

## Chapter One

George (pronounced Gay-org), my husband or jailer, depending on how you look at it, and I were living on the Big Island of Hawaii, high in the Kohala Mountains, near Hawi. It has a remarkably temperate climate, as compared with most of the rest of Hawaii. The day was sunny and serene with a light breeze teasing the whispering pines, which bordered our ranch, *Quinta Da Bela Vista*. I found the setting tranquil, when, as now, George was gone and the backdrop of the green rolling hills majestic.

I was out on the sun porch early one morning enjoying a fresh squeezed papaya and orange juice cocktail, when Mrs. McAfee, one of our household servants, brought me the phone. It was a call from Doctor Smeckel [change name] that brought me the bad news.

“We’ve completed our lab tests on your blood samples and it appears you have clamitia.” [rethink the precise venereal disease.]

“Is that bad, Doctor? Is it serious?” I remembered hearing the news that my son had cystic fibrosis. It had seemed so matter of fact at first and then became so morbid as time progressed that I wondered if this would be the same.

“I won’t lie to you, Lili. It *is* very serious. . . . I mean it didn’t have to be if you had been properly treated from the onset, but it’s gone untreated for so long . . .”

I thought of that bastard husband of mine and how he had forbidden me to go to the doctor. “Is it fatal, doctor? Will I die?”

“No, you won’t die. In fact you’ll be able to live a long healthy life.”

A cool morning breeze swept off the nearby mountains and chilled my worried face. I put my hand on the patio table to steady myself. Mrs. McAfee was wiping down the lawn furniture and looked over at me with concern.

“Then, what is it, Doctor? Why is it such bad news?”

“Lili, I’m afraid the disease has gotten into your ovaries. We can kill it in pretty short order with antibiotics and I’ve already called the pharmacy to have them delivered, but . . .”

I knew what he was about to say. I dropped the phone, took one step toward the railing, tripped over the breakfast table and fell to my knees. Mrs. McAfee rushed over. I pushed against her leg to make her go away. I wept on the cement. I felt like slamming my head into it to put myself out of my misery. I had lost one child through death and now I had lost them all—all of the unborn children I might have had, dreamed of having, dreamed of raising into fine young men and women.

This was the one last reason for hope and fulfillment I had given myself in times of depression, the one complete rainbow on the horizon that kept me going.

Like a serpent hissing, I could hear the doctor's voice through the long, coiled black cord of the phone line, confirming the worst. "Lili . . . , Lili . . . the problem is you'll never be able to have children. . . . I mean children of your own."

I retreated into the fetal position, while Mrs. McAfee said "Good-bye" to the doctor and hung up. I lay there, refusing to be consoled, refusing to be comforted, or moved. As the sun rose and beat down on our patio and the morning dew burnt off, I begged to die for I felt dead already, dead from the inside out. The genes of my ancestors, my loving mother, her parents, the good, strong, righteous people who were in my line had been mistaken to pass along their mana to me for I had squandered it.

Mrs. McAfee allowed me to continue my grieving. She pulled an umbrella stand over to block the sun out of my eyes, then picked up the dishes, cleaned up my uneaten food and periodically came back to wipe the sweat from my forehead. When she dared to reach for my hand I wouldn't let her hold it. I had to endure my misery alone.

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Around noon, I moved back to the lawn chair, pulled my knees up to my chin and wrapped my arms around them. I stared into the ironwoods, which I called the whispering pines, still numb from the news. I knew it would do no good to confront my husband, George, with the wages of his infidelity. I had slept with him, even after I knew him to be the cruel person he was—for the purpose of child bearing, but I never expected him to ruin our chances of having that child together.

I had desperately wanted a child, even if it was "our" child—because I didn't believe that God sends us any but innocent children and I figured George, now that I had given evidence to the authorities, was about to be hauled off to jail. *Good riddance!*

Over the course of many months, I had made a truce with him, or, rather, a workable accommodation. He didn't bother me, except for the purposes of propagation and I neither dined with, spoke to, or bothered him about his business, or his comings and goings, day or night. Meanwhile, I enjoyed the benefits of his unfathomable wealth.

The U.S., British, Barbadian, Antiguan, Guatemalan, and various other governments had cooperated in rounding up many of the individuals on the organizational chart I had turned over to the F.B.I. I had thought that my husband, one of the *copos* in an organized crime ring would be among the first to go. That's what I had counted on.

I would let him sow his seed, get brought to justice, and then I would raise what would probably be a very bright and talented son or daughter with all the advantages and opportunities of his wealth. I believed that once George was behind bars I could do a wonderful job of raising my son or daughter without any help from a man.

I could've retreated into the amusements of the idle rich, but would not have found that fulfilling. Instead, I had started a school and spent most of my time conducting classes for children, in music, the languages--English and Hawaiian--and in Hawaiian culture. There were no conditions as to race, means or class. Some students came from as far away as Oahu and came each day by boat, commercial jet or seaplane.

I tried to console myself and regain my composure for the days' tasks at hand after the devastating phone call from my doctor. From my vantage point on the sun porch I noticed an early arrival coming up past the security checkpoints. I was surprised when I saw the child hobble. I couldn't remember any of my students, even the

occasional visitors, having such an impairment and hoped that she had not suffered an injury.

George was understanding in one respect. The children were neither interrogated nor searched and allowed to come and go as they wished. At some level I think he liked them, but it was hard, if not impossible, for me to admit by then that he might actually have even one good quality.

I continued to watch the child make her way up the driveway. It was like watching someone ride a bicycle that had a wheel with one flat, octagonal side. Her gait was smooth and rhythmic, yet she would bounce each time she covered a short distance--smooth flowing strides, followed by a sudden bounce. I picked up the binoculars I kept handy for bird watching.

In the view provided by the binoculars I was moved by the child's big green eyes in contrast to the bright yellow chiffon, ruffled dress she wore. It reminded me of the colorful, stately fashion I had seen on Sundays at the People's Cathedral in Bridgetown, Barbados in what now seemed like another lifetime. Mrs. McAfee placed a sandwich on the serving tray in front of me, which she clipped onto either side of the lawn chair. I was so caught up trying to identify the child that I barely noticed she had handed me some tablets to take, which had arrived from the pharmacy. I leaned forward, as I swallowed them with a glass of pineapple juice. Then it came to me.

"It's Emma!" I shrieked and jumped up. The dishes and silverware flew everywhere. "Mrs. McAfee, it's Emma! It's Emma Williams! . . . the little girl I told you about from Barbados. What could she be doing here?"

Just the sight of her made my heart race with joy. I sidestepped the broken dishes, hastily zigzagged down the stairs and ran towards her.

“Emma! Emma Williams!” I shouted. “What are you doing here . . . my precious little girl?”

Emma was startled and stopped to look up at me. I must have seemed like an erupting volcano charging towards her. I closed the gap like an elk, grabbed her and engulfed her in my arms. I placed a kiss firmly on her cheek, bundled in a giant hug. My joy found kindling, even among the barren ashes inside me. I didn't think that was possible.

I turned Emma sideways and placed another kiss on her cheek. Then I pushed her back so I could look into her eyes. Tears flowed down my cheeks and crept into my lips. I remember the faint taste of salt. “My, but you've grown,” I said. “I can't believe how much you've grown. What's it been now? Two years . . . three since I last saw you?”

Emma didn't answer. In my joy, I had forgotten she had difficulty speaking--in fact never said much at all.

Once I let go of her arms, she seemed more at ease and politely said, “Sh-sh-shoogah.”

“Sugar, yes,” I replied. “You can call me Sugar. You can call me anything your darling little heart desires.” I held her to my bosom, where I had just that very morning resigned myself to the news that there would never be another child. “What are you doing here?” I asked.

She looked down at the ground. “Dad-d-d-y's d-d-d-dade!” she said.

Oh my, how I didn't want that to be true. *Oh, God, don't tell me he's dead—not the love of my life. Don't tell me that!*

Emma trembled. She reached into her purse and handed me an envelope. She looked at me, solemn and stone-faced, "Dad-d-d-d-y's d-d-d-d . . ." As clearly as I had anticipated the words of Doctor Smeckel on the serpent phone, I felt the dagger of Lance's death plunge deep into my heart.

I held the little girl closer still. I held her and she trembled. I held her and she cried. I held her and we both cried. I brushed back her hair and kissed her about the face and then on her hands and arms. Oh, how I valued this child.

I leaned back, so I could see into her beautiful green eyes and tried to be as steady and comforting as I could. Even though I already knew the worst, I had to have it confirmed. "Your Daddy's dead, Emma? Is that what you've been trying to tell me?"

She nodded. I looked up and the distant peaks had become enshrouded in thunderous clouds, black clouds, darker clouds than I could ever remember. It started to rain, misty at first, but then it grew and grew into a torrential downpour.

At the edge of our estate, I could see a black footman, who had worked his way through security, struggling to carry Emma's luggage, sliding in the mud. *He must have brought her from Barbados*, I thought. The guards watched while he lugged her heavy bags in our direction, but I had something more important to do before I could come to his aid. I had to hear what my dear Lance had said to me. I stood under a tattered awning, ripped by the wind and tore open the envelope. Rain swept in, blurred the ink and dripped from the end of my nose. I shook my head and the letter.

I recognized his handwriting. Unlike George's, whose was frilly, Lance's words were scrawled in a barely legible scrip.

I brushed away the mixture of rain and tears and read. "My dearest Lili, If you are reading this, it means that I am gone," the letter began. Those words made my heart sink. Even though I knew by now at a conscious level that Lance was dead, I was still in an emotional state of disbelief. I reread the words.

I knew I had to keep my composure or I would trouble the little girl. I motioned for the maids to bring towels to the footman and help him bring the luggage into the house. The rain subsided, but the cool Kohala winds continued to [blow—word choice?].

I sat on the ground, sidesaddle in the driveway, holding Emma with one arm, as I read Lance's note.

"I have long feared for my life and felt it would be best to make arrangements for that which is most precious to me before it is too late. I love all my children. But, God help me, I fear that I love Emma the best. I'm not sure why, because she's a badge of my sin and infidelity. At least that's what my minister has said to me. Yes, I'm going to church again and I'm back in the choir."

I smiled. *That beautiful voice of yours belongs in the choir, . . . and in the heavens!* I sighed.

The letter went on. "Maybe it's her handicap. Maybe it's because I see so much goodness in her that could bloom, if she were only planted in the right soil, or *aina*, as you call it. Maybe it's her pretty face, or the obeah [magic] that seems to abound in her.

“I know my sister, Sharee, or my parents would take her, but I also know they don't want her. None of them has ever gotten over the misery I brought to Emma's mother, when I was unfaithful. But she is a beautiful child. I see in her only goodness.”

I smiled as I fought back the tears. I could hear Lance's husky, masculine voice saying just that.

“I didn't want to run the risk of you refusing my request, so I asked that this letter and my daughter be delivered to your doorstep at the same moment. I knew that would force you to keep her. Right at this very moment, I know you've got your arm around her and are holding her close.”

I tightened my grip on the little girl. She had put her arm around my neck. I knew she could not read the letters and must have wondered what he had said to me.

“It's from your daddy,” I said. “He wants me to keep you.”

Emma smiled. I pulled her to my side.

“Sugar, I beg you. Raise Emma for me! Trust my judgment in making this decision. You will make every bit as good of a mother to her as I could have been her father. In time she will love you as if you were both. I've never seen her so taken with another person, as she was with you, during that glorious time when we lived together under my roof in the glow of a bright Bajan sun.

Your lover always, Austin Clyde “Lance” Williams, RBPF.”

PS: Give Emma your fighting spirit, infuse your *mana* and help her become the fourth goddamn ‘W’ that I never was. I know you can! Do it for me and for the love we once shared.”

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Between the time we embraced in the driveway and Emma had a chance to unpack and prepare for dinner, the full brunt of the news, as well as the medicine I had taken hit me broadside and I passed out. I fell into a dreamlike stupor, while my body fought off the scourge of George Santini. I remember trying to regain consciousness, but my entrapment was like the riptide that had killed my mother. Each time I tried desperately to escape, it pulled me back into the undertow.

During my dreams I saw Lance, high atop my favorite horse, but he carried a spear and not a lance for there is no metal in Hawaiian soil. He had the look of my ancestors in his eyes.

Apparently the doctor at the Quinta had told everyone that my delirium was from the hold the disease had on my body, as well as the medication he had given me to combat it, but I know differently. It was a time designated for me to enter the spirit world to make peace with Lance for leaving him without so much as a word of explanation. It was full of bright shiny rainbows. I was able to converse with him and caress his soft, smooth skin. Together we whisked through the limits of time, arm-in-arm without the shackles of prejudice, unbridled by worldly constraints.

It was a place that was very much like Hawaii, although there were plants I didn't recognize and all of the air smelled sweet, perfume like, some of it like plumeria blossoms, other exotic aromas I had never experienced.

I promised I would raise his child as though she were my own and he promised that he in would always look after the two of us, especially when we needed it most and least expected it. I have no idea how long I was gone from this world. It could have been a few hours or a few days. I lost all track of time.

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When I awoke, there was no one in my suite, so I made my way to the kitchen. One of the chauffeurs was pounding a drumbeat with apapane sticks he had borrowed from the little cottage in which I conducted my school. There was Emma, doing the hula, not with perfect gestures and technique, but with excellent rhythm and poise. No one saw me enter. Everyone was enamored with the little girl and laughing and encouraging her to keep the beat, shake her body and waver her arms with feeling and precision.

Then, Mrs. McAfee noticed me and spilled coffee on her shirt. "Ouch!" she said.

Another of our maids ran over to hug me. Paulo, the repairman, Reginald and Mrs. McAfee joined them. Sharee, Lance's sister was there, too. I felt as though I were in one of those pile ups you see in the football games on television on Sunday afternoons. Then Emma started to scream. She must have thought they might hurt me.

Tiny, my friend and bodyguard, came to my aid and the sea of people parted to allow me to walk across the room and take our little charge into my arms to reassure her. "Sugar will take care of you," I knelt down to her level. "I'm your new mommy. You will never have to leave here. We'll never part."

Then, I got to wondering about Sharee. I turned to ask her, "What are you doing here? I didn't see you when Emma got here. Were you in the security station being searched?"

By now, it was midmorning and the light coming through the skylight felt warm and comforting. A hazy sunshine filled the room.

Sharee did not answer.

I looked over at Mrs. McAfee. "She's come to take the little girl home with her," she said. "Your husband has refused to allow her to stay. She was entertaining us one last time before Sharee was about to leave with her and take her home when in you walked."

I couldn't believe what I was hearing. I looked over at Paulo.

"He gave his orders," he said. "While you were sleeping."

I knew I should have found a way to break the bonds of that wonderful sleep, the sleep while I was communing with Lance. I had had that feeling, especially near the end. I looked over at Tiny. If anyone would back me and take my side against this monster, I knew it was Tiny. He shrugged his shoulders, indicating his own powerlessness and nodded his confirmation.

I grabbed Emma tighter than ever, trembling. I picked her up and she put her arms around my neck. When she arrived, she had weighed a ton, but now she felt light as a feather. "Why not? Why won't he let me keep her?"

Even Sharee, who had never approved of my relationship with her brother, looked sympathetic. "I don't know," she said, "but he sounded cross and determined."

"The boss is convinced that's the way it has to be," Tiny said. "I don't think there's no changing his mind."

"Where is he? When is he coming back?" I said. If he had walked in the door at that very minute, I am convinced that I had the will and the inclination to kill him.

Finally, Mrs. McAfee said, "He's gone to the Mainland. He'll be back in a few days."

Tiny added, "The boss said he wanted the little girl gone by the time he gets back and that none of us had better cross him."

The group confirmed the news.

I dropped down to the floor, sat beside Emma, and tried to console her. I shouldn't have had that conversation in front of her, but I was so angry that the words just poured out. A big tear ran down her cheek. "Shoo-shoo-shoogah," she said.

"No one's taking you anywhere, love. No one's taking you away."

I looked at Tiny, who represented George's authority in his absence. "She doesn't have to go anywhere." I sobbed. "She doesn't have to go anywhere today, does she?"

"No, ma'am," he replied at length. "No, ma'am, I guess she don't—leastwise not today."

I looked over at Reginald and Paulo. "Now you men go take her bags back and put them into the spare bedroom. Sharee can stay with me in my suite. She can use the extra bed."

I looked down at the little girl and brushed away her tears. "Mommy's not going to let them take you. You'll see. You're mine now and Sugar's not going to let them take you away from here—not now, not ever!"