

An End To Innocence

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Chapter 1

Honolulu, April, 1999

The distinguished-looking journalist, hula teacher and part-time social activist beamed broadly as she seated herself in Honolulu's lavish concert hall. Sitting down on each side of her were her husband of fifteen years, Keekolo, and her daughter Keke. Inner excitement broke through to the surface and Kelia Kane found herself talking in too loud a voice.

"What a triumph for Native Hawaiian culture," I found myself exclaiming enthusiastically to one and all.

Keke glared at me as people in front and back of us stared at us in consternation. I realised that teenage daughters were terribly sensitive to the shortcomings of their parents and that the performance of a lifetime was about to begin. But I couldn't stop myself anyway. I was too excited.

"At last, an entire epic composed of ancient hula and ancient chant being performed in the islands periodically." I babbled. "Just like an opera or a Broadway play. Maybe now Native Hawaiian culture will get the respect it deserves from others."

"How did Hawaiian culture survive anyway?" I started as the lady in the row in front of me turned and asked me a question I had never managed to resolve.

"I understand the old chants and dances were pretty much replaced by the Hollywood version of the hula by the end of the nineteen thirties."

Keke glared at me and put a finger to her lips. Now as well as embarrassing

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my daughter by talking at a concert I was in danger of breaking an unspoken code and revealing Native Hawaiian secrets to others. The woman in the front seat was a foreigner, a haole in Hawaiian. The whole front of the audience within hearing distance was Native Hawaiian or part Native Hawaiian. They were giving me “the look.” The one that said close the mouth.

“I’ll tell you later,” I whispered to the lady asking the question. I realised by her matching aloha shirt and slacks that she was one of the very few tourists attending the epic performance. It had been only discretely advertised in a few community papers.

The woman’s question seemed to put a hole in the aura of happiness I had arrived with. I felt knocked off track as my mind seemed to want to answer her question instead of concentrating on the show.

I decided that the woman’s question was arousing the constellation of emotions I had about being half Native Hawaiian in a foreigner’s world like Oahu had become. I decided that it was too much to have to make sense of it all. I had unconsciously been trying for many years.

I sensed by the ache in my stomach and the pain in my head that I was again going to try and resolve what I knew was my world-view crisis of epidemic proportions. The crisis was aroused every time I thought about the place of Native Hawaiians in a Hawaii controlled by non-Hawaiians.

Not now,” I thought, “not here, not at the start of “Holo Mai Pele.” I willed myself to stop thinking of Native Hawaiian problems as the performance I had been looking forward to for months started. But I could tell it was to no avail.

“Thirty-eight percent of the homeless are Native Hawaiian, many Native Hawaiians are one paycheck from homelessness and the government is determined to solve the economic down-turn by even more development,” I thought, despairing.

The question the tourist had innocently asked was resulting in my mind being flooded with a river of old memories.

“So many Native Hawaiians are so enculturated by others’ values,” I thought. “Like myself, when I was young. So enculturated by my Japanese father’s views on the place of women and by American enculturation concerning relationships, home ownership and consumption of consumer goods. All I wanted to do was meet my prince on a white horse, get married, have a home like you see in “Better Homes And Gardens,” and produce children,” I realised. I tried to force myself to return to the present.

The first act of the epic started with an unusually large number of chantors rhythmically striking gourd drums and chanting an ancient chant. Despite the simplicity of the stage setting, only muted light illuminating the scene, the chant was impressive. I lost myself to the Hawaiian Ancients as the chantors were joined by

myriads of hula dancers dancing the vibrant hula from the Big Island.

Pride in my Polynesian heritage soared as I realised the chant they were using was over four hundred years old. The chant and dance told of the migration of Polynesians to Hawaii in ancient times. I thought of the Polynesian Voyaging Society and it's success with the voyaging of the double outrigger, voyaging canoe Hukule`a to Tahiti and other parts of the Polynesian triangle in the last three decades.

"So much for non-Hawaiian anthropological putdowns that our ancestors had only wound up on Polynesian islands as a result of drift and random accidents," I thought. The assumption of western civilization superiority by most non-polynesian anthropologists kept them from believing that ancient Polynesians had the knowledge and ability to deliberately navigate through and around the greater than four thousand miles of the Pacific ocean. Europeans could not do it until the invention of the chronometer that allowed exact longitude determination.

"The Polynesian Voyaging Society had shown the falsity of the anthropological assumptions," I thought angrily, "as well as triggered the emergence of a Native Hawaiian and Polynesian cultural and political renaissance."

The hush of the audience at the start of a fifteen minute break told of the success of the first part of the first act. The silence was suddenly broken by excited conversation as Native Hawaiians and others of the audience told each other how wonderful the performance was so far. I started as I realised the annoying tourist was asking me again how the Hawaiian culture had managed to survive.

"Why would someone of your ilk care?" I asked myself under my breath. I presumed that the woman was from the North American continent.

"Haven't people like you done a thorough enough job of destroying Hawaiian culture?" I thought.

I tried to suppress the almost instinctive hostility that some Native Hawaiians felt towards tourists.

"After all the Hawaiian way is one of Aloha," I told myself. "It's not this woman's fault that she was likely brought up to assume western cultural superiority and to stick Native Hawaiian culture in with paganism. At least she seems to be trying to learn something. That's more than many of the foreigners do, even when they come here to live permanently."

I started as I realised I was staring into space like an idiot. Keke gave me "the look" again, along with everyone else around me. However, my husband solved my dilemma for me.

"Why, the ancient chant and the ancient dance were always there for us," Keekolo answered the woman's question quietly as I stared blankly into space.

Keke and the others around us glared at him looking horrified. But I knew

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Keokolo could not bare the woman's embarrassment at my silence. He was so sensitive to other's discomfort.

"It was Keokolo who should have taken all my social work training," I thought. "And to think his wife is an activist." I knew some of the Sovereignty protests had caused him considerable grief.

"Like when pamphlets were given to those tourists at Waimea Bay saying: "Tourists go home." Keo had been upset for days.

"There must be a better way to educate tourists," he had complained.

"You still believe your grandmother's teaching that imitating western business ways is good for Native Hawaiians, don't you?" I had challenged him angrily at the time. My husband had never fully decided whether he was a haole like his mother or Native Hawaiian like his father. I knew in my heart that Keokolo was trying to honor his father's belief that one should pay homage to the spark of the divine within all human beings but his behaviour seemed Schizophrenic to others as he frequently alternated between his two enculturations.

"There were always a few kumu hulas who preserved the old ways," Keo said gently to the tourist in his customary charming manner. Keokolo was a professor of Business and Commerce at the University of Hawaii but his never-failing aloha and polite and gentle manners always betrayed his Native Hawaiian side. The tourist swooned noticeably as women always did at my husband's classic handsomeness and gentle manner.

"It was just that in the late sixties we realised the kupunas were dying off," Keokolo added, "you know the Hawaiian elders, and steps were taken to record the old chants, customs, and dances before they were lost forever."

"Thank you so much," the woman returned to her seat looking charmed.

"Father, how could you?" Keke censured him.

"Don't worry Keke, I'm not sure your father's answer to that woman is correct anyway," I whispered. Memories of the early sixties were flooding me and I recalled what a sorry state ancient chant and ancient hula had fallen into by that time.

"Maybe you're right, Dear," my husband looked bemused. "Memories are coming back to me and except at the University and the odd devoted Native Hawaiian 'ohana, where hula and Native Hawaiian culture were kept alive by a few, all I can recall about the early sixties is Elvis Presley music being played on the radio stations here."

"Elvis Presley and Kui Lee, Keo. I remember both artists being played over and over at my High School graduation."

"But Kelia, we must be mistaken. Why, look how Native Hawaiian culture is flourishing now. The Merrie Monarch Festival has developed the ancient hula (

Hula Kahiko) to a level where it could compete successfully in any folk dance competition in the world. And the voyages of the Hokule`a to Tahiti and the rest of Polynesia have proven to Hawaiians what a powerful, ocean-voyaging race they descended from.”

“You’re right Dear. Even Iolani Palace, the home of King Kalakaua, has been restored to it’s original splendor. And the protests of activists won an apology from President Clinton for the illegal overthrow of Queen Lili`uokalani in 1993. Although I don’t know how that’s going to help the plight of many Native Hawaiians much. But how could all this have happened if ancient chant and ancient hula had been that badly off by the end of the thirties?”

Keokolo nodded but I could see he wasn’t completely convinced. Our conversation ended as the next section of the hula epic began. The chant concerned the travels of the sister of the volcano goddess Pele, named Hi`iaka, as she travelled about revisiting the Hawaiian Islands. I realised that hidden nuances in the story were likely telling of the way moving plates in the ocean’s floor allowed lava flow to move from island to island. But instead of celebrating with the rest of the audience in the excellent recreation of ancient hula before me I found myself staring in my mind at old memory pictures from my youth. I had been experiencing flashbacks lately as I tried to reach some semblance of understanding as to the recent attack on Native Hawaiian culture and rights by government authorities.

Rights it had take years to pass in the legislature like the right to gather materials for hula halaus were being regularly threatened. A bill to amalgamate and thoroughly overhaul key Hawaiian bodies like the Office of Hawaiian Affairs was brought into the State Legislature in 1998 without consultation with the Hawaiian Community. All these reversals had me searching for answers to the meaning of life for people of Native Hawaiian descent in modern Hawaii. Frequent flashbacks to my younger days kept occurring. I worried that I might be losing it or something.

* * *

Chapter 2

Hilo, 1968

Memories of the year I graduated from High School came flooding in on me. I remembered that particular year as a year of unusual drought for the Hamakua Coast area of the Big Island. I tried to stop the old memories but somehow I was pulled back to the day that started the awful pilikia that resulted in my almost marrying the wrong person the first time around. I attended closely as the old memories dominated my mind. The memories were so vivid I felt like I was physically present. I stared at the memory pictures of myself as a very young woman.

“Oh my God. Not that time era. I was so naive and enculturated. And like most teen-agers, so sure I knew everything.”

Sweat was pouring down my face like a river as I felt again the upsetting emotions and physical sensations of myself as a teenager. I seemed helpless to still the flood of pictures from decades ago.

In my memory I was cursing the high humidity of old Hilo town as my brand new school clothes I had bought for September were soaked through with moisture.

“If only the University of Hawaii at Manoa had a viable summer semester,” I thought. “I’d already be there. At least the weather in Honolulu is livable. In Hilo we often get soaked with rain or when it’s sunny, soaked with sweat.”

“Even the tradewinds have deserted us,” I mused wearily as my mother led me

over to a shaded bench in Hilo's small park. We sat down gasping for oxygen. It was over eighty-five degrees and the humidity had to be reaching close to ninety-eight percent. Even the sidewalks were burning my lightly clad feet through my sandals. I decided to continue the argument I was having with my mother.

"Tutu!" I pleaded desperately. "You have to let me take part in the "Merry Monarch Festival", this year. Some of the hula halau are advertising for trained hula dancers to add to the numbers for the pageant. Why the Mayor say's that in 1968 it's an honor for Hilo to host the event. She says that holding the festival shows that the people of Hilo have completely recovered and rebuilt the area after that horrible tsunami eight years ago. Besides, the festival is the only sign of life in this entire town. How else do you expect me to get through this boring summer?"

"Keiki open ears!" I froze as I realised my mother was shouting in the pidgin she learned when our family worked in the sugar-cane plantation. She only did that when she was really furious. I hoped no one was close enough to overhear us. The pidgin was such a contrast to mother's elegant appearance. She was tall, elegant looking, and since father-san had become a merchant, always well-dressed.

"Remember you daughter of respectable Japanese businessman. No way let you take part in disgusting pageant to draw tourists to Hilo."

My heart felt like it had been stabbed. I'd been counting on the festival livening up the tedium of the summer. But I knew when mother's voice reached that tone and she shouted in pidgin there was no use arguing with her.

I argued with myself instead. I knew I had to make her change her mind or the summer would be hopelessly dull. Her closed attitude made me furious.

"Oh, mother," I yelled, losing it completely. "You remind me of that ancient painting of King Kalakaua on the wall in the old civic center behind us." I pointed in the direction of the painting that had been sitting in the center for decades.

"Your attitudes are about as up to date as King Kalakaua's."

"Keiki, remember good dis time! Halau you belong practice mele oli, mele hula, not hula Hollywood?" I didn't appreciate her calling me a keiki, a child. After all I was eighteen years old.

"Mele oli, mele hula, ancient, sacred chant and dance of our people. Your kumu hula one of da last kupuna teachers. Refuse switch to Hollywood hula fo tourists."

I winced. Mother's voice was angrier than I'd ever known it.

"Festival maidens meet ships full American sailors. Dance hula 'Betty Grable' not hula 'Nalani Wai.' Cellophane skirts, coconut cups, swivel hips like movie 'Song Of Islands,' and radio program 'Hawaii Calls.'

I knew what my mother was talking about. Nalani Wai was one of the foremost ancient hula dancers on the Islands. Many of the older Hawaiians thought

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that the Hollywood version of the hula was a complete sell-out of the old culture. But I'd thought my mother was more up-to-date.

"Father not want see only keiki disgrace family in front entire town. And disgrace Japanese kane father want Kelia marry."

I ignored the reference to the young man my parents wanted me to marry. Their thinking that I was considering such a proposal was the only way they would send me to the University of Hawaii at Manoa in September. That was where Leonard Aoti was going. I was determined to avoid an arranged marriage but I wasn't going to let my parents know that yet. If I rebelled against their choice I would not get to university at all. I tried to reason with my mother.

"Then, why did you ever make me spend all those years dancing mele hula, mother? Besides what's wrong with swivel hips. After all Elvis Presley is all the rage now, you know."

"Kelias, you only half-Hawaiian. Promise my mother before die teach Kelia secrets of culture. No want you lose culture on plantation. So convince father pay hula lessons. We gone plantation years sooner if no educate Keila in mele hula." The more angry mother got the more she used pidgin.

"Mother," I argued desperately. I ignored the guilt trip she was trying to lay on me.

"Don Ho and Kui Lee are all you hear on local radio now, not mele hula or mele oli. And surely, the men in the U.S. Navy are as entitled to see Hawaiian culture as anyone else. And Hilo's business community needs tourist money to survive. How come you won't let me dance with that halau that's recruiting hula maidens for the Festival?"

Fire almost flew from mother's nostrils.

"Keiki, no be hewa'ole (innocent). You one good-lookin, shapely, wahine. You tink sailors on ships look culture? Dat last ting on mind. Listen good, Keiki. Servicemen, Merry Monarch Festival kapu fo you."

I gasped. My mother was putting the entire festival off limits for me. And servicemen, too. It was a good thing she didn't know about the cute Marine that I had been discretely flirting with on my lunch hours. The Hilo laundry I was working in for the summer was located next to a recruiting office in downtown Hilo. Disappointment and anger made me gasp. But I knew only too well a daughter didn't argue in the open with a Hawaiian mother. Particularly if she was married to a respectable Japanese businessman, or so I'd been told.

I realised I was going to have to do things differently once I got to Honolulu in September if I was ever going to do what I wanted with my life. Much more secretly than I had done them in the past. I rationalised as did many of my friends that what mothers didn't know wouldn't hurt them. But I knew father-san wouldn't finance

my university fees if he found out I'd disobeyed mother.

I glanced over towards the civic center and thought of the statue of King Kalakaua again. I used it to calm down. I remembered that the Civic Center had survived two tidal waves, a hurricane, and a lava flow that just stopped at the outskirts of Hilo.

"At least you didn't put festivals off limits," I mentally conversed with old King Kalakaua rather than the person I so wanted to tell off. "I know they didn't call you the 'Merry Monarch,' for nothing. Didn't you encourage Hawaiians to dance the hula? And it wasn't only the hula Kahiko you meant, either. I've seen old pictures from your era and it wasn't always the hula Kahiko they were dancing at your court."

"Keiki, Merry Monarch events in beer gardens, bars, dance halls, tourist places. No Hawaiian culture dere. Leonard Aoti father descend from higher class in Japan than Nimura's, Samurai. Find out you dance sailors he tink you geisha girl not good enuff marry son. Merry Monarch kapu fo you. Conversation pau!"

I somehow managed to keep quiet. It was my best strategy, I knew. I hated Leonard's father with a passion. He was a Japanese snob always bragging about how superior Japanese things were. And he was always pointing out supposed shortcomings of me to his son, like I was only half-Hawaiian and all.

I really didn't like Leonard very much either. He was such an opportunist. Always becoming involved in student councils and boring clubs so he could push his own interests. Like just recently he got a generous kickback by getting the graduating class to hold its party at his uncle's hotel. And he wasn't the greatest looking guy either, with his plump body, and tacky Aloha shirts, even if he was hopelessly infatuated with me.

I desperately needed some stimulation for the summer and I really had no intention of marrying Leonard Aoti. I wasn't even sure I wanted to go to university on Oahu in September. I had started wondering about whether it was necessary to get more schooling after I met Orrie Robinson, the cute Marine from the recruiting office.

"Maybe I should only get married like my mother did," I thought. Lately, I'd even found myself writing Kelia Robinson over and over again on the laundry papers I was responsible for in my summer job. Orrie was really good looking and so polite. He was almost everything Leonard Aoti was not.

I decided to use the usual strategy of my friends, not being exactly truthful but not going outwardly against the orders of their parents either. I abandoned the idea of being a hula maiden in the festival.

"I'll just visit some of the events," I decided. Orrie had asked me to meet him for a date during the festival. And bring one of my friends for his pal LeRoy.

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Chapter 3

Lasting Repercussions

“Mother doesn’t have to know where I am every hour of the day,” I decided.

“Keiki, special hula happen Hilo opening night Merry Monarch. You go. Nalani Wai dance mele hula and chant meli oli. Maybe dan Kelia know what dey stand for.”

I felt myself panic. That was the night Orrie had asked me to go out with him. I began losing control of my anger again.

“Nalani Wai is coming to Hilo.” I thought. “Whoopee! An old crone mele hula teacher. That’s supposed to make up for not dancing in the Merry Monarch Festival and not dating Orrie. Boy, my mother must be more of an outdated dragon than I thought.” Fortunately I managed not to say my thoughts out loud.

“Not the opening night of the Festival,” my heart felt like it had been stabbed. “Oh, no, I was looking forward to a night on the town with Orrie and instead I’ve got to watch some ancient Hawaiian lady doing the chants and dances I’ve just spent the best years of my childhood and teen-age years performing.”

“What time, Mother-san?” I asked, managing to keep my voice casual.

“Why, 7 p.m., Kelia.” Mother’s pidgin was fading as I gave her the impression she had won the argument.

A plot filled my mind.

“I’ll get Lokia, my best friend, to invite me to stay over the night of the opening,” I mused. “I’ll tell father-san that Lokia wants me to stay over at her house

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after Nalani Wai's performance. He always lets me do what I want. Then we can sneak out and meet Orrie. After all I am eighteen years old and a High School graduate."

Nalani Wai's mele oli and mele hula came in no time at all. I shivered with anticipation at going out with Orrie for the first time as I sat in the stands with Lokia watching Nalani Wai take the stage of the auditorium. The old kumu hula was draped in maile leaves. The sacred, red, ohia blossom was entwined in her hair. I knew she was at least fifty years old. That made her a dinosaur for sure. Lokia and I were planning to go to her house and head for the Inn Orrie had told me to meet him at as soon as the performance was over.

I glared at the hula dancer on the stage with irritation. I was so tired of either dancing or watching an endless succession of ancient hulas. At first when my mother had insisted I join the halau I'd looked forward to getting off of the plantation. But as I grew older the hula practices and performances cut into my social life severely. It seemed like we were always preparing for a contest or watching other hula halaus trying to see if there was anything we could learn from them.

"What's so special about her?" I thought as the audience clapped profusely as Nalani Wai began her dance.

"Why, she's ancient," I thought. Why does mother insist I watch some old crone. And not that mele hula again. It was a tribute to Pele. Our hula halau had danced that mele hula for years.

"But she does dance like a young woman," I admitted begrudgingly as the old crone transformed into a youthful figure with her dancing. She seemed to hypnotize the audience or something. "And the way she dedicated that offering to the hula goddess Laka was impressive. Her facial expressions are so pronounced," I admitted.

"Oh my Goodness," Lokia exclaimed. Nalani had switched to a hula ma'i, celebrating royalty but instead of a customary name chant, Nalani Wai was dancing to royal procreation, as Hawaiians so nicely liked to call the theme.

"I know King Kalakaua wanted to increase the race," I giggled to Lokia, "but did he have to have dancers who were so explicit? No wonder the missionaries banned the hula."

I watched the old woman in astonishment. Her flirtation moves were unbelievable.

"No wonder my mother said she was something special," I blurted to Lokia. "She's even got me believing she's only sixteen. How can she do that?"

I joined the audience applauding furiously.

"Anyone that doesn't understand what that hula means must be dead," I

thought.

"It's said that Pele takes possession of Nalani when she dances," Lokia whispered. Her eyes were wide open as far as they could go.

"Don't be silly, Lokia," sarcasm filled my voice. Father-san had laughed at my mother's Hawaiian religious beliefs for years and I was sure he was right.

"Surely you don't believe that old superstitious stuff, do you?" Lokia turned red.

"Well I suppose not," she admitted.

It was close to ten o'clock when Lokia and I reached her parent's house. Her parents and elder sister had gone to Honolulu saying they didn't want to be in Hilo with a shouting bunch of tourists roaming the streets.

"Let's go meet Orrie and his friend," I ordered. They are where all the fun is. Did you manage to get your sister's ID card like I told you? I've got my cousins."

"I've got it all right but are you sure we'll be safe," Lokia protested. My parents warned me to stay off the streets after nine o'clock." I cursed my friend's cowardice. She was always a goody two-shoes.

"Lokia, we're through High School. Surely if we're old enough to go to university this September we're old enough to go out to a community celebration to meet someone I know. Half the town must be out there celebrating."

"Well, all right Kelia, just as long as we're home by 11:00."

"11:00," I fumed. "Things are just beginning to get started by then."

We walked the few blocks to downtown Hilo. Lokia's parents were right. Noisy people were staggering down the street everywhere.

"Hey Babe, give me a kiss!" a drunken sailor accosted us. Lokia and I broke free of his grasp and took off down the street in a hurry. The sailor lurched after us.

"I spotted the inn that Orrie had told me to meet him at. It was obvious that a beer fest was being staged at the Inn. Loud German polkas and the sounds of revelers could be heard blocks away. I dragged Lokia into the front door of the Inn.

"Kelias, it's so smoky in here," she protested.

"Listen to the music and the laughter," I argued. "Everybody's having fun. It's our turn to have some fun too. There must be more to life than mele hula."

I looked around. The whole dance floor was full of people hurtling around the room.

"You girls got any ID," a huge bouncer accosted us. We pulled out our borrowed cards and he stared at it closely in the darkened room.

"Well, I suppose this is you," the bouncer gave in. "It looks like some people are moving out of that back table. I can seat you there if you like."

"Two draft beers," I said confidently handing the bouncer a bill. "Keep the change."

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I searched desperately for Orrie. My heart sank. The inn was full of older people. Hilo's young crowd didn't seem to be present. I was beginning to think Orrie wasn't going to show when I spotted him exiting from the dance floor with a young woman on his arm. Jealousy jumped into my mind. The woman was gorgeous.

Orrie spotted me frantically waving and led the woman to another table. I sighed, relieved. She already seemed to have a date.

Orrie came over with a buddy. He was a good looking, dark-haired fellow with an air of authority. I glanced at the Sergeant stripes on his arm. Both Orrie and his friend were in Marine uniforms.

Orrie gave me a hug. My heart increased its beat considerably at its warmth. Then I smelled alcohol on Orrie's breath. Warning bells went off in my head but I decided to ignore them. It was time for some fun for a change. Kelia was staring at Orrie's friend with stars in her eyes.

"You're sure you want to be home by 11:00," I whispered.

"Don't be silly, Kelia. We'll stay as long as you like."

"Hey, Beautiful, here y'all are, after all. See Sarge I told you Kelia wouldn't let us down."

My heart pounded. I'd known I could trust Orrie. I glanced at him with joy. He'd turned up right on time like he said he would.

"This is my Sergeant, LeRoy Jones. Who's that lovely young lady beside you?" Both of the Marines glanced at Lokia with appreciation.

"Lokia Pukui to you both," I introduced my friend. "But only if you guys promise to behave. I gave Lokia my word that you would."

"Of course, Kelia," Orrie promised. "On our word as Southern gentleman, right Sarge?"

"Right, Orrie," Lokia's admirer put his hand over his heart. "I promise on General Robert E. Lee's grave."

The Sergeant sounded like he came from the deep South. I could see at a glance even in the dim light that physically both marines were a great improvement over Leonard Aoti.

Orrie sat down next to me. The Sergeant sat next to Lokia and took her hand in his. He placed a gentle kiss on her right hand. I could see Lokia was charmed. Her cheeks went bright red with the attention."

"I'm Kelia Nimura," I introduced myself to Orrie's sergeant.

"Kelias Nimura, eh? That name is Japanese, isn't it Sugar?" The Sergeant's voice was slurred and I realised he'd been drinking heavily already.

"Do you know anything about being a Geisha girl, Sugar?" he joked.

"Perhaps you could show me what one does?" I countered. "Lokia and I are

just hoping for some fun for a change.”

“So are we,” the Sergeant promised. I didn’t care for the smirk on his face.

“Hey, Sarge,” Orrie protested. “Forget the year you were stationed in Japan. The customs aren’t the same here, you know.” Orrie spoke rather harshly to his friend. I could see the Sergeant shake his head and try and sober up a bit to Orrie’s tone of voice.

“Right, Orrie. Sorry y’all, I just got carried away with myself. You young fillies are so sweet lookin, just like the Geisha girls I met in Japan.”

“Let me show y’all how a Southerner dances a polka?” the Sergeant challenged me. He seemed to want to make amends. I got up and went with him to the dance floor. He moved into a dancing position and before I knew it he was whirling me around like a top. I realised the liquor he’d drank hadn’t affected his motor control at all. The Sergeant was an accomplished dancer.

“That Sweet filly, Lokia? How old is she, Sugar? Has she dated much before?” I realised the Sergeant was referring to Lokia.

“Not really, Sergeant.” I decided to tell the truth. “Both of us just graduated from High School.”

“So, what’s going on Sugar? You sweet things breaking out or somethin?”

“I guess you could say that,” I answered. “I’m so tired of being chaperoned all the time.”

The Sergeant nodded. I could see he was making some kind of evaluation of us in his head.

“Well, you’ve picked the right guys to have fun with, Sugar.” he sighed.

“Don’t you worry y’all sweet little heads. Orrie and I can be perfect Southern gentlemen, for sure. When we’re out with the right kind of women, that is.”

I wondered what the right kind of women were. The Sergeant loosened his grip somewhat and danced me through several, fast-moving polkas. By the time I collapsed beside Orrie I was completely out of breath.

“Your turn Lokia, Sugar,” he ordered. They disappeared onto the dance floor.

“Don’t mind Sarge, Kelia,” Orrie said as he took me out to the dance floor and held me tight. “I’ve been out with him before. He may come on strong but he’s just trying to find out what kind of woman he’s out with. In the South we either put our women on pedestals and worship them or if they’re the kind that come from the wrong side of the tracks we have some fun at their expense.”

I gasped. “That sounds like what Leonard Aoti’s father is always saying to Leonard,” I realised. “Why I remember him telling Leonard that there were only two types of women, Geisha class and potential wives and he wasn’t sure which one I would turn into. Maybe culture differences aren’t as great as gender differences?” I thought. “At least for males.”

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My frown must have really upset Orrie.

“Really, Kelia. Sarge is safe, I assure you. He’s totally committed to his family back home. He just likes to have a little female companionship on breaks.”

“His family back home? You mean he’s married?” I gasped. “Are you married, too, Orrie?”

“No, Kelia.” Orrie laughed at the expression on my face. “I’m only twenty-five. Back where I come from most of us Southern fellows get married at thirty. We need some time to sew a few wild oats first.”

“Twenty-five,” I started. I had thought Orrie was only about twenty-one. I repressed my feelings of dismay then thought of something that made me hopeful again.

“Five years,” I calculated, “before he wants to get married. Five years, I could finish university by then.”

“I’ve been wanting to hold you close like this ever since I saw you through the laundry window, Kelia,” Orrie confessed. We danced several waltzes and by the time they were done all thoughts except how attractive Orrie was had left my head. We moved back to the table. Lokia was laughing heartily with the Sergeant.

“LeRoy has been keeping me in stitches,” Lokia complained. I noticed a drink in front of her that wasn’t beer. It was almost gone and even in the dim light I could see that Lokia had quite a bit of red in her cheeks.

“What’s that stuff?” I asked.

“Saki, Sugar, Japanese whiskey, y’all should be familiar with that. Here, have one yourself,” Sarge ordered.

He drank my beer in a gulp and filled my glass with a liquid out of a flask he had under his jacket.

“Don’t worry, Sugar,” he said at my worried look. “Orrie and I will look out for y’all sweet things,” he promised. “Why I have two daughters back in Alabama almost as old as y’all girls. I just like to get out in female company once in a while, I assure you.”

“I went into shock. Lokia almost dropped her glass. The Sergeant didn’t look anywhere near his age.”

“Look, I’ll prove it to y’all. Just tell me what time your parents expect you to be home and I’ll drive you there myself.”

“Oh, my parents are on Oahu for the weekend,” Lokia blurted out. “Kelia’s parents are letting her stay at my place for the night. We don’t have to be home till late.”

I frowned at Lokia. “Did Miss Goody-two-shoes have to tell the Marines everything,” I thought. I reached for my Saki.

“You’re lucky you girls have us,” the Sarge said judiciously. “Lots of

servicemen would take advantage of that information, believe me? You sweet little fillies really are innocents, ain't y'all?"

"Sarge," Orrie protested. "Remember, I've been waiting for weeks to get Kelia alone by herself."

"Don't look now Orrie but you still ain't got Kelia to yourself." Sarge laughed and pulled his flask out to refill his drink.

"Damn," he pronounced. "Don't tell me we have to switch back to beer. What a downer. Don't they serve anything else here?"

"Fraid not, Sarge," Orrie replied.

"Then we've got to find another place to entertain these sweet young fillies, Orrie. Come on Nimura, I bet you know somewhere that has a lounge, anywhere that serve's hard liquor."

"The only place I know that has a hard liquor license is the Volcano House lounge and restaurant," I replied.

"How far is it to there, Sugar?"

"Why, about forty-five minutes, Sarge."

"Then we're off. Particularly if you girls don't have to be home till late. Come on Orrie. There's a full moon out tonight and I bet that volcano is a sight worth seeing on such a night."

"Hey, Sarge," it's 11:00. By the time we get there, the lounge is likely to be closed."

"Not till midnight. Believe me, we'll make it before then. Come on Ladies. I was under the impression you wanted to have some fun tonight."

Lokia stood up.

"I'll go with you, Sarge," she volunteered. I could see that Miss Goody-two shoes had already had too much to drink. She was acting completely out of character. Her gait was unsteady and her response when Sarge kissed her on the lips was much too intense. I realised I couldn't let her go by herself. I remembered all my mother's warnings about how alcohol removed your inhibitions.

"Let's go Orrie, "I agreed.

Orrie and the Sergeant put their arms around us and walked us out. The Sarge handed a bill to the cashier.

I went into the back seat with Orrie and Lokia sat next to the Sergeant in the front. "Much too close to him," I thought.

Then I forgot all about Lokia as Orrie pulled me tight against him. He kissed me on the mouth and I forgot everything until the Sergeant wheeled out of the driveway with his back tires screaming loudly. I figured that we were in for quite a drive. Sarge boosted the local radio station up and the sounds of "Blue Hawaii" filled the night. The drive up to the Volcano turned into a horror movie. Orrie held

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me tight as the Sergeant roared around the curves on the Chain of Crater's road. A car approaching us had to head for the ditch as the Sergeant roared around a particularly sharp curve on the wrong side of the yellow line.

I screamed.

"Slow down Sarge," Orrie ordered. Then he kissed me on the lips a few times and my heart beat fiercely. I couldn't figure out if I was having the time of my life or if we were all going to be killed any minute. The horror ended suddenly as Sarge roared into the parking lot of the Volcano House restaurant and Inn.

Sarge whistled appreciatively as we looked around and saw cars taking up almost every parking spot in the place.

"See l'il Buddy. I told y'all this place would still be open."

"Why are those lights on in the plateau above the volcano crater?" Lokia asked. I looked in the direction she was pointing. Surprise went through my body. A panel of spotlights was lighting up a small part of the plateau above the crater. A crowd could be seen watching something and the sound of chanting could be heard coming from the plateau.

"It must be a special hula presentation," I shouted.

"Hold on a minute," Sarge commanded as we moved towards the pit. "I'm going to see if I can find some liquid refreshment for y'all."

Sarge disappeared into the door of the restaurant entrance. I spotted the path to the plateau and moved towards it. Footsteps beside me told me that Lokia and Orrie were following beside me.

I moved towards the lights ahead. We slid down onto the plateau over lava and through the shadows of burned out ohia trees and other underbrush. Some kind of vapor was pouring out of the crater floor like a fog. I guessed it was the usual volcano fog that settled over Hilo. The locals called it vog. It made it hard to see clearly.

A full moon lit up the places on the plateau not obscured by vog. We slithered down a steep path towards the lights ahead until we reached the crowd staring into the plateau. We moved up to the back of the crowd. They were watching something intently. I listened closely. Chanting could be heard and the sound of an gourd drum being rhythmically struck.

"Maybe it's ghosts, Kelia," Lokia looked scared out of her wits.

"Don't be silly, Lokia," I responded. I pulled Lokia and Orrie through the crowd to the front. Everyone was looking into a small clearing in the middle of the plateau. We stared in surprise.

Beneath the full moon a hula dancer was vigorously dancing an ancient mele hula. Behind her was a man thumping an gourd drum, an ipu. He was chanting in ancient Hawaiian and accompanying the dancer. Both the phantoms were dressed in

the costume of the people of old.

“Kelia, it’s Nalani Wai,” Lokia whispered. “And that man must be her usual accompanianist. Keokolo Kane. I understand he’s a professor at the University of Hawaii at Manoa.”

The dancer and her accompanist moved in our direction. It was Nalani Wai. I could see her clearly. As her accompanist came up to us I stared at his features.

Thoughts of Orrie momentarily went out of my mind. “God, he’s handsome,” I found myself thinking. He was a tall, part-Hawaiian man looking very muscular in his tapa cloth covering. His blonde hair reached down to his shoulders and his voice was very powerful.

Just then some man created a big disturbance pushing through the onlookers. I realised with a sinking heart that it was Orrie’s sergeant.

“Hey y’all, we lucked out,” Sarge announced loudly, holding a huge liquor bottle high in the air.

“How much did that set you back, Sarge?” Orrie asked.

“Never mind, some tourist sold it to me. It’s real Southern Bourbon, worth it’s weight in gold,” Sarge replied loudly. “What’s going on? The guy in the lounge said that there was a special hula performance by some famous hula dancer going on out here. I wanted to see it. Remember Betty Grable in ‘Song of the Islands,’ Orrie? Maybe we’re going to see something like that.”

The crowd hissed as his loud talking was interfering with their concentration on the hula. My face went bright red.

“God, I hope there’s no one here that recognises Lokia and I,” I thought. I turned my attention back to the performance. Beneath the full moon and illuminated by lights set up on the plateau overlooking the crater floor, Nalani Wai was vigorously dancing an ancient mele hula.

“That’s one of the hulas that she danced earlier,” I whispered to Kelia but she didn’t have that accompanist with her.”

“I think his plane got in late or something,” Lokia whispered.

“What if someone recognises us?” I asked, worried. People were beginning to stare at the Sergeant.

“Don’t do anything to attract attention to us,” Lokia whispered.

“Well, that sure ain’t Betty Grable,” Sarge announced loudly. “What happened to those lushious hula maidens they had dancing in the harbor this afternoon? That old dame must be at least fifty if she’s a day.”

“Quiet ignorant haole,” hissed a person behind us. “Who invited you here, anyway? This performance is a special invitation performance for the members of the Hale Nua Society of Hilo. Take your boorish self elsewhere. You haoles have no appreciation for the dances of the ancients at all.”

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“And no respect for Hawaiian culture, either,” someone else protested. I nearly died. My mother was the secretary for the Hale Nua Society of Hilo. The hair on the back of my neck stood up in fear. I felt goosebumps form on my arms as I realised we were seconds away from someone realising who Lokia and I were.

“Kelia, your mother might even be in this crowd,” Lokia warned.

I looked back at the performance. Nalani Wai seemed to be in some kind of trance.

“The goddess Pele is speaking to her,” someone in the crowd whispered. “She often dances up here alone on full moons.”

“Sure,” Sarge let out a loud snort. He turned to the man that had asked him to leave.

“Who you calling names, Brah?” he demanded in an angry voice. Sarge seemed to be having a delayed reaction. I realised his thinking was slowed by the alcohol he had drunk.

“Have some respect for Uncle Sam’s uniform at least,” he ordered in a drunken slur.

“Get out of here!” the Hale Nua Society member ordered him loudly. “You are ruining this performance.” The man suddenly lost it and spit into the Sarge’s face.” Sarge flew into a rage. He slammed the man in the jaw knocking him backwards. Ladies in the crowd screamed.

Orrie grabbed the sargeant from behind.

“Take it easy, Sarge,” he tried to sooth the big soldier. “This ain’t back home where we come from.”

“Sorry y’all,” Orrie apologised to the now menacing crowd of locals. “Sarge ain’t a bad guy, he’s just had a few too many.”

“Get him out of here before we do,” the man that Sarge hit yelled. Orrie dragged Sarge in the direction of the parking lot and Lokia and I slunk after him.

“Who were the women with those louts? Hope those aren’t local girls,” someone in the crowd asked.

“Not likely,” someone else laughed. “Surely our local girls would have more taste.” I tried to quell the fear and nausea in my stomach.

“Move into the shadows, Orrie,” I directed. “Let’s get out of here fast. There’s people here from Hilo. Someone might recognise Lokia and I.”

“What’s your worry, Sugar,” Sarge demanded. I told y’all that you and your buddy are safe with Orrie and I.”

Sarge didn’t seem to realise how embarrassed Lokia and I were at his actions. He seemed to have calmed down a little, though. Orrie released him. I turned and realised we’d moved to the top of a little hill. The performance in the crater was visible again. I looked at it intently. Orrie and the Sarge looked too.

“Hula performance,” Sarge sneered. “Why, take a good look at that guy banging that drum.” Lokia and I started at the sneer in Sarge’s voice.

Keokolo Kane was visible in the spotlight as he chanted an ancient oli dating back hundreds of years on a temple drum.

“Look at that guy,” commented Sarge. “He’s even got the nerve to wear something a filly would wear. And that wailing. Sounds like something from the grave.”

“Keep your voice down, Sarge,” Orrie warned. “You’ll have that crowd tar and feather us yet.

“That chantor is dressed in tapa cloth,” I protested. “Ancient barkcloth that some craftsperson worked for days to create and decorate with ornate designs. He’s not a homosexual, he’s just dressed in ancient costume.” I was appalled at the stupidity of the Sergeant.”

“Let’s get out of here, Orrie,” I pleaded.

“Thank Christ,” the Sarge commented loudly. “Let’s go back to the lounge.”

“I’d rather not,” I protested. “There’s bound to be somebody here that recognises Lokia and me, maybe even my mother.”

The crowd seemed to be dispersing back to the restaurant entrance. The performance must have ended.

“Let’s go back to the car, Sarge, I think it’s time to take the girls home. I’ll drive and you can enjoy your bottle in the back seat.”

“OK, I’il buddy,” he agreed. We moved towards the parking lot. As we climbed up to the top of the trail and moved into the parking lot Sarge waved his bottle high above his head. We reached the side of our sedan and then Sarge offered the bottle to Orrie and Lokia. To my horror Lokia drank some of the liquid.

“Hands against the car,” a loud voice ordered from behind the car as a flashlight was suddenly shot into our faces.

“Flat on the ground,” the voice ordered. All of a sudden uniformed police surrounded us. I watched in horror as the officer put a pistol to Sarge’s head. He dropped to all fours. The officer grabbed the bottle out of his hand.

“You too, buddy,” the officer ordered Orrie to the ground. The officers handcuffed Sarge and Orrie’s hands behind their backs.

“Had a report of somebody driving dangerously out of control on the Chain of Crater’s road,” another officer pulled out a blue book. “You the fellows responsible?”

“And how about you ladies,” he flashed the flashlight at Lokia and me. He whistled.

“How old are you girls, anyway?”

“Twenty-one,” I lied. I pulled my fake ID out of my purse. The officer shone a

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light on the picture.

“This isn’t you, young lady,” he said accusingly. “What else have you got in your purse?” He grabbed the purse out of my hand. I was mortified. The Hale Nua Society was now gathering around us in the parking lot.

“Kelia Nimura,” the officer announced, staring at my real ID. I heard someone in the crowd gasp.

“My God, that’s Auhea Nimura’s daughter. Thank God she isn’t with us tonight to witness this.” My heart stopped.

“Birthdate July 2, 1951. That makes you a minor, young lady.”

“Read these soldiers their rights, Keono,” he ordered another officer. “They’re going to be charged with drunk driving, speeding, failing to give the right of way, giving liquor to a minor, and drinking in a public place for starters.”

“Take the girls in a separate car, Keono,” the officer ordered. “I imagine we’ve got parents somewhere who are going to be very interested where their daughters were tonight.” I turned beet red. I realised I had very little chance of even seeing Orrie again after my parents disciplined me and the Marine Corps got through with him and Sarge. I’d be lucky if I wasn’t grounded for a year.

“What did you say the name of that chantor was Lokia?” I asked my sobbing friend as we were driving down the Chain of Crater’s road.

“Keokolo Kane,” Kelia, but how can you think of him at a time like this. Our parents are going to give us Holy Hell when they find out what happened.

“You’re right Lokia, I’ll be fortunate if they even let me go to University in September after this. They’ll never believe we were just coming up to Volcano House for dinner.”

Loud applause in the audience brought me back to 1999. I realised with consternation that I had missed the whole of the second scene of Act I of the hula epic. People passed before me as another break began. “I was so young,” I thought. “And so trusting of good looking members of the opposite sex. Even those in uniform.” The memories were causing a sharp pain in my heart. They were causing me to feel the humiliation I experienced in my early ventures with men.

“If only I knew then what I know now,” I thought. I hope Keke doesn’t have to go through what I went through as an adolescent. I was in so much of a hurry for my prince to come along. And I kept mistaking lust in my suitor’s eyes for love. I hope Keololo and I have managed to get through to her that she can have an identity of her own without having to live vicariously through a young man.” I willed myself to return to the present.

“This is the only theatre I’ve ever been in that had enough room in the aisles for people to get by without someone standing up,” Keo spoke. I tried to pull my thoughts back to the present but they seemed to want to stay in the past. I smiled as

I remembered how all Hell had broken loose when our parents picked Lokia and I up at the police station.

A deadly silence had accompanied me as I had been driven home.

Once we got in to the privacy of our house it started.

“University pau, Keiki, finished. You lose honor. No way we pay educate dishonorable daughter.” My mother was furious.

“Hilo laundry advertise fo permanent worker. You take. Grounded house one year. Find honor. Prove you worthy of trust again. End conversation.”

I realised with horror that my parents were putting me to work in the Hilo Laundry for a year, maybe even forever.

“Lokia go school on mainland with cousins,” Mother informed me.

“You say goodbye tomorrow on phone. I promise her parents you never see again.”

I realised they had even discussed the matter already with Lokia’s parents. I nearly died with embarrassment. We were being treated like disgraces. And not even being given a chance to explain.

“But Father-san,” I turned to my more understanding parent the next day. “Nothing happened. We were just going to have dinner with the servicemen.”

I could see I had made a mistake to even try and discuss the matter rationally. Father-san’s face was red with anger, pain and humiliation.

“Kelia, your mother nearly died last night with embarrassment and shame,” he explained. “You made her the laughingstock of the Hale Nua Society not to mention the entire Hawaiian and part-Hawaiian population of Hilo. And what about my Japanese business associates? You know what they are saying about your actions. That episode was more in keeping with a young woman destined to become a Geisha rather than a respectable Japanese bride. You’ve done irreparable damage to your reputation.”

“How was I supposed to know the Hale Nua Society of Hilo was going to be up at the Volcano House?” I protested.

“Kelia, you know I don’t put any stock in the old religious and cultural beliefs of your mother but membership in the Hale Nua Society is very important to her. You’ve destroyed any possibility she had of becoming the President of the Society.”

“Who cares?” I said defiantly.

“Oh, and I suppose you don’t care about me, either. What about my chances of becoming Chairman of the Hilo Chamber of Commerce?”

I started. Father-sans voice had suddenly become very cold. I gasped. I’d forgotten how important face is to the Japanese.

“Leonard Aoti’s father phoned me late last night, Kelia.” Father was speaking very slowly and deliberately. I could tell he was in no mood for my explanations.

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“The word was out by the time we returned from the Police station. Murai Aoti offered me his condolences and regretted that his son would now have to find a more suitable wife. You know what that means.”

“I’m sorry, Father-san, I never meant to cause you embarrassment.”

“It’s too late for apologies, now young lady. I don’t want to hear anymore. Your mother has already decided your punishment. I think that under the circumstances I would be wise to support her.”

“No university for a year Father-san?”

“Yes, and when you arrive in Honolulu next year your mother has arranged for you to study with Nalani Wai. She has graciously agreed to instruct you in the advanced secrets of mele hula. If you show any promise she might even instruct you in mele oli as well. Some of her students even become kumu hulas. By the time you are through with the first series of lessons Nalani Wai will evaluate how much promise you have.”

“That means hours of study every day, doesn’t it?”

“Yes, Kelia. Believe me, you need the discipline that training will offer you. And after the boredom of the Hilo Laundry for a year I assure you that you’ll welcome even Nalani Wai’s attentions.”

“But Father-san, I don’t want to be a kumu hula!” I begged. “Please don’t make me take those lessons. And live with Nalani Wai, I’d rather die first.”

“It’s either that, Kelia, or a year in Hiroshima with my widowed sister. You know, the one that wants to become a Buddhist nun. Which do you prefer?”

I remember running from the room in tears at my parents tyranny. I couldn’t imagine a worse fate than Japan with the widowed sister of Father-san.

“I never thought I’d be able to hold my head up high again in public in Hilo,” I remembered. “But eventually the locals thought I had reformed myself and forgave me. “And I got to know Leonard Aoti much better.” I smiled ruefully.

Back in the audience as my daughter rose to go for intermission for some reason I thought of the tourist’s question about Hawaiian culture again. “Well, there wasn’t much evidence of survival of the hula Kahiko in Hilo in 1968, all right,” I thought. “Or even for years after. Except for Nalani Wai who rarely performed in the public at all, most of the hula done in Honolulu and even the early years of the Merry Monarch Festival was the modern hula accompanied by string instruments.”

“When did the Hawaiian culture become so strong again, Dear,” I asked my astonished husband as the intermission continued.

“Are you still dwelling on that, Kelia?” he laughed. “Why I think it was when Governor Burns government started giving out money for Hawaiian culture. You know, that fellow he appointed head of the State Foundation For Culture And The Arts. Those grants helped many of the hula halau research authentic hula. You

remember Governor Burns' time, don't you?"

His words seemed to stir up even more memories. I suddenly found myself back in Hilo, again, a few weeks after the Volcano House episode. I was desperately trying to figure out how to contact Orrie Robinson.

* * *

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