and most of it was depressing and sad.

“Honey, we shouldn’t be talking about this in a beautiful room with a view like ours.” His big eyes showed the shadows of his pain. “We should be talking about how nice it is that we found each other.”

“I’ve been waiting to hear this. I want to hear it. And better here where we can leave it all behind us.”

“That’s true.” He hesitated. “I was very much in love with a man who turned out to be a conman, a bad conman. He stole money from a lot of people and we...well, before I knew the truth about him, we had our son, Jack. We paid a surrogate and we both inseminated her, but he looks just like me and I don’t think Adrian...that’s

my ex's name. I don't think he ever accepted Jack because he was my son and not his."

"He's your son *and* his." I was mystified that Adrian could reject his little boy.

"I told him that so many times, but in the end it turned out to be a good thing. Adrian will be in prison for a very long time and he signed his parental rights away in exchange for my not suing him for all the money he stole from my family."

"He stole from your family? My God, B...I'm so sorry."

"Yeah. Me too." He looked at me, his eyes solemn and weary. "I have been alone a long time. I hope I am not going to...be so needy that I drive you away."

I took the dessert plate out of his hands. "Needy? I can show you a thing or two about needy, B..."

I loved the way he laughed when I pushed him back on the bed and began to stroke his fantastic, soft skin with my tongue.

"Wait a minute...the Spiderman backpack, it belongs to Jack, doesn't it?"

"What? Yes...can you please concentrate on what you're doing? Don't let your mind wander when you're making love to me."

"You lent me your son's backpack."

"Yes. I told you it would protect you and it did. Jack puts it in my suitcase every time I travel for

good luck. Oh honey, I can't wait for you to meet my little boy."

"I can't wait to meet him, either. You think he'll like me?" I was trying so hard not to feel anxious, trying not jump the shark and think about how happy my mother would be to have a grandson.

Byron gazed up at me and smiled. "Yeah, I think he'll like you a lot. I hope you understand that until he gets to know you...I can't have you in my bed at home. You *do* understand, don't you?"

I put my finger to his lips. "Of course I do. Would you like me to show you how much I understand?"

He licked his lips, his eyes reflecting the same desire I felt for him.

"Yes, please."

I let my lips and tongue do the talking, from his mouth, to his chin and throat, licking his chest, his rock-hard abs, down to his belly. I gave his cock a few cursory licks, then put my mouth on his ass hole. He spread his legs as my face worked between his thighs. Having a man lick your ass is about as close to heaven as you'll ever get and I glanced up to see Byron lightly stroking his cock as my tongue stabbed at his tight hole. I had no idea if he'd ever been fucked, but I couldn't wait to try it. Right now, his gaze was on me, and seeing how hard he was got me all worked up as my hand went between my own thighs. We

stroked our own cocks in a glorious rhythm and his breath came in shallow gusts as I slipped a finger into his ass, took it out, licked him, then put my tongue inside him.

Over and over, I taunted his ass with fingers and tongue and I knew he was close to coming. With his hand wrapped around his cock, my own erupted at the same moment he did. He cried out he when came, my whole tongue buried deep inside him. For long moments afterwards, I continued sucking and licking him and his voice was thick when he muttered, "I need you. Please let me touch you."

I scooted up into his arms and he kissed me, his eyes half closed, his mouth on mine, and I felt his steaming cock poking at my ass. I smiled. He wanted what he wanted and as far as I was concerned, he could have as much of it as he wanted. It was his for the taking.

Chapter Eleven

All day Friday, Byron worked and I marked time sightseeing. We called each other constantly, snatching lunch together at KHOP only because we knew it would be quick and, as Byron said, we could play footsies under the table.

He came back to the hotel at five, begging me to wait for him in bed, and as soon as he walked through the door, he lunged at me. We went berserk trying to get at each other and I pointed his cock at my ass.

"You sure you're ready?" he asked. "I didn't get you ready for me."

"I'm ready, I'm ready. Please, please fuck me."

And he did. It hurt because I hadn't had sex in a long time and we had done nothing but ball since the previous evening, but I didn't care. When he slumped over me, our hearts dancing a cute little Irish jig, I felt him relax.

"This was even better than my fantasies all day."

"Really?"

"Really." He leaned up on one elbow, studying me. "I want to be inside you all night, but there's something I want to share with you."

"Does it involve leaving our bed?"

"Unfortunately yes, but you want to be a part of my whole life, don't you? Not just my cock?"

"This is true." I grinned. "What are we doing?"

"My friends, Kimo and *Lopaka* are in town doing a special *hula* show. They are great devotees of *Madame Pele*. This is a one-time charity show for a new children's hospital in *Hilo*. *Anuenue Farms* is sponsoring it. I have to go. I want to go. And I want you to be my date. I can't wait for you to meet them."

I hugged him hard. "I would love that. Wait a moment, is *Lopaka* the one who is lending me his apartment?"

Byron smiled. "That's him. They're a wonderful couple, honey. They've become my closest friends."

"Uh-oh. And you want me to meet them? What if they hate me?"

"They will love you. And afterward...well, maybe we can talk them into supper."

"Do you think they would like to see my photo of *Madame*?"

"I think they would love that. I hate to be the harbinger of bad news though, honey, but we

need to get going. We have to be in Volcano in forty five minutes.”

* * * *

The town of Volcano was lush and wet, still bearing the damp smell of sulphur, but it competed with the scent of jasmine and gardenia as we approached the Volcano Community Center. The small facility, backing onto a jungle trail at the foot of the active crater, was packed.

Byron and I paused to admire the *Anunenu* Farms booth where a pretty island girl was giving away sample bags of Volcano Coffee under a big canopy painted rainbow colors.

“That’s what *Anuenue* means,” Byron told me. “It means rainbows.”

“*Aloha*, Byron,” the island girl twinkled at him, a red *plumeria* flower poking over her left ear. Uh-oh. I remembered now. It meant that she was single. Byron seemed oblivious to her hopeful expression.

“*Aloha*, *Leilani*.” He smiled. “You did a wonderful job. Here Lovemore, take a sample of our new coffee.”

He steered me to a wall of photos of a tall, stunning man half covered in black tribal tattoos and a woman in red, portraying Goddess *Pele*.

“That’s Kimo.” Byron pointed to a picture of

the tattooed guy.

"He's a mixture of scary and sexy."

Byron laughed. "Yeah, that's Kimo. And this is his husband, *Lopaka*."

He pointed to another handsome *Hawaiian* guy in a group shot.

"Wow...he's hot, too."

"Kimo certainly thinks so. They're the most devoted couple I know."

I studied the astonishing and fearsome looking Kimo, depicted in various stages of *hula*.

"Kimo is a very powerful *kahuna*, you know, a high priest," Byron told me. It was a little hard to hear him over the noise, but I was riveted, so he continued. "It's a secret profession, but he is a very great man, a great healer. Kinda the *Hawaiian* Superman. That's his secret identity. By day, or actually, mostly at night, he's a hula dancer."

"And obviously *Lopaka* is a dancer, too."

"Oh, yes. They have a school...you'll get to spend a bit of time with them. Wait until you meet their babies. Jack adores those kids."

"Hey!" We turned around and there was the park ranger from my guided walk. I introduced him to Byron. The ranger was excited to see us there.

"I told my wife about the photo you took of *Pele*," he told me. "You will email it to me, yeah?"

"Absolutely." We watched him marshal a very

pregnant woman and a little girl in a hula outfit into the performance space and we stood back, enjoying watching so many happy people, old and young, laughing and chatting.

A bell rang and we dashed to our seats and the most amazing show I had ever seen in my life unfolded before my eyes. It was so beautiful it almost hurt my eyes and my heart, and as long as I live I will never forget the display of grace and glory of those hula dancers telling the story of *Hawaii's* creation.

Until he made his first appearance on stage, I had no idea Kimo was a virtual superstar in the islands. I thought *Kilauea* was erupting again the way the people greeted his entrance out of the mouth of a simulated volcanic eruption. It was a spellbinding entrance, complete with fire, music, drums, smoke and the great man himself.

What a body. Wearing nothing but a red loin cloth, he was quite a sight with all those tattoos, the long black hair and the look of fierce concentration on his face. He did not stop moving when the foot stomping in the audience, and then the applause, accompanied every step he took. The female dancer playing Goddess *Pele* was also warmly received, but I noticed when four male dancers came out, it was the first one who got a rousing reception.

His dance solo was beautiful and I knew from

his picture it was *Lopaka*. The crowd loved him. It was an amazing show, high energy, yet poetic in its myth and magic. Sometimes I didn't know where to look with simulated thunder and lightning, rain, fire, and the incredible hula dancing. During intermission, Byron and I remained in our seats and he leaned over to me.

"What do you think?"

"I think I have never seen anything like it."

Byron looked so happy. "*Lopaka* used to do this dance where he came down from the ceiling on a high wire and up until they had their baby twins, Kimo let him do it. It was quite a spectacle, but..." he shrugged. "I think the stress and worry finally got to Kimo. Some of the fans, you know...they miss it, but well, *Lopaka's* never going to be dangling from the ceiling again."

"They are an openly gay couple?" I was amazed that there was such acceptance, such reverence of them. Byron nodded.

"Oh yes, they had a big wedding. I went, but I didn't really know them. It was my father who introduced us. I can't wait for you to meet them." As the house lights fell, he squeezed my hand and we prepared ourselves for more excitement. When it was over, Byron's cell phone rang.

"It's *Lopaka*. They want us to go backstage." He grabbed my hand and we pushed past dozens of people to visit the couple in a makeshift dressing

room filled with flowers and fruit. A sweet, feisty old lady opened the door.

"*Tutu!*" Byron shouted.

"Byron!" the old lady cackled.

"This is *Lopaka's* grandma," Byron said to me.

"*Tutu*, this is my friend, Lovemore Kendo."

"You can call me *Tutu*." She hugged me, her eyes sparkling. "My boys want to meet you. Where's your baby son? Where's my Jackie?"

"Aw...he's home, *Tutu*."

"You bring him by for Sunday lunch, yeah? And you bring this cutie pie with you, too." She grinned at me. "You're the one who took *Pele's* picture, eh?"

"That's me."

Lopaka loomed behind *Tutu*. "I'm *Lopaka* Wilder, *e komo mai*, welcome, please make yourself at home."

Up close, he was a hot little number. Well, not so little. Maybe around six feet, he had a slim but well defined, muscular build. Kimo, who moved toward us, was even more intimidating. He was well over six feet, maybe by four or five inches. He exuded a presence beyond being pure *Hawaiian*, and his unblinking gaze didn't miss a thing. He put his arms around *Lopaka*, who beamed at him.

"Byron, this is my husband, Kimo Wilder. Kimo darling, this is our new house guest, Lovemore."

Kimo darling shook my hand with a firm grip. *Lopaka* looked completely enthralled by his mate, whose black eyes swept over him in matching passion. I wondered if they'd been having wild sex just before we arrived.

"Welcome to *Hawaii*." Kimo's voice was rich and deep. "Any friend of Byron's is a friend of ours."

Tutu fussed around, getting tall glasses of mineral water as the Wilders sat very close to one another. I offered up the digital photo of the goddess and I watched their pleasure the moment they saw her face.

"I want to give you a copy of the picture," I told them. "Maybe I can email it to you or have it blown up for you in *Oahu*."

"Oh, we'd love that!" *Lopaka's* face shone. "How did you meet *Madame*? Please tell us the story."

I started to tell it, *Tutu* racing to sit on the other side of Kimo. I could tell they were all entranced as they asked questions, and I felt honored that they showed such an interest in my experience with their volcano queen.

"Can we persuade you to have supper with us?" Byron asked, as soon as there was a break in the conversation.

Lopaka's face took on an anxious look and Kimo pulled him close.

"Oh darling, please don't worry."

"But I do worry, Kimo." His voice was small now and he looked upset.

"This is our first time away from our baby twins." Kimo kissed *Lopaka*, rubbing comforting circles on his back.

"How old are they?" I asked.

"Five months old." *Lopaka* looked like he might cry.

Kimo's voice was gentle. "Baby, you know I have put many protections on the house. You do trust me, don't you?"

Lopaka looked aghast. "Of course, I do. It's not that, Kimo. It's..."

I watched the two men and knew some sort of inner, mental dialogue was going on.

"Which baby are you worried about?" Kimo frowned.

"*Pele*. She hates when she can't feel us close."

Kimo opened his mouth to speak and then their cell phone rang. *Lopaka* took the call and I heard his frantic side of the conversation.

"We're on our way. Can you walk around with her? Oh...you're doing that. Tell her we're coming home." His gaze flew to his husband's face and Kimo gave him a very sweet smile, before turning to us.

"Can we talk you into coming to our house in *Oahu* for lunch on Sunday instead of supper tonight? My wife will not be happy unless he's

with our children..."

"Oh, but I've made a cake, darling." *Lopaka* snapped the cell phone shut. "I made a chocolate honey cake."

Kimo laughed. "When in the world did you have time to do that?" He glanced at us. "He's the best cook in the world, next to *Tutu*."

Tutu preened under his compliments. "They know how to flatter me." She looked at *Lopaka*. "We'll get you home...the fast way. First, I go with Byron and Lovemore and we wait for you by their car. What you drive?"

I described my rental PT Cruiser.

"Eh. Then my boys go do the hula star thing, then we go home. Babies no more *huhu*. No more crying." She clasped her hands to her temples. "Oh...I hear my little girl screaming in my head."

Lopaka nodded. Evidently he could hear her, too. Kimo turned his troubled gaze on him.

"Darling, talk to her. Let her know we're on our way." The two men fell silent.

"I can still hear her," *Lopaka's* voice was very agitated. "She needs us, Kimo."

"Then we're leaving right now."

"No. You have people to see." *Tutu* was adamant. "I talk to that little girl. I tell her that her mama and her papa on their way. You go. But be quick or she wake up all da babies."

Kimo grinned at me. "When there's a nuclear

war, I'm going with her."

The two men ran out the door and *Tutu* led me and Byron out to the parking lot.

"How many babies do they have?" I asked her as she paced beside our car.

"Five. But little baby *Pele*, she one hot fire cracker." The old lady cackled. She quickly grew serious again. "I can't bear to see my boys so distraught." She shook her head. "The only reason they did this show was for the hospital."

The Wilders must have ditched a lot of fans. They were soon with us, an urgent look on both their faces.

"I'll drive." Kimo took my car keys and we all piled into the rental. He drove like a lunatic and I felt grateful not to have eaten before the show. My stomach was left behind in Volcano as we hurtled along Saddle Road. *Tutu*, Byron and I were tossed around the back seat like loose shoes and we came to a screaming halt at the edge of a cliff. Kimo muttered some words that sounded like a chant and the mountain opened up. That was an eye opener, that's for sure.

The car lurched forward and the engine died. Everything went black.

"This is as far as we can go." Kimo's voice came out of the confined, dark space. Then there was light. I realized it was coming from flashlights the two men held.

“What happened to the car? Did it break down? What happened to the lights?” I was babbling, worried about getting back to the hotel again.

“It’s a protection spell,” Kimo said. “Nobody can get near my family with all the whammies I put on the place. Stay close.”

We followed him and *Lopaka* in a single line, and just when I thought the dank closeness would suffocate me, I felt a rush of fresh air. I could breathe again. A loud wailing, a distressing sound of true and profound grief, washed over us.

“My baby!” *Lopaka* and his grandmother shrieked in unison, darting off toward the house. Kimo, Byron and I walked in a more leisurely manner out of the tunnel and the weird thing was, when I turned around to look, it was gone.

“In my experience, the less I question Kimo’s magic, the less indigestion I get,” Byron whispered to me.

“Good advice,” I whispered back.

Kimo stopped. “They’re with her.”

Two seconds later, the screaming stopped too.

“You have an amazing connection with your baby,” I told him, awed by what I’d witnessed. “You have that with all your children?”

“Oh yes, but she’s our only girl...” he hesitated. “She and her twin brother, well, they’re special little people.”

Ahead of us was a sprawling, lovely slice of

sheer *Hawaiiana*. The house had two floors, a wraparound *lanai*, and smoke billowing from a chimney stack. Two dogs came and greeted us, a black lab and a yellow lab, and they were overjoyed to see Kimo.

He visited with them for a moment and they surrounded him protectively as we entered the house.

"Look who I found calling for her daddy." *Lopaka* came toward us. Kimo's whole face change as he saw the people he loved so dearly. The baby was wrapped in a soft *tapa* cloth, a lot calmer now, until her gaze fell on her daddy. Her little tear stained face crumpled again and he held his hands out to her.

"She's all right, darling." Kimo reached out a hand and stroked *Lopaka's* face. He sat down on a chair at the big kitchen table with the baby in his arms, unwrapping her little body as *Lopaka* and *Tutu* busied themselves organizing cake and coffee. Kimo held a tiny baby's foot in his big hand and started stroking the sole as the baby nestled into his chest. *Lopaka* watched them, a loving expression on his face.

"That's his magic," Byron told me, making Kimo smile. "He's the ultimate pediatrician. Kimo is a great healer."

Kimo was humming and an odd, yet comforting warmth filled the room. Baby *Pele*

squealed with joy now, laughing up at her father. She was a beautiful baby and I sensed she, too, had gifts.

“Oh yes, she’s going to be a very powerful healer herself,” Kimo told me, apparently reading my mind. “*Pele* and her brothers.” He took a baby bottle of milk out of *Lopaka’s* hands and held it to his foot.

I couldn’t help staring. His foot looked like it was on fire, glowing like lit coals, giving a whole new meaning to the expression *hot foot*.

The baby drank drowsily, and Byron looked at me.

“See how he is with kids? That’s what inspired me to launch a line of coffee, Volcano Coffee, all the proceeds going to children’s welfare projects in the islands.”

“That’s fantastic,” I grinned. “I’m so proud of you, B.”

“Yeah, well, don’t be. I want Kimo’s photo on the packaging. We’d sell it like hotcakes, only I can’t convince him to do it.”

“Why don’t you want your photo on the packaging?” I asked Kimo, who glanced at Byron with mild reproach.

“He asked me to pose with Angie, who plays Goddess *Pele* in our show. Dancing with her is one thing, posing for photos that will be around in perpetuity is another. The last time I posed for a

picture with a woman was before I met *Lopaka*. I will do anything for charity except confuse our children who will one day wonder why *Lopaka* isn't in that photo with me."

"That is so sweet, so romantic," I told him and he smiled at me. He really loved *Lopaka*. It was truly inspirational.

"Who's side are you on?" Byron joked.

"Kimo's."

"I like you." Kimo put the baby over his shoulder, burping her.

Lopaka, however, looked at me. "I would love to see Kimo's photo on the packaging." He put a huge chocolate cake on the table as *Tutu* joined us, carrying a tray with a pot of coffee and some cups.

"That'll be my husband." Ten seconds later, a door opened and an old man with a shock of gray hair, big grampa shorts, and an *Aloha* shirt wandered into the kitchen.

"You kept my bride out all night." He gave her kisses and she tittered in a girly way that was very endearing. He acknowledged Kimo and *Lopaka*. "*Aloha*, kids. How was the show? I fell asleep reading to the boys." He looked at me. "Hello, there. A new face."

Lopaka introduced us and Sammy, who I learned was not only *Tutu's* husband, but also a *kahuna*, asked how much money was raised for the hospital.

"It was a sellout so I am sure we met our goals," Byron responded. "Maybe you can talk Kimo into putting his face on our coffee."

Kimo laughed.

"Why not put just the dancer playing *Pele* on the packaging?" I asked.

"She's not very well known. She won't sell. Kimo's the star," Byron told me.

Kimo shook his head. "The Goddess *Pele* is the star."

"Why not put *Pele* on the packing then?"

Byron looked at me.

"*Pele*." I held up my camera. "As in the goddess herself? Why don't you use my photo of her?"

"Are you kidding?" Byron asked me.

"You got a photo of *Pele*?" Sammy asked, his eyes widening. He studied the photo in my camera and looked at me, a funny expression on his face.

"I think it's a fantastic idea." *Lopaka* looked ecstatic.

"I don't know," Kimo looked worried. "All those people looking at her..."

What was he talking about? I was beyond excited by the idea. I nudged Byron.

"It would be my gift, my donation to the children's projects. What do you think, B?"

"I think you're wonderful," was all he could say. "I'm in shock."

And then a strange thing happened. Baby *Pele* turned around and looked at me from her perch on Kimo's shoulder. She reached out her tiny index finger and I looked at that itty bitty finger tip and kissed it. She instantly grabbed my finger when I touched it to hers and hooked onto me.

She smiled.

I gasped. I'd seen that face before. "My God, it's her, isn't it?" My words came out in a rush.

Kimo nodded, and now I understood. All the protections, the fears, the worries, the secrecy.

The baby was laughing now and I knew who she was...because I'd taken her picture in the middle of a lava field just that very day.

She wasn't just named after her. *She was Madame Pele.*

Chapter Twelve

I wanted to spend Saturday in bed with Byron until we had to fly to *Oahu*, but after a long, wonderful evening with the Wilders, we spent the night in one of their guest rooms. It rained as we made love fast and furiously, before falling into a deep, untroubled sleep.

“One of the benefits of visiting the Wilders,” Byron mumbled. “You get your rest with these folk. I have no idea what Kimo packs into his spells, but I always feel like I have been away for a month when I visit them.”

“You stay with them a lot?”

“Oh, yes. Most Sundays. Jack is one of their students. Quite often we stay the night, he runs off to class in the morning and I go back to work feeling very energized and refreshed. Speaking of which...” his hand drifted to my eager and hungry cock under the sheets. We would have made good use of our relaxed state had it not been for the pounding on our door. A reluctant Byron

untangled his legs from my own, threw some clothes at me and we dressed hurriedly, ushering in a barrage of little boys who hurled themselves on our bed.

"Who are you?" one of them asked. "I'm *Kamaha*."

"No, I'm *Kamaha*. He's *Keli'i*."

"I'm *Kimo*!" the little one shrieked.

It was like being on an island of little replicas. *Kamaha* looked like *Lopaka*, *Kimo* looked like...well, *Kimo*, and then a woman walked in with a massive piece of chocolate cake in her hands. She was the spitting image of *Lopaka*.

"I'm *Maluhia*, *Lopaka's* twin sister. I see you've met the boys. They want you to come and have breakfast and I wish you would. I'm about to go on my honeymoon and the distraction would be wonderful."

"Nice to meet you too," I said and she laughed, her voice mirroring the same cackle as *Tutu*. Poor girl, I thought, of all the things she had to inherit.

The kids dragged us down the hall where the two dogs were keeping a sad vigil outside a closed bedroom door.

"*Kimo* and *Lopaka* are still in bed." *Maluhia* shook her head. "Poor things won't get much time for romance when I'm on my honeymoon." She wandered off and *Tutu* rounded on us in the hallway with hot cups of coffee.

"Those two like to *huli huli*." She gyrated her hips and I almost spit up my coffee. "I let 'em, but I gotta get 'em up in a minute."

"I wake 'em up *Tutu*," one of the twins announced, and the boys and the dogs beat her to it. Byron and I grinned as we heard barking and laughing and we followed *Tutu* outside where a pretty table had been set, a vintage table cloth with pineapples and ukulele covering it. *Pele* and her twin brother were asleep in a giant pram. He was gorgeous, too.

"His name *Kamapua'a*, after the pig god," *Tutu* told me. "As feisty as my baby girl is, he be one *anela*, one angel boy."

Kimo and *Lopaka* emerged, dressed in board shorts, various boys dangling from their bodies. Breakfast was fun and we kept the boys busy as *Maluhia* and her apparent new husband, *Raul*, whom I didn't really get to meet, went sneaking off for their honeymoon.

"Where are they going?" I asked *Lopaka*.

"A wonderful hotel in *Kona*." His face looked dreamy. "Kimo and I spent a couple of nights there, remember darling? It was before we were married, but it was like a honeymoon."

"*Lopaka*, my love. Every day is a honeymoon, being married to you. I don't remember much about that hotel, I was too busy ripping your clothes off."

"I know." *Lopaka* glanced at him and they exchanged loopy grins.

Byron and I laughed. They were something else, those two. They were also going home that afternoon and insisted that Byron bring me and his son, Jack to their home in *Oahu* for Sunday lunch the following day.

"Do I smell pancakes?" Kimo grinned as *Tutu* bustled out of the house carrying pancakes loaded with fresh fruit.

"For my babies...all of you," *Tutu* cackled, and ran off to the kitchen as Sammy came out with a plate containing three strips of bacon.

"What?" He looked at all our amused faces. "I mighta ate a slice or two...sheesh."

The Wilders talked us into accompanying them to the beach for a quick morning swim at the bottom of their house.

"You can borrow some of our board shorts," *Lopaka* insisted. "Bring them with you to *Waikiki* and leave them in the studio."

On the climb down the rocks at the bottom of their garden, I confided to *Lopaka* that I was nervous about meeting Jack.

"Don't be nervous. He's a fantastic, loving little boy, very much like *Kamaha*. He is fearless, but he needs a lot of attention. When Byron travels, you can be there for him." He lowered his voice. "Jack is not going to be your problem. Byron is."

That started me. "Byron?"

"Once bitten..." he shrugged and went to grab baby Kimo, a sweet, rambunctious toddler who was trying to ride the family's yellow lab like a pony.

"We'll meet you at the studio in *Waikiki*," Kimo said when Byron and I left to go back to the hotel. "You sure you don't want to fly home with us?"

Byron and I had already booked and paid for return flights, but I knew we were both disappointed not to be joining them on their private plane. The three boys cried when we left. Sammy led us out the way we had come. I marveled at the tunnel that opened up and, as we walked through it, Sammy turned to me.

"Please don't tell anybody about this."

"Sammy, I don't know anyone who would believe me even if I did."

I had hardly had a chance to visit with the Wilders' baby twins but looked forward to spending more time with all the children the following day.

"They like you," Byron said, slipping his arm around me as Sammy left us by the rental car. "And I'm so glad."

"Me too," I told him, eyeing him with a burst of friskiness. "How about fucking me right here?"

"I would love to honey, but I'm a...little private about some things. Let's get back to the hotel and

jump into the cot, then head back to civilization.”

“All right.” It was an effort, fighting off my disappointment.

“You crazy man. How do you want me?”

What happened to your privacy issues?”

“Fuck those,” he insisted. “You want some cock, you’re gonna get it. Now how do you want it?”

“On the hood. Just fuck me, Byron.”

He pulled down the shorts I’d borrowed from *Lopaka*, pushing me buck naked onto the hood, which was not very comfortable but it had to do in a sexual emergency. His hands held my ass to his face as he bent down and sent his tongue to my quivering hole, which grasped at the welcome intrusion. All I could hear were the calls of wild birds and the sucking sounds Byron was making between my legs. He fumbled at his own pants and a car zoomed past.

“I think we woke up the animal kingdom, honey.” He laughed when a huge birds soared overhead. “Nosy critters, too.”

“Show them how good you can fuck me, Byron.” And he tore into me without hesitation. We both groaned at the pleasure of our passionate connection again. I was still hurting from all the sex we’d been having, but I didn’t care. I wanted him so badly and, as he muttered something about military police, I grabbed his face in my hands.

"They can arrest us if they do stop, but they can't fuck me. My ass belongs to you. Fuck your ass, Byron. It's all yours, baby." Byron's face took on a possessive gleam I enjoyed putting there and his hand sought my cock.

"Come with me, come on honey. I need you to come, too."

He didn't have to beg me again.

* * * *

We flew back to *Oahu*, huddled together, our hands joined under the thin airline blanket. Byron talked about his son and I enjoyed listening to Jack's likes and dislikes, trying to file it all away for future reference. I'd never dated a man with children before, but seeing the sexual heat between Kimo and *Lopaka* was inspiring, to say the least. Being parents hadn't turned them into boring people and I hoped Byron and I could find even just a little of the intense passion they seemed to share on a sustained basis.

"Are all five children theirs?" I asked Byron.

"No. The older twins, *Kamaha* and *Keli'i*, are *Maluhia's* children. Until a little over a year ago, she and *Lopaka* didn't even know about each other. A long story. Anyway, she was married, left her husband, and Kimo and *Lopaka* became her family. They rescued her and the boys. And she became a

surrogate for them.”

“Kimo impregnated her?”

“Not in the fun way.” He laughed. “*Tutu* bought a turkey baster for the occasion.”

I laughed, too. “I just bet she did.”

“So while she was pregnant, she met Raul, the guy she just married, and he’s a fantastic guy.”

“And Kimo and *Lopaka* like him.”

“Honey, if either one of them didn’t like him, Kimo would have turned him into something harmless, but useful, like a chair.”

“Really? He can do that?”

“Yes. So you better be nice to me.”

“How nice do you want me to be to you?” My hand snaked toward his crotch under that airline blanket.

“Not that nice. We’re in public, honey.”

“So we are.” I did not stop what I was doing but went in for the kill. I loved watching his open-mouthed gulping as I brought his cock to a swift and raging hardness. He flopped about in his seat, afraid we’d be caught, until the moment he was ready to come.

“Please...” he rasped, and I brought him fervent relief with my hand.

“Christ...one of these days you’ll get us arrested,” he murmured when he recovered.

“I’d love that, fucking you in a jail cell,” I whispered, reluctantly tucking his cock back into

his pants as we touched down in *Honolulu*. "I would make you my bitch."

He smiled. "You know what, I already am."

In *Honolulu*, the weather was warm and the sky a perfect blue with marshmallow puffs of cloud in the sky.

"Can I meet Jack today?" I asked.

"I don't know, honey, let me see how he feels. He hates when I go away."

"Who stays with him?"

"My cousin, Ana, who is his nanny. She's a wonderful woman, but he gives her tons of trouble." I wanted to ask what kind of trouble, but he was concentrating on not getting into an accident as we waited to cross the road safely to the strong of car rental kiosks. Dozens of tourist cars drove haphazardly out of the airport, ignoring all signs and lights. We retrieved his car from long term parking and he dropped me at Dollar car rental to pickup yet another PT Cruiser, the ubiquitous rental car on the island.

"Would you be okay with me driving Jack in a convertible?" I asked him as he waited in line with me.

"When would you be driving Jack around?" He seemed thrown by the question and the vibe flowing from him was cold and angry.

"I just though...you know..."

He fixed me with a long look. "If you ever did

drive him, and that's a big *if*, I wouldn't have a problem with it. You could keep the top up, you know."

That messy little moment over, I followed him to *Waikiki* and to the studio apartment I was borrowing for my stay. I was apprehensive about how things would be now that he was home. Would he make time for me? Outside a big, elegant apartment building on the south end of *Kalakaua Avenue*, he jumped out of his car, came over to my window and kissed me.

"You park down there." He pointed to an entrance up ahead. "They'll be expecting you. Tell them it's the Wilder residence. I'll call you in a couple of hours and hopefully we can have dinner, okay?"

"Okay." I watched him get into his car and drive away, feeling a pang of anxiety I hadn't felt since the moment Byron and I became lovers. The blast of a car horn sent me scuttling forward and I descended into the building's subterranean parking lot.

The apartment building was lovely. An older style place with vintage furniture and fixtures on the floor where *Lopaka's* studio was, it had a warm, gracious feeling to it. As I came out of the elevator towards the apartment, I heard laughter and music coming from inside and I hesitated before knocking.

I sure hoped the Wilders weren't in the middle of a hot lay, but before I could knock, *Lopaka*, broom in hand, threw open the door.

"Hiya! How was the trip?"

"Great, how was yours?" I grinned, spying Kimo with a grocery bag just beyond him.

"Kimo had to put a sleeping spell on the dogs to get them on board the plane. They love the Big Island. Now they're home, they're happy again. Kimo darling, don't eat those strawberries. They're for Lovemore and Byron."

"But they're so tasty, 'paka."

"Yes I know, sweetheart. I'll give you plenty at home."

"But I want you to give me some now, 'paka."

They exchanged a hot look that sent *my* temperature into triple digits.

Kimo glanced at me. "We stocked up on some essentials for you. We left a list of all the places you might need for milk, coffee, soap, that kind of thing. And our favorite noodle bars."

"What an adorable place." I couldn't get over it. Perfect views of *Waikiki* Beach, Diamond Head in the distance. It was one big room with a kitchenette and the bathroom to the right.

"We are so happy sneaking away here when we can." *Lopaka* smiled at his husband. "It's our love nest."

"Well, I appreciate you letting me stay here, I

really do.”

Lopaka looked at Kimo. “This was my home before I met Kimo. We fell in love in this place, didn’t we, darling?”

Kimo’s entire face lit into a smile. “Yes, my love, we did.”

“You’ll fall in love here, too.” *Lopaka* was so sweet and warm and he went off to get me keys to the unit.

“He has such a great ass, doesn’t he?” Kimo asked me, his hot gaze fixed on his husband. When *Lopaka* came back and handed me the keys, he put himself into Kimo’s arms.

“I hope you’ll be as happy here as we have been.”

“He will be.” Kimo grinned. “Show Lovemore where everything is, darling, and let’s get going. Any minute now, the kids are going to be squawking.”

“I feel bad taking away your love nest. No offense, your babies are all gorgeous, but...um...I feel awful about moving in on your private make-out turf.”

“Kimo grinned. “You’re not taking away our...private make-out turf. But if you came back in say...twenty minutes, I wouldn’t be upset.”

“Darling, we left the place nice and clean for him.” *Lopaka*’s hand lay on his husband’s chest. “Besides, there’s the stairwell, you know.” He

wiggled against Kimo. "How about an old fashioned quickie?"

Kimo's whole face changed. An urgency overtook him and, with one glance at me, he said, "Any time you and Byron need some private time here, you just send Jack up to our house. Our children adore him. He is always welcome in our home." The two men ran toward the fire exit and disappeared through a heavy door.

A few seconds later, I heard *Lopaka* moan, "Oh, Kimo..."

I shook my head, grinning. Wow, those two really were something else.

Unpacking quickly, I found room for everything and made myself some fresh Kona coffee, nibbling on one of the fruits the Wilders had left for me. Pineapple, strawberries, papaya and coconut. Yum.

I took a look around and felt very comfortable in the space that shrieked Kimo and *Lopaka's* names. A few minutes later, my cell phone rang. Byron. I wasn't sure whether to be relieved or nervous. What if he didn't want to see me?

"Hey." His voice sounded nervous. "Everything okay?"

"Yes. This studio is wonderful. Thank you for hooking me up, B."

'No problem. I wish you were here right now. Am I going to see you this evening?"

"I sure hope so. This view I have here is pretty spectacular, but I like looking at you much more."

Byron laughed. "*Lopaka's* bachelor pad is pretty special. They get all sorts of offers for it, but I think they'll never give that place up for sentimental reasons. So, I'm thinking dinner for three. It's time you met Jack. Especially if you're going to be working over here with me."

"I'd love that." I was still nervous, but elated. He was not only talking dinner, but talking future. *Working together is good. Or is he saying this for his son's benefit? What if the kid hates me?* "What should I wear? Are we going somewhere smart or casual?"

"Very casual, very fun. Now drive over to us, this is how you'll find our house."

Twenty minutes later, I was zooming up the *Nu'uaniu Pali* Highway, away from *Waikiki*, my tense fingers gripping the steering wheel. I got a bit lost in the maze of one way streets until I stayed on the *Ala Wai* Canal as he suggested, merging with *Kapiolani* Boulevard and as he predicted, I found my way to *Nu'uaniu* Avenue, with its gleaming high rises. I saw the red and gold pagoda Byron told me to look for and realized he lived in an amazing, Japanese style house nestled among a number of foreign diplomatic residences about a block south of Queen Emma's Summer Palace. Up ahead, the

Nu'uaniu Pali itself, a huge mountain of much mystery and power, of death and destruction in ancient wars, watched over me as I followed Byron's instructions to park in the driveway behind his car.

I walked to the front door and knocked, removing my shoes when I saw the sign by the door to do so. Byron was so *Hawaiian*, and I loved it. I loved seeing the little sneakers with Spiderman etched onto them, lined up beside Byron's shoes. I lined my shoes up with them, too, and knocked on the brass knocker. The door opened and a little boy stood there, staring up at me. I stared down at him and something inside my heart clicked into place. I couldn't explain it, but I already loved him.

Maybe it was a recognition of souls, but that little boy and I connected on some deep, intuitive level and he smiled at me. He had so much of Byron's face in his, but he was wholly his own person.

I'd been waiting my whole life to meet this little kid, even though I had no idea until a couple of days ago that he existed. On instinct, I bent down and the little boy threw his arms around me and I scooped him up. I held him easily and he smelled of strawberries and Play-doh.

"Did Kimo and *Lopaka* drop by with some strawberries?" I asked.

"Yes," Jack giggled. "They picked 'em from their garden. How did you know?"

"They gave me some, too."

We smiled at each other and when I looked up, Byron looked astonished. "I see you've met my son."

Jack's arms tightened around my neck.

"I love Lovemore, daddy."

Byron's eyes widened and I wanted to say, *I love you, too* as that little boy put his head on my shoulder and sighed.

Chapter Thirteen

“He never likes new people,” Byron kept saying as Jack eventually let me put him down.

“You have to see my room.” He dragged me into the most fantastic kid’s room I’d ever seen. What an imagination. He had built a battle field out of Lego with dinosaurs, fish, sharks, soldiers, Bionicles...you name it, he had envisioned and created an entire wonderland.

Byron lounged against the doorway, smiling as I let Jack explain the complicated clan structure of jungles, outer space zones, desert and oceans.

“Hey,” he interrupted at one point. “I’m hungry.”

“Ooh, yeah...I’m hungry. Are you hungry, Lovemore?” Jack’s gaze was intent on my face.

“I’m always hungry.”

“Me too,” he laughed. “Daddy said we can go to Fatty’s.”

“Fatty’s?”

Jack thought I was hysterically funny and laughed again. “Fatty’s Chinese Kitchen. We have to go now, though, before all the sea bass is gone.”

It was my turn to laugh as he reached for my hand. He led me out of the room, turning to his dad who still wore an astonished look on his face.

“Come on, daddy, don’t dilly dally.”

Dilly dally. This kid was a pistol, that’s for sure.

We drove in my car with Jack’s child seat hitched into the back, Byron at the wheel. We went back to *Waikiki* and there was a magical feeling to the beach city as street lights started glinting off the ocean on our right. We parked inside the Miramar Hotel, host to the apparent local favorite, Fatty’s Chinese Kitchen, which was outside the hotel on *Kuhio* Street. It was not an elegant looking place. A bunch of cheap chairs lined the window front and inside, one long bar with eight stools looked over food cooked to order by a guy who, in truth, looked kind of chubby.

Jack parked himself in between me and Byron and commandeered the ordering as the intense heat got to me.

“You’ll get used to it.” Byron’s hand squeezed my shoulder as Jack rattled off what sounded like the whole menu.

“We want two sea bass plates, a mushroom stir fry, and mmm...” he scrunched his face in concentration.

"How about the Prawns, honey? In the Sichuan sauce?" Byron prompted.

"Yeah," Jack looked excited. "You like prawns?" he asked me. On my nod, he continued. "And the ginger chicken with the lo mein. Daddy, you want the fish ball soup?"

"I think we'll get a couple of those and a chow fun. Lovemore will like that." Byron grinned at us both.

As the dishes slid across the counter to us, we shared and sampled while intense heat wafted over us as people came and went, taking food to go.

"This is the best Chinese food I ever tasted," I told Byron and Jack.

"Why else do you think we come to eat inside a sauna?" Byron asked.

"Tsk," I muttered, swallowing a mouthful of choy sum noodles.

"No, you tsk," Byron laughed.

"No, you tsk." Jack got in on the game.

"You tsk," I grinned at him.

"No, you tsk."

The three of us laughed and I was surprised to see, once we'd demolished our food, that there was a line out the door for the counter.

Byron paid for our meal and, with loud goodbyes, we left the hothouse kitchen.

"I want ice cream." Jack his little hands into

ours. "Don't you want ice cream, Lovemore?"

"Jack, I don't think I have room for anything more."

He looked shocked. "There's always room for ice cream. Isn't there, daddy?"

"In my tummy, there always is." Byron smiled down at him.

We stood at the lights on the corner of *Kalakaua* Avenue and I tried to picture what *Waikiki* looked like when it was a huge royal estate, with sprawling huts and horses. I felt an absurd nostalgic twinge even though I'd never seen it then.

Jack tugged my hand. "Lovemore, do you love my daddy?"

The bluntness of his honesty begged the truth. I couldn't filter it, not with this child.

"Yes."

He nodded, not the least surprised it seemed. Over the top of that golden head, Byron's furious gaze turned away from me. Why was he angry? We walked along *Kalakaua* Avenue, and the second the little boy's attention was diverted by an ice cream shop, Byron snapped at me.

"Why did you tell Jack that you love me?"

"Because it's true."

"You can't say stuff like that to him!"

"Why not?"

"Because...because...I'm not there yet. We're

not there.”

I sighed. “Byron, I’m afraid too. But I refuse to lie to your son because I am afraid. I told him the truth. *My* truth. The question wasn’t does my daddy love you or do you think my daddy loves you. He asked me a simple question and I gave him a simple answer. I will never lie to your son. And I will never lie to you.”

He said nothing. He brushed past me, following his son into the store and kept up a glum silence as Jack picked and tested half a dozen ice creams, before choosing the one, I already knew from Byron, was his favorite. That little boy’s face shone as Byron held him in his arms and helped him eat a double coconut and macadamia nut ice cream cone. I knew what he was doing, though. He was keeping his son away from me.

In the car going home, Jack kept up a nonstop patter about all of the animals on Kimo and *Lopaka’s* property. Byron and I listened and made appropriate remarks, but his behavior toward me was off, way off. He was cold and distant and he would have let me drive back to the studio, probably without a backward glance, if Jack hadn’t dragged me into the house to help him pick out a DVD to watch.

He chose what he wanted, of course. Fortunately, I hadn’t seen *Aloha Scoopy Doo*, so watching the goofy kid’s cartoon movie wasn’t a

hardship. It allowed my mind to drift. Byron had virtually told me he didn't love me. Well, it was too bad that I had let the truth of my feelings slip out. At least I knew the truth. Sadness rinsed away the good feelings I'd had spending time with him and Jack, and I worked hard to find that joy again.

When it was bedtime for Jack, it was me he wanted to read to him.

"You choose my book," he told me as Byron changed him into Spiderman pajamas. I picked one from the Treehouse series, remembering that Byron had told me they were his favorite stories. It seemed appropriate to select *Vacation Under the Volcano* considering I'd just had one. There was a thunderous expression on Byron's face. I predicted a fiery outburst as soon as we were alone.

"That's my favorite story!" Jack piped up. "How'd you know that?" He snuggled into me as I read to him of Pompeii, of a different time when fire ruled the earth. When he drifted to sleep, I could no longer delay the inevitable. Byron was pacing the hallway when I left Jack's room. I could have predicted he'd ask me to leave immediately and not come to the Wilders' house the following day.

"Thank you for a wonderful evening," I told him, feeling crushed by the weight of his ire.

"You're welcome. I hope you understand. This was a mistake."

"We were a mistake?"

"No, I didn't say that. Bringing you home to meet my son was a mistake. You and I can keep seeing each other, if you're open to that, but there'll be no talk of love, no future. There can be none of that. I need to keep you separate from the rest of my life."

"I don't know if I can do that."

"Then...I guess we say goodbye."

"Is that what you want?"

"No!" he snapped. "It isn't what I want. I want you, but I don't want you pushing me into a corner."

"I'm not trying to."

We both paused, reining in our emotions.

"Then let's keep seeing each other, but give me some room. I still think it's better if you don't come tomorrow."

"All right." I choked on my own words. We didn't say goodnight. He didn't walk me outside in the now frigid night air. I felt him watching me leave as I drove up to the *Pali* and sat in my car for several minutes. I would have gotten out and gone to look over the railing at the city of *Honolulu* below me, but I was put off by the signs warning me the area was off limits after sunset.

I drove back toward *Waikiki* and prowled in my rental along *Kalakaua Avenue*, returning the car to the parking garage. I was tired, but I needed a

walk. I need air. I left the building, walking toward Diamond Head. So many happy people jostled me, it was almost a culture shock after being on the Big Island.

ABC stores were open literally everywhere. Every fifth sixth store was an ABC, gigantic and packed to the brim of the exact same stuff. I popped into *Honolulu* Cookie Company and bought a basketful of their signature shortbread cookies which were not cheap.

Retreating to the studio, I felt that serenity that had enveloped me earlier. I threw my dirty clothes in the tiny washer I'd discovered, hidden in an accordion closet next to the bathroom. I opened up the sofa bed. It was already made with fresh sheets I was certain were new. What a class act that *Lopaka* was. There was no TV, but there was a little sound stage system for an I-Pod and I took mine out, hooked up my laptop on a desk overlooking *Kalakaua* Avenue and I downloaded the *Forgetting Sarah Marshall* movie soundtrack from I-Tunes.

I listened to new songs from new bed sheets, ate cookies and drank passionfruit tea, throwing the clothes from the washer into the dryer. I took a shower before allowing myself to get into bed, which was surprisingly comfortable. I listened to Daniel Ho's haunting *Hawaiian* language version of *Everybody Hurts*, thinking about Byron and Jack.

I soon drifted to sleep, wondering if, during his courtship with him, there were many nights *Lopaka* had lain awake thinking about Kimo.

Chapter Fourteen

My cell phone rang ridiculously early. I had a series case of cotton mouth and I was desperate for a glass of water.

I mumbled a greeting as a little voice said, "Hi Lovemore...it's me Jack. You awake?"

Eyeing the oven clock which read *Six a.m.* I stifled a groan. "Yes, honey. I always wake up at the crack of dawn."

The little boy laughed. "Daddy said I could call you."

"Did you wake your daddy, too?"

"Oh...I always wake daddy. Lovemore, how did you get the name Lovemore?"
"I don't know. My mother picked it out. I don't know why she gave me that name. You'll have to ask her."

"Okay, I will."

I cringed, wondering how his father would handle that idea.

"Dadddeeeee!" he screeched into my ear and

next thing I heard was Byron's voice as he wrestled the phone away from his son.

"Did we wake you?"

"He always wakes up at the crack of dawn, daddy. He told me," I heard Jack saying, and I had to laugh.

"Come over for breakfast. We're making pancakes. And uh...bring some stuff for the rest of the day. And uh...plan on spending the night with us."

I was so happy, I couldn't be huffy. I missed him too much.

Byron's voice dropped. "Please forgive me, honey. I was an ass. Jack would be so upset if you didn't come. He wants you to come with us to the Wilders' house."

"How about you? Do you want me there?"

"Yes. Very much." He actually sounded miserable.

"I'm on my way. Can I bring anything?"

"No. Just get here, will you?"

It didn't take me long to shower, dress, brush my teeth and throw some things together, glad I'd done the washing the night before. I was excited to be seeing Byron and Jack again. And, until I drove all the way to the house and Jack rushed to the door to greet me, I hadn't realized I hadn't taken a proper, deep breath since I'd left him and Byron the night before.

Jack dragged me through the house and Byron gave me a hug as he whipped the pancake batter. He looked so good in his vintage *Hawaiian* shirt and jeans, and as I helped Jack assemble some strawberries and pineapple, I looked forward to every second I could spend with them.

We finished breakfast and drove down to Diamond Head, parking at the zoo then walking down to Queen's Surf. Sunday morning seemed to be the happening time for a lot of beachgoers and we tumbled around the surf for a couple of hours with Jack who turned out to be a surprisingly strong swimmer. Then it was time to head to the Wilders' residence.

Byron was at the wheel as we rounded the island toward *Hawaii Kai*. He pulled a left off the freeway and we were pointing toward a cliff face. He dialed a number on his cell phone.

"*Lopaka*, it's Byron, Jack and Lovemore." There was a ripping sound and the cliff opened up. A narrow pathway opened up and, as we drove up the mountain, it closed up behind us again.

"Don'tcha love it?" Jack asked me.

"I sure do." In truth, it was mind-boggling stuff to witness. We arrived at a huge black iron gate that swung open and were greeted by a pack of Wilders, all rushing forward to love and hug us. Jack clung to me, looking a little bit jealous when *Kamaha*, *Keli'i* and Baby Kimo came to greet me.

He watched me hug the three boys and I turned to him.

“Can I give you a piggy back?”

“Yeah!” His face lit up and then all the boys wanted a piggy back as we ran toward the house. It was wonderful being back with the Wilders. *Lopaka* took me to a cabin that was part of a series nestled in the jungle-like foliage on the immense property, saying it was right next to Byron’s.

“He asked for separate cabins, but Jack sleeps in the main house with us. I just know Byron will get awfully lonesome in that big bed. What’s the matter...is he already giving you grief?”

“You must be psychic. Yes. Last night, he was horrible.”

“If it gives you any comfort, you’re the first person he’s ever brought here and he told me this morning that Jack loves you already.”

Yes, but Byron doesn’t love me, I wanted to scream.

“Give him time. You’re doing great.”

Lunch was an amazing, *luau*-style feast. Afterward, there were canoe races, swimming, surfing and walks around the property, during which the boys showed me all the various animals living on the vast estate. I had no idea how big it really was, but it went on and on, with buildings for classes, for dancing and drumming, *lei*-making. The view from the mountaintop property was

unbelievable. I could see islands in the distance. *Maui* and *Kahoolawe*, according to *Kamaha*.

On another ridge stood a big house that, I learned, was *Maluhia* and Raul's home with the twins. All the while, Jack held my hand, wanting physical contact at all times, and I was happy to give it to him.

Byron, who walked along with us, seemed to alternately be happy at how happy Jack was, then worried. I would catch him staring at me at odd times and I felt his anguish and concern. I had so much fun with that family that when it was time to bathe the kids and say goodnight to them, Jack became hysterical that I wasn't going to spend the next day with him.

"But sweetheart, you're going to be in school tomorrow."

"Daddy's going away. I want you to stay with me."

Byron, who was helping me bathe him and the other boys in a giant tub full of bubbles, just shrugged.

"You're going away tomorrow?"

"Just for the day. I'm going to *Kauai*."

When had he planned to tell me this?

"I'm going to be back tomorrow night and Jack's nanny will pick him up from school. He—"

"Nooooo...I want Lovemore to pick me up and come home with me. And he can play with me.

Please, daddy, please.”

His tears started to set off the other sensitive little boys until Kimo came into the bathroom.

“Nobody cries in this house. What’s going on?”

I lifted Jack out of the tub and held him to me, not caring that he was wet and bubbly.

“Tell daddy Lovemore can pick me up tomorrow and take me home,” Jack wailed.

“How about it, daddy?” Kimo smiled at him.

“I know when I’m outnumbered,” Byron grinned, but his expression was uneasy. As we walked back to our cabins, he seemed morose. I didn’t want to ask him what was wrong, because I knew. He didn’t like that I was getting closer to him and Jack.

“We should leave in the morning around seven. Can you drop me at the airport?”

“Sure. It would be my pleasure.”

He sighed. “Are you sure you want to pick him up from school tomorrow?”

“Of course.”

He nodded. “Now you know what his nanny goes through. He’s got a mind of his own, my son.”

Byron left me without saying goodnight and I went into my cabin, showered quickly and climbed into bed. He barreled into my room without knocking.

“I’m such an ass.”

“Yeah, you are, Mister Go-Away, Come Close.”

“Do you...can you forgive me?”

My hesitation wasn't in whether I forgave him, but whether I could be afraid and still do this. I was strong, I was learning that, but at a certain point he had to cease making me feel so vulnerable.

“Oh God...tell me I haven't fucked things up.”

He crawled over the bed to get to me.

“No, you haven't fucked things up. You just have to stop hurting me, Byron.”

“I know.”

We didn't make love, nor did we fuck that night. I wanted him to hold me and he did, telling me over and over again how sorry he was for being mean. I slept crookedly, twisting my neck. Love lunatic that I was, I didn't care, because I slept on *his* shoulder, with his arms wrapped tightly around me.

I picked up Jack at two o'clock the following afternoon after spending a restless day window shopping in *Waikiki*. I was afraid to do anything that would take up too much time. I was petrified I would not be able to find the turnoff for the Wilder residence and that I would be late. I needn't have worried. I joined a procession of cars

met by Sammy and each child came down to the opening, led by *Tutu* and *Lopaka*. They both smiled warmly at me and I tucked Jack into his child safety seat, then headed back to *Nu'uaniu Pali*.

My cell phone rang and Jack shouted, "That'll be my daddy."

And it was. I had a brief conversation with Byron, handing the phone over to his son. At their house, I was nervous to meet Ana, his aunt and nanny, but she couldn't have been sweeter. She and I got along very well from the beginning. I sensed her watching me as I played with Jack and I saw her eyes on the kitchen clock.

"Do you need to leave?" I asked her around six. "Jack and I will be fine until Byron comes home." She shook her head, but I knew she was anxious about something. The second Byron arrived, she talked to him at the door and I guessed her review had been favorable because he came into the kitchen with a big smile on his face.

"Jack and I want to make you dinner," I told him as he hugged his little boy. Over the top of Jack's head, he blew me a kiss.

"No, let's go out," he suggested. "You must be exhausted. Ana usually is."

"Far from it. We've had a fantastic time." Jack and I won the dinner battle. We barbecued outside. Chicken, corn, vegetables and a *kulolo*, coconut and taro pudding Jack and I made from

scratch.

I left around eight, as Byron put his son to bed. Jack was drowsy from his full day and Byron walked me to the door. He hugged me and gave me a very sweet kiss, thanking me for taking care of Jack.

“Will you be okay driving home?” he asked me.

“I’m fine,” I assured him, but in truth I was devastated. I longed for a night of passion...I hated being away from Byron. I wanted to be with him. I knew I had to be patient, but I was restless that night and, with no television to zone out to, I downloaded a TV show onto my I-pod and tried not to think about how much I missed that man.

The next day, he called me to say he and Jack were taking me to dinner. I had just about exhausted my wardrobe, not that I was a clothes horse by any stretch of the imagination, but I went to *Ala Moana Mall*, bought some new shirts, a pair of jeans and some nice pants at Tommy Bahama, then went back to the little studio to await my dates.

Jack had never been to the studio before and he raced around, looking at everything, whipping through my song choices on my I-pod.

“Not cool, Lovemore.” He made me laugh. He thought my view *was* pretty cool, though, and we spotted various landmarks together.

“I’m going to download some better music for

you." That five year old knew his way around my computer with a panache I envied.

"But our dinner..." Byron grumbled.

Jack and I won that battle, too. We went to Kimo and *Lopaka's* favorite noodle bar and wandered along the beachfront. Had we been alone, I was sure Byron and I would have walked on the beach and fooled around in the nearest private place. As it was, it was a school night for Jack and so they dropped me off at the studio after a long walk around *Kalakaua* Avenue.

The next day, I started work on designing bags of Volcano Coffee with my *Pele* photo on it. I enjoyed being in the studio and broke for lunch, hurrying down to a hamburger joint that always did brisk business. I got a burger and fries to go and raced back to email Byron and Kimo and *Lopaka* some rough designs which my sister Chin would develop further. *Lopaka* called, telling me they loved everything I'd sent them. I was busy and thoroughly absorbed until it was time to pick up Jack from school and was surprised to get a very cold vibe from Ana when we arrived at the house.

"I spent all day cleaning. Don't make a mess." She glared at me as Jack hid behind me, and I wondered where her animosity was coming from. It was an odd afternoon with her banging around in the kitchen, Jack and I talking in whispers.

When Byron came home, exhausted from his trip to *Maui*, he asked me what Jack had done to upset Ana.

“Nothing. She was like this when we came in this afternoon,” I told him.

“Are you sure? You’re not protecting him?”

“Absolutely not. She was angry the second we walked in the door.”

Byron was silent and poor Jack was left wondering what he had done wrong.

I mixed a batch of Mai Tais, which put Byron in a better mood.

“This is very upsetting. I miss you,” he told me in the kitchen. “We need some time together.”

“I know.” I put my hand to his cheek and he gave me a love-starved look that lifted my spirits. We went to Byron and Jack’s favorite restaurant that night, Boots and Kimo. Jack and I did our best to keep Byron laughing. It wasn’t hard. We all ordered artery-clogging pancakes and waffles for dinner, trying to decide which was better, the macadamia cream sauce or the strawberries.

That night, Byron allowed me to stay over and I inhabited the guestroom, hoping he would come and rip my clothes off, but he didn’t. He left town very early in the morning and I was the one who fed Jack breakfast, driving him to school. It was Ana who picked Jack up from school. I didn’t hear from Byron at all until around four, when I got a

phone call from him asking me to go and talk to Ana and Jack.

“What’s going on?” I asked him.

“She says he misbehaved.”

That shocked me. If anything, Jack always seemed nervous around Ana. I went over to the house and found Jack in his room having a time out. Ana was sitting in the living room watching television.

“There’s no reason for you to be here,” she told me.

“I’m here to help.” I kept my voice pleasant. “If you have something else you want to do...”

“This is none of your business,” she snapped, shocking me. I was seeing a side to Ana I disliked and I resolved to find creative ways to keep Jack out of her way without causing a disturbance between her and Byron.

“Byron asked me to drop by. I was going to go to Queen Emma’s Summer Palace. I can take Jack with me, give you a little break.”

“Well, I did have things to do...”

“Great!” I went to Jack’s room where he sat, staring at the walls until he saw me.

“Will daddy let you take me?” he asked, excitement back in his voice.

Byron thought it was a good idea to get Jack away from Ana and that began my ritual of keeping Jack out of her way as much as possible.

It was the next night that Byron insisted I sleep over again, giving me a huge kiss goodnight. I missed him so much it hurt.

"Tomorrow, I want you to meet my parents," he told me. I was so happy, I could barely sleep. I loved the drive to *Anuenue* Farms on the north shore, which was a huge coffee plantation with tours and sampling menus. I met his parents, who were not very happy to meet me. I don't think it had anything to do with the fact that I was stuffing my face with chili-flavored coffee candy at the time.

Mr. Kojima, Byron's father, was very Japanese and, although I had been raised by Japanese parents, I sensed instant distrust from him. Byron's mother, Miya, however, seemed to be more open to giving me a chance.

In a small room off the main office, we drank tea out of delicate pink cups my mother would have envied. They weren't particularly interested in the Volcano Coffee project, even when Byron told them I was donating my *Pele* picture.

"What do you get out of it?" Byron's father asked me point blank.

"Nothing," I told them, feeling stung. "This is my way of giving back."

"Kimo likes you?" Byron's dad asked me then, and when Byron nodded, I felt their grudging small steps toward the neighborhood of

acceptance. Maybe not the neighborhood, maybe just the same hemisphere. I checked my cell phone and realized Jack was getting out of school in another hour.

“Shouldn’t we go pick him up?” I asked Byron.

“No. Ana can get him.”

“But Byron, he loves it when you pick him up.” His furious glance shut me up.

“Pick him up and bring him home for dinner,” Byron’s mother suggested. “We went to the fish market and we have so much food.”

We had a long drive back into *Honolulu*, about forty five minutes, which made Byron grumble until he saw the expression on his son’s face. Jack was so elated to see his father, and even more excited about dinner with his grandparents.

“My nanna always has *mochi* ice cream,” Jack told me. “And I like her dog.”

Byron’s mother was very silent until Jack and I went gaga over her sumptuous dinner. Shrimp in oyster sauce, crispy scallops and calamari in ginger sauce, and *Kauyuk*, an island preparation of pork and taro. As Byron and Jack played Monopoly with the old man, I helped Miya with the dishes and she apologized to me for her husband’s moroseness over dinner.

“He had such a wonderful *maeyaku*, birthday celebration last year and this year...” she shook her head.

I understood now. "It's his *yakudoshi* this year." His year of calamity.

Miya looked at me. "You know about *yakudoshi*?"

"Yes, my father just had his. In my family, we celebrate them. My father doesn't believe in bad luck. We made a feast, had a big cake..." I glanced at her shocked expression. "Sorry, I didn't mean to ramble."

"No, no. I am surprised and very...pleased. Your mother made the cake?"

"We bought it from a Japanese bakery. And we burned paper money and incense. We...you...should do the same thing."

She nodded. I'd put some ideas in her head. I only hoped Byron wouldn't go berserk.

Byron drove us all home, Jack crying about not being tired until we turned the first corner and he slept the whole way.

"I want to have lunch with you tomorrow," Byron told me. "Think you'd like a nooner at the studio?"

"I'd love that, B."

He turned up at eleven the next morning, saying it had to be noon somewhere on the planet. We threw ourselves at one another, fighting to bring gratification to the other. He was on his knees, licking and kissing his way down my belly and it was an effort to get him into bed. He would

have been happy with the floor, but I wanted the moment to be wonderful and hot. It was not that I didn't want him pleasuring me, it was hard to resist a hot mouth on my neglected ass. But I wanted him to get the same delight he was giving me.

Byron did not want to get out of bed, which worried me since it meant Ana would be alone with Jack. I reasoned with myself that they'd done fine without me, but I cherished that little boy and I wanted him safe and happy.

"See if you can guess what letters I am spelling with my tongue," Byron whispered, as his tongue zigzagged across my sensitive hole. I wanted him so badly the only word I wanted him to spell was *fuck*, but he kept up a maddening routine on my butt and suddenly I picked out the letter *I*.

"Good...what about this one?" he asked.

"L."

"Excellent, honey. Next?" he worked me to a frenzy, licking L-O-V-E, and then he took his mouth off me.

"What word was that?"

"Love." I was very emotional now.

"Put them together and you have *I Love*. Who do you think I love, or do I need to spell that out for you, too?"

I put my fingers to his face. "Just tell me."

"I love you. I love *you*." And then he shut up

and fucked me.

* * * *

My days and nights became consumed with Byron and Jack and I loved it. Byron traveled a lot, but always came home in the evenings. The days he traveled, I picked Jack up from school and Ana, who had apparently never told Byron she was missing her favorite yoga classes and coffee with her friends to care for Jack, took off once we arrived home. Some days she was even gone before we arrived. This left us to spend time reading, writing, drawing, hiking. I took him to the zoo, to Queen Emma's Summer Palace and snorkeling at *Hanauma* Bay. Jack and I took pleasure in planning evening meals that he and I cooked together.

We fell into a rhythm. Byron liked me being at the house, but I knew Ana liked her alone time there. That wasn't difficult to figure out, she came right out and told me. I had no problem with her honesty and didn't take it personally. So when Byron and Jack left in the morning, I went too. The days Byron left early for an inter-island trip, I would take Jack to school and not return until I came home with him.

A couple of weeks after I'd arrived in *Oahu*,

Byron relented about me staying in the house and I slept in the guest room, but once Jack was asleep, I was in Byron's bed for a hot workout until he nudged me in the small hours, sending me back to my own bed. I didn't care. Our sex life was becoming more intense, if that was possible.

One morning, I went back to the studio after dropping Jack at school and Byron turned up at my door, lunging at me the second we were inside.

"I can't stand not spending every second with you. I can't stand not being inside you all night."

He tugged down my pants and quickly found his way inside me.

"Byron...aren't you supposed to be going to *Maui* this morning?"

"I hate you not being at the house. Why do you come here when you know I need to think of you being there? I need you. I don't want you to leave me."

"Byron, I have no desire to leave you."

He went on and on, not giving me a chance to explain that Ana liked the house to herself. He hadn't talked like this since the first time we made love.

"When are you supposed to go home?" he asked me.

"This weekend. I don't want to go back, Byron."

"Then don't. Stay a couple more months. At least."

"But sweetie, I need to work."

"So? You can work from here, or at my house. Why do you come back here during the day anyway? I love knowing you're at the house." Once again, he didn't give me a chance to respond. When I told him I would talk to my sister about my trip extension, he urged me to invite her for a visit.

"She can stay here in the studio," he suggested.

I called my sister as soon he left for the airport and she was ecstatic. "I'd love to come out there. Sure you have room?"

By lunchtime, she'd booked a flight out the following week.

"I threw a card. Two of Swords," she told me over the phone.

"Man, is that all the cards you have in that deck? Swords?"

She laughed. "Two of swords is okay. It's actually a beneficial card. It says you need a little help. Byron just needs to see what a fantastic sister you have and he'll fall on his knees and ask you to marry him."

"I'll take your word for it."

She laughed. "I'm so excited. You having a kid in your life takes a boat load of pressure off me, babe." She hung up before I could tell her that Jack

was not my kid, but Byron's. An hour later, my mother was calling to ask all about Byron and Jack. She sounded excited and happy, and I tried not to cringe when she asked what size clothes Jack wore.

That evening, Byron must have developed a fast-acting panic attack, because he took a step back away from me. He called me on his way home from the airport as Jack and I prepared fish and scallops to barbecue for dinner.

"I'm going to *Maui* again in the morning and I'm taking Jack with me for the weekend. I want some time alone with him. I'm giving you a heads up because I don't want an argument in front of him."

"Okay, that's no problem at all, honey." I was hurt. I wondered what they were doing in *Maui* and I felt bad that I hadn't given any thought to the fact that he hadn't had time alone with his son.

That night I didn't stay, not that Byron put up much of an argument. I knew he was freaked out about my extended stay, even though it was his idea. I gave them both hugs goodnight and left them to each other. I drove around *Waikiki* for a while, dropped the car back at the apartment building, changed into my Tommy Bahama pants then walked down *Kalakaua* avenue to The Grand. I'd been told the best gay bar in town was on the fifth floor and I felt I had nothing to lose.

Lei's Hula Stand and Bar was more attractive than some gay bars I'd been to on the mainland. I bought myself a martini and was quickly approached by a couple of twinkies wanting a threesome. I was approached by a few more guys as I nursed my overpriced cocktail and my intense anger at Byron made me want to lash out at him with some mindless, sweaty sex. My heart, however, urged me to go home and watch the rest of season five of *Twenty Four* on my I-Pod.

Naturally, I needed cookies to get me through the intensity of the show so I went back to the cookie shop. I was going to bounce back to Los Angeles like a butterball the rate I was going.

I got home around midnight and my cell phone rang.

"What are you doing?"

"Not much." I was pleased that he'd called. It took me a few seconds to register that it wasn't Byron calling me. By some twisted universal connection foul-up, the wrong man had picked up my distress signal. The person wanting to have phone sex with me wasn't the man I wanted. It was *Makaio*.

Chapter Fifteen

I didn't feel even slightly tempted to engage in phone sex. I hung up on the guy, deciding I would change my cell phone number in the morning. I did it first thing, calling Byron with my new number. He did not pick up his phone and he stayed away from me all day. Around three, he called me in an agitated state.

"Honey, I panicked when I couldn't reach you. I didn't check my messages all day. Why did you change your number?"

"That idiot *Makaio*, or Malcolm or whatever his name is, called me last night."

"I want his number. I want to have it out with him."

"Honey, I don't have his number," I told him. "It came up private. I changed my number, now he can't call me again."

He was only slightly mollified.

"How's *Maui*?" I asked him.

"Fine, but Jack and I miss you already."

"I miss you both, too."

"What are you going to do this weekend?"

Stay in my bed. I'm depressed. I could start on season six of Twenty-Four. Just another day in paradise. Without you. Damn. I don't even have anymore cookies...

That wasn't what I said. What I said was, "I haven't really decided yet."

"Then you have to come out here."

That surprised me.

"The Wilders are here doing the same show they did on the Big Island. *Lopaka* is very upset with me, and because he's upset, Kimo is mad at me. I'm afraid he's going to turn me into a desk lamp or something."

I laughed.

"Oh, nice." He started to chuckle. "I haven't even told our son you're not coming. He thinks you're busy, but that you're coming tonight. You will come tonight, won't you?"

Our son? Does he realize what he just said? "I don't think so, B, my sister found out I was going to be alone all weekend and she changed her flight. She's arriving in about an hour."

"Bring her with you. Call me with your arrival time. I'm booking a six p.m. flight for you both on Go! Airlines. Now pack your things and get your beautiful ass here, will you?"

* * * *

My sister, she of the thousand summers, adored Jack as soon as she saw him.

“Your name means a thousand summers?” he asked her. “Wow, that’s so cool!”

She was a crafty one, my sister. She managed to snap several photos of Byron and Jack, me and Jack, me and Byron and a few with me and Byron and Jack together. I could see my mother, to whom she emailed the snaps from her camera phone, back in San Diego trying to figure out Jack’s measurements from the pictures.

“How come I got a boring name, daddy?” Jack was asking.

“You’re named after my dad. Jack is not a boring name,” Byron told him.

“But I want a cool name, daddy.”

Kimo, who was listening to all this— after Byron picked us up at *Kahului* Airport and drove us to the Wilder compound at the top of yet another mountaintop— laughed.

“Do you think my name is boring?” he asked Jack.

“No. You have a cool name too, Kimo.”

“Well, guess what my name is in English.”

“I don’t know,” Jack shrugged.

“It’s Jack.”

“Really?”

"Yep." Kimo smiled at him.

Jack turned to me. "Did you hear that, daddy? My name's Kimo, too! Cool, huh?"

"Very cool." I loved being called daddy and tried not to make a big deal of it. I took him in my arms and hugged him, then the twins came to pull him away to visit the horse corral.

"Thank you," I said to Kimo, the first chance I got.

"I didn't do it for you. I want my make-out turf back," he deadpanned.

My sister loved *Lopaka*, but totally and completely bonded with *Maluhia*, still glowing from her honeymoon. Her husband, Raul, a very sweet guy who told my sister he had several single brothers and would be happy to introduce her, also found himself a new best friend in Chin.

For the first time, Byron wasn't acting tweaked. He looked relaxed and happy. He sneaked his arm around me, and over dinner he and Chin laughed and talked. I didn't even care that she was spilling all my childhood secrets. They enjoyed each other's company and I felt very happy that my sister liked my new man.

That evening, I stayed home with *Maluhia*, Raul and the kids and I let Byron take my sister to see the Wilders' show.

"Are you sure?" she kept asking.

"Absolutely. Jack won't leave the twins, the

twins won't leave baby Kimo and baby Kimo won't leave his new baby brother and sister. Just don't play footsies with my man."

"Oh, nuts," she teased, making Byron laugh.

"You wait until I get you alone," he murmured into my ear.

I didn't have to wait too long, if you didn't count the show, a late supper, tucking and re-tucking the kids into their beds and my sister into hers.

"Byron, you want to play a game?" I asked him as we prepared to fall naked into bed together in a guest room with a very sturdy lock. I was so happy to be in the same bed with him all night, I wanted it to be memorable for him.

"What kind of game?" He was smiling now.

I held up a ping pong ball.

"Oh, honey..." he moaned. "I'm not interested in that kind of game."

"Oh, ye of little faith."

He laughed. "Okay then, what did you have in mind?"

"Lie back."

He willingly complied and put the ping pong in his navel.

"Now, whatever I do to you, the ping pong ball has to stay inside your navel. If it rolls out and comes back, I have to keep going. If it falls off completely, you have a turn. And if that happens,

no rocking the bed, trying to get the ping pong ball to fall out."

"You are such a stickler for rules," he cracked, and I began my oral assault on him. By the time my tongue worked its way down my man's body, and to the hot ass I was determined to fuck for the first time, he was barely able to keep it on the bed, let alone the ping pong ball. It rolled off his belly and we switched places.

I let him have some fun, then I flopped around on the bed and let the ping pong ball fall to the floor.

"If I didn't know any better, I'd swear you did that deliberately." Byron's eyes narrowed, but I was a man on a mission and I pushed him back on the bed, not that it took much coaxing.

"Now, where was I? Oh, yes, licking out your hot ass."

Byron laughed. "Yeah. Like you forgot, baby."

"I didn't forget, I just wanted to make sure you didn't forget." And then my mouth was glued to his ass, sucking, licking, kissing and the ping pong ball fell out of his navel as I took his ass in my hands and gave it everything I had. I was past caring about the game and Byron was pulling on his nipples as my tongue went into him.

"Oh fuck, baby. Stick your cock in me. Please."

"When was the last time you got fucked?" I asked him.

“A long time. Please. Fuck me.”

I worked a couple of fingers into him, stroking on his prostate, his cock in my hand and my tongue sliding all over his perineum. I got between his legs. He muttered a thousand senseless things and came the second I was inside him. I knew two things when my cock entered him. One, was that I truly loved this man, the second was the amazing, peaceful feeling that I was home.

Byron loved being fucked and he came a second time at my urging, matching me thrust for parry as I came inside him and he cried out as he felt my come filling his belly.

“Oh, God...nobody ever fucked me like that,” he moaned. I stayed inside him, the way he always did for me. We kissed and licked each other’s faces and when I pulled out of him, he spooned me, his mouth at my ear.

“When we go back to *Oahu*, you’re staying in my room every night. No more pretense,” he mumbled against my shoulder.

To my surprise, he didn’t change his mind the next morning. In fact, he seemed to be ecstatic about having me and my sister in the family home.

My sister and *Maluhia* had become so bonded, they were already making plans to hang out with each other back in *Oahu*.

"If I can get my husband to watch the twins, we can even shop one afternoon," *Maluhia* told Chin.

"Forget about that," I told her. "Bring them to us. They can have a play date with Jack. We'd love that, wouldn't we, Jack?"

"Yeah!" Jack was ecstatic. "Daddy?" To my further surprise, Jack was talking to me, not Byron. "You think Ana will let me have a play date? You know she hates mess. She'll yet at us, daddy."

It was the first time Jack had said anything aloud about Ana and I was shocked to hear him talking that way. I hated seeing his fear over a play date. I saw the worried expression on his father's face and on the flight back to *Maui*, Jack sat with my sister, playing Old Maid.

"Can I ask you something?" Byron's hand reached for mine under the ubiquitous airline blanket.

"Ask me anything."

"Have you ever had a lick of trouble with Jack about anything?"

"No, never. Why, B?"

"I didn't think so. Ana always complained about Jack. I used to stress out about traveling. I used to worry because I'd come back hearing all about how naughty he was."

"That's ridiculous. He's the most obedient child I know. B, I take him everywhere. He's wonderful.

He's—"

"If I ask you another question, will you answer it?"

"Yes." I was riled up now, ready to kick myself some Ana-ass.

"Are you screwing around on me?"

"What, are you high? I would never do that to you." I was really upset now.

"Don't, baby...please. I...it's just that I don't understand why you don't stay in the house during the day. Why you go to the studio."

"Because she doesn't want me there."

"Did she say that to you?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact, she did."

"And you never told me this?"

"Why would I go and upset you? B, this is all so new. I—"

"Did Ana tell you she didn't want you in the house during the day?"

"Well yes, but—"

"What did she say exactly?"

"Byron, she loves Jack, she loves looking after him. She just got used to having the house to herself during the day, that's all."

"My son is afraid of her. I see that now."

I was silent because I'd only just begun to realize this myself.

"Are you sure you want us, me and Jack?"

I smiled. "Oh yes, I am sure."

"If this is going to have any chance of working, we need to commit to each other. It needs to be the three of us. No more studio apartment, no more mind trips from me. And from you, I need the assurance that you are in this. We do this or we don't do this. Not both."

"I want you and I want Jack. And while we're on the subject, I want to have a big birthday bash for your dad. If you're serious about this, I want to invite my parents."

Byron looked at me. "You're crazy, you know that, don't you?"

I frowned at him, making him laugh.

"My family is cracked. My dad followed you around the farm like you were going to steal his coffee beans and you want to give him a birthday party."

"Well, I happen to be in love with his son," I shrugged.

"Come here." He gave me a swift kiss.

Ana expedited her departure from the house by taking an instant dislike to my sister. Ana flared up so quickly it was disorienting. While she and Byron got into a heated discussion, I took a trembling Jack out of the house, dragging my sister with us.

"I wanted to stay and watch the fight," my sister pouted.

"We're going out." I buckled a stricken looking

Jack into his car seat and drove them as far from the house as I could without breaking any traffic rules.

"Where are we going?" Jack asked.

At a traffic signal, I hesitated. "We're going to Kimo and *Lopaka's*," I told him.

"Oh, cool! Daddy, you got your I-Pod with you?"

"I have mine." My sister handed hers over to him.

"You have much cooler songs than either of my daddies," Jack mumbled, singing along with *Who Let the Dogs Out*.

"That's because I'm much cooler than your daddy."

"No you're not, I'm the cool one," I joked.

My cell phone rang. It was *Lopaka*.

"Kimo's worried about you all. Is everything okay?"

"We were just going to call you."

"Are you coming over? We're back home now."

"Yes," I told him, relieved that I didn't have to explain things to him in front of Jack. We arrived at the Wilder property and the mountain road opened up.

"What the..." My sister was in shock.

"Kimo does magic," Jack told her from the back seat.

Once we were on the property, I felt we were

under Kimo's protection and that Jack was safe.

Kimo and *Lopaka* came straight over to us, their concern seeming to be for all of us. Some silent conversation passed between the two men.

"*Tutu* is making dinner. Jack, you want to help me and the boys pick some vegetables?" Kimo asked him in a gentle voice.

Jack instantly put his hand in the big one extended toward him. I watched him skip off with Kimo.

My sister threw her arms around me. "You really love him, don't you?"

"I really do."

Lopaka looked at us. "What happened?"

"She hates me. I don't know what I did, but she just took an instant dislike to me," my bewildered sister said.

"Kimo never liked her. She's very jealous of you, Lovemore. You're taking away the guy she had designs on."

"She had designs on Byron?"

"On his money."

"That's gross," my sister said.

"I had no idea."

"We called Byron and he should be here any minute. Let's go into the kitchen. I'm trying my hand at some apple martinis."

Byron arrived about a half hour later, and once more we gave ourselves up to the luxury of a

sumptuous feast with the Wilder family.

Kimo spent some time with Jack who did not seem traumatized by anything that had gone on with Ana. He did tell Kimo he didn't like being alone with her, but since I'd arrived, that hardly happened anymore. If anyone was truly aggrieved by the experience, it was Byron who'd never sensed that his little boy was having a bad time with his aunt turned babysitter. Kimo gave our little boy a healing and after it was over, Jack slept in my arms as Sammy and Raul played old *Hawaiian* songs under the stars on their slack key guitars.

"He won't remember anything about his fear of Ana," *Lopaka* told me. "Kimo's cleared out the memories of her yelling at him, the false punishments."

"You don't think she ever hit him, do you?" Byron asked.

"No." Kimo stroked Jack's foot as the little boy slept. "He told me she just said things. Now when he thinks of her, it will be fuzzy memories. Nothing harmful, just...she's his aunt who used to care for him."

It was hard for me to put Jack into his bed that night.

"Honey, he will be fine," Byron told me. "Geez, I am beginning to sound like Kimo." He shook his head.

With the kids all asleep and *Lopaka* and Kimo scampering off for a moonlight romp in a rock pool, Byron and I wandered over the vast Wilder estate, arm in arm.

"It's just us now, you know. You, me and Jack, sure you can handle that?" he asked me.

"I'm very sure." We'd left my sister to play poker with *Tutu* and *Maluhia*. When last we looked, that old lady was kicking both their asses.

"Was it horrible, dealing with Ana today?" I asked my man as he lifted me up and over a huge gate leading to a forest of birds *Lopaka* told me was the most romantic spot on their property at night.

"No, not horrible. There's a few things left to be taken care of..."

"Like what?"

"Kimo's coming to bless our house, give it a good cleansing so we can start fresh. Get my ex's energy out of there and Ana's, too. And there is one more thing."

He eased me back against a carpet of soft, downy ferns that smelled like ginger lei. The sky was thick and black through the tops of the tallest trees, but the stars were brilliantly gold. It was a magnificent sight.

"What's the other thing?" I asked, before I lost all my senses except my need for him. He kissed me long and deep, but from somewhere inside me, I heard Jack calling for us.

"It's Jack," I gasped, responding to his screams.
Dadddeeeee!

"I don't hear anything," Byron protested. But I tore back through the forest, falling over the gate, twisting my ankle. I limped into Jack's bedroom, Byron right behind me. Jack was sitting up in bed, waiting for me.

"I had a bad dream." He threw himself into our arms.

"What dream, darling?" Byron ruffled his head as I held the little boy tighter.

"That daddy didn't want to be my daddy." He looked at me, fear and misery on his face.

"Jack, that wasn't a bad dream. That was a nightmare."

"I saw a bunch of swords, daddy. Like Chin has in her cards."

"Your Aunty shouldn't be showing you those cards. They're not toys." My ankle was in such agony, but I was still gonna find a way to kick myself some sisterly ass.

"Jack, I was thinking." Byron's hand closed over my ankle, raising it to his lap. I winced.

"What happened, daddy?" Jack's eyes widened when he saw my swollen foot.

"I heard you screaming for me and I ran and I fell."

"But I didn't scream, daddy. I screamed in my dream. You heard my dream?"

I touched his little face. "I guess I did, sweetheart."

"Wow...that's so cool. Daddy, Kimo can fix your leg, can't he?"

"Yes." Byron nodded confidently. "He can fix this in no time. But I was thinking, honey, since your father wants to meet me and I want to meet him and we're doing a house cleansing, we should make it a family gathering. Have the birthday party for my dad. Do everything at the same time."

"Yeah!" Jack jumped excitedly on my lap. "I love birthday parties!"

I was too stunned to speak.

"You know those kinds of ceremonies are binding, right?" Byron asked. "Speak now or forever give up your wiggle room."

"I don't want wiggle room."

Byron kissed me. "Think you can handle having two *Hawaiian* men?"

"Don't you worry about me, buster. What about you?"

"I can handle it. And first chance I get, I plan on showing you how much I can handle it."

My whole family, here, in Oahu. My head filled with two thoughts, one, I couldn't wait until the moment my mom laid eyes on Byron and secondly, I couldn't wait until she got to hold Jack in her arms.

"Why are you crying, daddy? Is your foot very sore?" Jack hugged me.

"No baby," I told him. "These are happy tears."

And I was happy. Happier than I'd ever felt possible. I had found not one, but two *island bois*, and I had found my life.

"Oh, cool." Jack threw his arms around me again. And, yeah. He was right. It was cool. Way cool.

About the Author

A. J. Llewellyn lives in California, but dreams of living in Hawaii. Frequent trips to all the islands, bags of Kona coffee in his fridge and a healthy collection of Hawaiian records keep this writer refueled. A. J. loves male/male erotica, has a passion for all animals (especially the dog, the cat and the turtle). A. J. believes that love is a song best sung out loud.

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