

Part I
Barbados
1994

Chapter One

We tried to slip into our hotel room without being noticed. It had stark white stucco walls with a big round window, cleverly placed window seats, a cylindrical shower stall, strange and varying angles between the wall and ceiling components and most of all a breathtaking view of the ocean. We found it charming.

We made it clear from the beginning that we didn't welcome any intrusion from the maids and my companion periodically went down to the common dining area by himself and brought back all of our meals to the room. I knew from the outset that I was using him but decided in advance to enjoy myself for a brief respite before doing what it was I came here to do.

The proprietor was kind enough to supply us with any number of books to read. They were packed away on a convenient little bookshelf to our left, just as we entered the room. My companion had brought his own reading material. We spent a considerable length of time reading and enjoying our books and magazines.

My companion and I hadn't brought any luggage except for our gym bags and I made sure early on that his fit fully into mine.

We played chess. We conversed about the weather, about our jobs—where we worked for a common employer—about the small and trivial things in life that tend to bind couples and make them feel connected. There was no television in the room and no telephone but no one could call us there anyway because my companion had left a false identity with the receptionist. I had stolen a credit card with plenty of credit line and told him it was on loan to me while my “lost or stolen” one was being replaced. He registered us in the name of the cardholder and his wife, and I was confident the owner would not catch on until after our rendezvous had ended.

It was not long until we slipped off one another’s clothing, one delicious piece of apparel at a time. I eagerly pulled down his pants and got him very much into the mood. After that we couldn’t wait to get my clothes off and we had intercourse repeatedly with vehemence and passion. I knew this was not to be a long-term relationship but there was something about human intimacy, the sex act itself, that I found enthralling. The feeling of his sweaty body against mine, mine against his, the shrill high pitched roar of an orgasm, the promises, the entreaties, the ritual, the hopes, the dreams, even the deception was a wonderful aphrodisiac.

We did it. And we did it again, staying in our underwear all the while, in case either of us got the desire for more. We made a pact that if either of us wanted to do something nasty the other would oblige without question.

Other than that we mostly ate—delicious, light, nutritious meals brought to us by my lover. We read books and continued our one and only chess game. My companion was very clever when it came to chess and I could see his checkmate coming. I had already been in check three times and knew that an evasive maneuver was in order, so as not to lose the game. I stalled and refused to play until it was nearly time to checkout on the last day.

We decided to have one last encounter before we left the room to return to the real world and our workaday responsibilities. “I’m sorry I don’t have time to finish the chess game,” I said. “But I’ll make time for one more roll in the hay.” It was only midmorning and he was under the impression we were staying until late afternoon so I told him that I had just remembered a pressing responsibility I had to attend to. In fact I had one forthcoming and was so nervous about it that I had skipped eating breakfast.

He climbed onto the bed and waited for me while I went into the bathroom and took off my panties. I freshened my lipstick and eye shadow. I found that the ritual of painting my face steadied my nerves for our next encounter. When I approached him from behind he waited for me to do something nasty. Instead I put my arm around his neck and choked him until he gasped for air and flailed in panic and surprise.

He writhed in a similar manner to when we had made love and I found it erotic. The business had to be done before I weakened and gave in to the feelings I had developed for him. When I yanked and twisted his neck I could hear it snap. I flipped him onto his back, slit his throat and cut him from his chin to his navel with a steak knife I had lifted from the breakfast dishes on a tray that we later placed outside the door. I left the knife inserted at the end of the incision. The blood oozed and gushed until his heart stopped beating. The sight of it was exhilarating. I had to be extremely careful not to get it all over me. What blood did come my way, I soon rinsed off in the circular shower.

I dipped my index finger into his blood, took the warm crimson liquid and wrote across the pure white walls. I had to hurry. Yet I couldn't resist the compulsion to express my feelings about what we had done together.

Then I cleaned and scrubbed with the supplies obligingly left by the maids. I made sure there were no fingerprints, neither mine, nor his. No hair. I had been very careful of that. No clothing fragments. No residue from anything we had brought in except, of course, for my lover and his stains. I gathered all of our things, which didn't amount to much and stuffed them into my gym bag. At no small exertion I lugged my victim to the window and left him until I had a chance to make the bed. *Mustn't be untidy*. The quilt was green, white and yellow and had two bright yellow and green Macaws on it.

I wiped a Bajan dollar coin clean with a tissue, dropped it onto the bed and watched it bounce. I knew the proprietor's husband and all the hotel guests were out until evening on a cove and castle nature walk, which was part of their regular schedule of events. The staff had Sunday mornings off after nine a.m. The only one left to contend with was the proprietor and there were no check-ins expected that morning. My companion had inquired about that on the way in when he asked for a late checkout. No

lunch was served on Sundays. In short she wouldn't miss us if we departed early and you *could* say that my companion had already departed.

I watched from the window ledge with the body just inches below, partially covered by a towel I had put over his face. He looked so forlorn otherwise. Like clockwork I could see the proprietor walk from the reception area to the kitchen to begin preparations for a lavish dinner they would be serving tonight in advance of their star gazing show and astronomical discussion. Through struggle and sadness I lifted the modestly heavy frame of my lover's still supple body and shoved him out the window. His corpse plummeted to the ground below. I tossed the key on the bed, made sure I had my gym bag in hand, looked to be sure the breakfast dishes had been removed for cleaning and locked the door behind me.

When I got to the ground I could see that his blood had splattered onto the wall on his descent but there was nothing I could do about that. I hurriedly dragged the corpse to the small circular hot tub adjacent to the pool. I grabbed a fallen palm frond and brushed the path from the wall to the spa of footprints. I was careful not to step in any blood.

I turned on the hot tub and set the thermostat as high as it would go. I removed the knife from the body, severed the testicles from my victim and pushed his body into the spa. I tossed the knife into the pool. When I did so I could see the blood swirl into a cloud before it dispersed into the water. The hot tub, on the other hand, looked more like a Roman bath.

It was then that I noticed there were windsurfers just off the rocky shores near the pool. I had not counted on them but doubted any of them could see me clearly or guess what invigorating task I had been up to on this bright, sunny Sunday morning.

I kissed the tips of my fingers, transferred the kiss to the top of my lover's head and ran back to the car. I was in such a hurry that I didn't pay particular attention to whether or not the proprietor might see me. Instead I held my upper arm over my face. I put the gym bag into the trunk, jumped into the front seat and sped away.

On the way back to my abode I took the car, which the decedent had obligingly rented with the stolen credit card, to a remote area of Welchman Hall Gully, poured gasoline on it, as well as on the gym bag and its contents,

and set it ablaze. The next morning I read in *The Daily Advocate* that the body had been identified and that Lili Kaleo was the last known person to have seen him alive other than Mrs. Margaret Loveridge, the proprietor of the Peach n Quiet Resort.

* * *

Lili Kaleo arrived in Barbados several months before the murder. She stayed at a quaint little place called the Tower Hotel, which was a misnomer in that it was a wood frame low rise near Paradise Beach, consisting of two small buildings that looked more like converted houses than part of a hotel complex. She didn't bring much luggage, only a small satchel, in that she had left home in haste and been grieving to the point of not caring much about life's incidental amenities, least of all her appearance.

When she first got there she spent most of her time alone in her room, quiet and reflective, feeling sorry for herself, wondering whether or not it made any sense to go on. She would have been happy to stay in her room quilting, sewing and reading but the man who managed the front desk and brought her her meals wouldn't leave her alone.

"It's no good to stay holed up in your room all the time," he said. "You've got to come out and get some sunshine, swim in the pool, meet the rest of the guests."

At first she argued with him. "It's my business what I do with my time. You have no idea, no idea whatsoever what I've been through. You just don't understand."

Yet he was persistent. "It's for your own good, Mum. You're not eating enough to nourish a bananaquit. You must've lost ten kilos since you've been here." He put the service tray down on her table and said, "Come over here and look in the mirror."

She refused. But after he left the room and closed the door she did as he suggested. "*Mon Dieu*, Lili Kaleo," she said to herself. "Two more weeks like this and there'll be nothing left of you!"

* * *

That night with considerable reluctance, she joined the nightly gathering around the big round table on the porch of the auxiliary building. It was nothing more than a big wooden spool that used to hold electrical or telephone cable. It had been painted dark green and placed on its side to host cocktails, hors d'oeuvres and light dinner fair.

As she climbed the steps to the porch, Hans Jenkins, a man who introduced himself as a radio operator from the Netherlands working on a cargo ship out of Antigua said, "I've seen you skulkin' 'round here in the hallways," as the soft white suds from his ale spilled over the edge of his mug onto his heavily tattooed hand. He wiped his hand with his handkerchief and shook hers. The beer was pungent.

"I'm Lili . . . Lili Kaleo," she said as she returned his handshake and sat down. "Some people call me 'Sugar.'"

Hans had a terrible burn mark on the side of his cheek, a large potbelly and enormous, perfectly spherical blue eyes protruding from his heavily wrinkled skin, in much the same fashion as those of a crocodile. "What's a gorgeous creature like you doin' hidin' in your room?"

She responded with a glare as brittle as the island coral. "I'm not hiding, Mr. Jenkins. I spend the days in my room reading and sewing, writing letters, tending to my affairs."

"And, if you don't mind me askin', Miss Kaleo, why are you doing that when you could be bustling about with the rest of the tourists?"

"Oh, but I'm not a tourist." *And, who said I didn't mind you askin'?*

"What brings you here, then, Missy?" the sailor asked. There are people who can ask impertinent and prying questions and get away with it and there are people who can't. Hans Jenkins was one who could. In spite of his brash nature there was an aura of kindness beneath his crusty exterior.

Lili paused. "Business," she said in an almost imperceptible tone. "I have some personal business to attend to."

Mr. Appleby—one-hundred-twenty kilos, at least, with flushed fair skin—chimed in. "Pardon him young lady." He glowered at Hans. "I'm sure Miss Kaleo doesn't want to share her business with everyone who comes along. If she has something to tell us, I'm sure she will. Don't mind him, Miss Kaleo. We're just glad you've chosen to join us. We were worried about you."

Monique Appleby, a plump matronly woman from Marseille, said, "Yes, I've seen you about. I tried to get your attention the other day but you jumped back into your room as quick as a cricket. Do you remember?"

“Was that you? I apologize,” Lili answered. “I’ve been through a lot lately. I’m afraid I haven’t been myself. I haven’t felt up to doing much.”

Mr. Appleby nodded in empathy. “I know how that goes. This heat is stifling. It’s enough to sap anyone’s ambition.” He fanned his face with a cardboard coaster.

“It’s gorgeous around here, though,” mused Monique as she gazed off into the sunset over the clear turquoise waters of the Caribbean.

“Monique. Monique, dear. You’re not supposed to look directly into the sun. You might be blinded,” Mr. Appleby reminded her. He still had on a white hat with a black band which kept his bushy gray hair corralled just below the brim, next to his mutton chop sideburns. He took off his thick, dark sunglasses and handed them to his wife.

Mr. Appleby continued, “Enough of this depressing talk,” he said. “Where’s the minkee? Has anyone here seen Sea Cat? And *where’s* his minkee?”

Sea Cat, the man who roused Lili from her room, was also the waiter, housecleaning supervisor, maintenance man and Casanova *extraordinaire*, whenever he found enough time off from work to walk down the Spring Garden Highway to the wharf to entertain the bored single women overnighting from the cruise ships.

“What’s a minkee?” the radio operator asked.

“You know, a minkee,” Mr. Appleby said, as he wiped the sweat from his brow. “The kind that climbs trees.”

Just then Sea Cat appeared with a tray full of tropical drinks, including the specialty of the house, rum punch with lots of grenadine, a cherry and a little umbrella stuck into a slice of orange peel.

“There it is right there,” Mr. Appleby said, much to his own delight. “There’s the little minkee.”

Perched on Sea Cat’s shoulder was a baby green monkey with dark brown, almost black eyes and a long tail with a crook in the end that formed a curl.

“Come here, *mon petit* minkee,” Mr. Appleby said. He reached into the center of the table and pulled a peanut, still in its shell, from a bowl and held it out in the palm of his hand, fingers bowed downward.

The monkey alighted from Sea Cat’s shoulder and in an instant, retrieved, shelled and ate the nut. Jack, the “minkee,” knew he was not allowed to fraternize with the

guests unless invited, or beg for food in any case. But when treats were offered, he never risked waiting for a second invitation.

Sea Cat, who wore a white smock with vertical waist high pockets in which his hands often sought refuge, passed out drinks, shared pleasantries and flattered the ladies, whenever he got a chance. For a lady charmer Sea Cat wasn't what you'd call dashing. He was stocky with a mild complexion problem but he had a winning smile and a way about him that helped him slide in and out of easy conversation with anyone. Meanwhile Jack scurried up and down the pillars which led to the roof and then leapt from the latticework around one pillar to another with the ease and grace of a trapeze artist. He may not have been allowed to beg from the tourists but he was allowed to entertain them and snatch the rewards tossed his way with joyful abandon.

Mrs. Appleby, in a tiny, affectionate voice, said, "Here, little minkee, here's some fruit for you my little itty-bitty friend." She collected the fruit from inside her drink and stuck it into the soft tissue of a peeled banana which she had removed and unwrapped from a napkin inside her purse. Jack instantly devoured this delightful cocktail while holding fast to the side of one of the pillars with his feet.

"Cute little minkee, eh?" Mr. Appleby said.

And so it went day after day, night after night, when the hotel guests gathered around the large, round wooden table. As guests came and went new occupants regularly filled its empty seats. According to Sea Cat, the "all-arounder," the strand of nightly conversation at the table had started "nearly twenty-five years ago" and remained unbroken with only the bearers of the torch changing identity. The lamp of continuity had never gone out, not even during the earthquakes and threatened tidal waves from Kick 'Em Jenny, a volcano off the coast of nearby Grenada.

* * *

Then one day, along with her breakfast, Sea Cat brought her a telegram from her lawyer, Izzy Kawamoto. Her brother's house was going into foreclosure proceedings and it became clear that if she didn't resolve her problems soon and resume making his mortgage payments for him, it was likely that it wouldn't be long before he and his family would be out on the street. Mimo had been undernourished

as a child and, while strong of body and industrious, lacked the mental acuity of a normal adult. Consequently he had a difficult time securing and holding employment. His wife had her hands full with their children. Mimo was Lili's only living sibling and she felt great affection and sympathy for him and his condition. She loved his wife, Ruth, and their children as though they were her own.

Lili decided there was no more time for mourning. It was a luxury she couldn't afford. It was time to slip into town—a move that didn't go unnoticed by Sea Cat and her fellow guests. She didn't cruise there in a Mini Moke, like the tourists. Instead she walked the hundred or so paces up the little lane to the street, pointed her finger down at the asphalt and thereby called the bus to a halt.

Most of the people on the bus were of African descent. As a brown person, which is how she viewed herself, she stood out but not such that she felt noticed immediately or the focus of attention. At one stop a Scandinavian woman with fair skin, faint blue eyes and long blond hair got on the bus and hardly anyone could quit staring. A little girl sitting behind the woman stroked her hair with her fingertips as the bus drove on a few feet to the next corner, came to a sharp halt and everyone swayed back and forth as the driver jockeyed the bus into position. The road, which rimmed the southern tip of the island, was not much wider than an alley in south Chicago.

But the neighborhoods were kept up much better. The chattel houses along the bus route were various shades of pastel. They were like little gingerbread houses, all neatly lined up, freshly painted and brimming with cleanliness. They were not much bigger than a concession stand at a ballpark, and, like a concession stand, one wall would flip down to form a ledge upon which business—the sale of fish, a warm meal served, imported fine linen embroidery, or perhaps even a bookie operation might be conducted. None of the houses were numbered. The fire department knew them only by their names, which reflected something about their occupants, their business or—in many instances—the setting.

Lili's business, however, was not along the bus route but in the center of town. Once the bus stopped, it let out its remaining passengers at Cheapside, across from the old Saint Mary's Church. Uncertain of what to expect from the people around her she walked swiftly through the burgeoning morning shopping trade. Then she turned up

one of the many narrow lanes which spurred away from Broad Street in the downtown area. She walked up a side street and into a white building that resembled a medieval fortress, complete with a tunnel entry and a sentry. A Bajan police officer, smartly dressed in a gray shirt, navy trousers with red stripes down his pant legs and circling the rim of his hat, stood guard—as dignified and with as much pomp as if he were standing in front of Buckingham Palace.

“Good morning, Mum,” he said to her as she approached.

“Aloha,” she said without thinking. “I mean good morning. Good morning to you, sir.” The crackling in her voice belied her tension.

“Your business, Mum?”

“Well, I’m not sure what you’d call it. It has to do with a crime that I think—have reason to believe that is—was committed here a long time ago.”

“See the duty officer,” he said. “Up the stairs to the left.”

The Central Police Station was tidier than it was mighty. The duty officer was busy gathering the details of a car theft from the only Asian man Lili had seen since she’d arrived in Barbados. She found this humorous since virtually all the cars that she’d seen had been made in Asia.

Behind her stood an old wooden sign, sitting on the floor, which outlined the mission of the “Royal Barbados Police Force.” Lili read the block red letters: “Cap. 167: 1. To preserve and advance the principals of democracy . . . and so on down to number 10. To maintain the highest standards of integrity.” The floor of the building was wooden and there wasn’t a speck of dirt anywhere to be seen. All sorts of people, most of them black, were scurrying every which way and interrupted the dispatch officer with their needs and requests. The Asian man pulled out a small red passport and handed it to the officer as he signed a statement summarizing his version of the theft.

Lili took this opportunity to slip out into the courtyard because she had noticed that almost everyone ahead of her was being turned away or told to come back later. She never thought she’d actually have to sneak into a police battalion. Around the perimeter of the atrium into which the tunnel from the outside led, there were risers of wooden stairs which she assumed led to offices on the

higher floors. She selected one of them at random and boldly climbed the stairs.

At the top there was a room marked “International Drivers’ Licenses.” Lili could see through the Venetian blinds that even at this early hour there was a long line of people, most of them white, leading to two or three clerks—all of them black, who were busy typing while the people stood in the queue, talked to one another or read the morning paper. *Not there*, she thought.

There was another room across the hall with gold block letters on the door that said “Austin C. Williams, Inspector.” Why not? She thought, and twisted the polished brass knob on the rickety door to enter. It stuck, as she opened it and when it finally broke free it made a loud noise.

“Who let you in here?” a deep, gruff voice from behind a desk said. “No one gets in to see me without an appointment.”

Lili couldn’t see the person who was speaking to her. Her eyes were still adjusting to the darkness of the dimly lit room. “I let myself in. I need help.”

“We could all use a little help.” The brash voice reverberated. “But, you’ll have to make an appointment and come back to see me . . . later, say in a week or two. How about you call me on Friday morning at around ten a.m. and we’ll set something up?”

Gradually, as her eyes adjusted to the light, the man’s face developed like an image on film. His teeth became prominent and one of them had a gold border with the letter “L” on it. As his image became clearer she made out the periodic blinking of his eyes. His uniform was adorned with silver buttons down the front and silver numbers on the collar. Now she could associate the voice—the strong, sturdy, reverberating voice—with the frame of an African Bajan man, the police inspector.

Finally she could see him well. He had coarsely hewed, high cheekbones, thick bushy black eyebrows, tightly furrowed, a large billowing chest and arms that seemed to bulge at the sleeves in spite of the thickness of his jacket. He had a strong, sturdy, muscular appearance.

Except for the color of his skin—dark brown his portrait reminded her of a Hawaiian warrior. The man stood up and it was a joy to her to be in the presence of a man who was taller than she was. She was embarrassed it had taken her so long to adjust to the light and see him

clearly and had not immediately noticed how handsome he was. Instead she focused on the black hair on his hands, how it seemed to form little wisps of curl. The curls reminded her of her son Christian.

The man had on trousers with vertical stripes, just like the sentry, only his pants were black in contrast to his white coat and shiny silver buttons. She forced herself not to fixate on his appearance, not to drool over his appearance, because she was here on important business. Yet, the sweet smell of lime cologne tickled her nose and drew her closer, as did his expression, which she found inviting in spite of his gruffness. An air of self-assuredness resonated in his voice.

It was rich, deep and harmonic. The walls of the police station seemed to resonate along with it. "To whom do I owe the pleasure of this interruption to the start of a man's day?" He bellowed.

"My name is Lili Kaleo."

He paused, as though it was necessary for him to translate her words into his dialect. "And where are you from, Miss Kaleo? You don't sound like it's from anywhere around here."

"I'm from Hawaii."

"Hawaii." The man scratched his chin and took a step to the side of his desk, leaned against it and folded his arms. "Hawaii? I've heard of Hawaii, but I've never actually met anyone from there." He took a step forward and held out his hand to shake hers. "Austin Clyde Williams. Inspector Williams. Are you a Hawaiian?"

"About as much as anyone these days," she answered. She trembled at the feel of his hand. His grip was firm, yet not crushing.

"Just where is Hawaii?"

"Why it's in the Pacific ... the Pacific Ocean. It's on the way to Australia."

"Pacific? You don't say. Well, this is the Caribbean, Miss Kaleo. Are you sure you're in the right precinct?"

"I've been accused of a crime. Well, I was found innocent, but I've got to clear my name, find out where money was laundered. I need to know how to trace it through your banks, but I'm confused and need help."

The man grimaced, then laughed and shook his head.

Lili, who had done her best to hold herself together, lost her composure and the next moment the African Bajan police inspector was holding her in his large, burly arms. “I need help,” she continued. “I’m here by myself. My visa’s running out. I’m almost broke and I need help. People are depending on me. Can you help me?”

She wasn’t one to break down but her losses and grieving had extracted a heavy toll. Tears spilled down her distraught face.

The inspector held her back far enough to look into her eyes. “So this is all about money laundering?” he asked, as he reached one hand into his desk drawer for some tissues without letting go of her with the other. “You must be thinking of St. Vincent or Antigua, Miss Kaleo. We don’t permit money laundering here in Barbados. Shirt laundering and pants laundering, maybe—but not money laundering.”

Lili laughed. The inspector’s unexpected humor broke her somber mood. Then just as suddenly she realized he was touching her. She stepped back and retreated to the other side of his desk.

“Sit down,” he said, as he put the Kleenex back into his drawer and closed it. He straightened his uniform, pressed the wrinkles with his large, basket like hands, went behind his desk and sat down. “I’m working at Government House today. Got to keep myself looking sharp.” He motioned for her to sit, then folded his hands together and put them on the desk.

Lili sat down in the highly polished wooden armchair in front of his desk, pushed the hair out of her eyes and dabbed at her tears. “Please excuse me,” she said. “I’ve been through a lot lately.” There was also something about this man that had thrown her off balance but she had no time to pause and define it.

He stared at her while she tried to get herself together. His large billowing chest drew in and out, as he breathed in rhythm through his broad nostrils. As she calmed down she became aware of his breathing. The strength and predictability of it made her feel secure—a feeling she had felt in the presence of only a handful of men over her thirty-plus years on the planet. She cherished this feeling because it contrasted so sharply with her life’s experiences.

After Lili had regained her composure, he said, “Look, you walk in here off the street. You don’t know me

from Colonel Sanders. You accuse our banks of money laundering. You fall apart. You start crying. . . . You wrinkle my uniform. By the way, I just got it pressed . . .” He reached down and straightened it again.

“I know. I’m sorry. I won’t bother—” She got up and no sooner had she done so than he motioned for her to sit back down.

His phone rang and he took a call. “Yes, yes. I’ll be right there. I have someone with me now but I’ll be right there.”

He hung up the phone and turned to her. He spoke in a lower voice than he had been using. “How do you know I’m not on the take?”

Lili blushed.

He leaned forward as he spoke. “That’s right. Even if we did allow money laundering here in Barbados, which we don’t, how do you know I’m not on the take?”

Suddenly Lili realized how foolish she had been. *Why didn’t I think of that? He could be on the take.* “I don’t—”

The inspector stretched his arms. “Look, if I were on the take or involved in money laundering, there would be, as of this moment, no chance whatsoever that you would ever find out the first bit of information about whatever it is you’re looking for. You couldn’t have done a better job of making an announcement if you’d shot a cannon ball over the swing bridge and into the middle of The Constitution River.”

Lili shuddered at his commanding voice. She stood up to leave and responded in a resolute, somber tone, “You’re right. I shouldn’t have come here. Can you tell me where I can find the Grand Barbadian Bank?”

“And what? You’re going to go marching in there and tell them you want to know if any of them have been laundering money?”

The tears came back. Out popped the Kleenex.

She sat back down. “I feel like a fool. So much has happened to me lately I can’t think clearly. I don’t know where to start.”

The inspector stood up, placed his hands on the top of the desk, leaned on them, peered into her eyes and said, “Look, I’d like to help you. But, you have to understand. I’m the youngest police inspector this island has ever seen. My father, Clyde Williams, was a legendary traffic cop and my brother has already made deputy superintendent—still

on the sunny side of forty-five. But if I don't take my young ass from behind this desk and get over to Government House and take care of my duties, I'm also going to be the youngest police inspector ever to get sacked."

Lili felt dejected. The conversation had begun to seem so promising.

"I'll tell you what, Miss Kaleo. Where are you staying?"

She looked at him quizzically.

"You can trust me," he said. "I'm *not* on the take."

She fought her bedraggled feeling and smiled. "I'm staying at The Tower Hotel. It's over in St. Michael."

"I know where The Tower is, Miss Kaleo. Tonight around ten go down to the Paradise Hotel and get a table next to the dance floor. Perhaps we can talk more freely there. You never know," he said, as he gazed around the room. "The walls may have ears."

On the way out of the station she looked around. On a clerk's desk near the reception area was a police brochure. It depicted a number of bills of various denominations on a clothesline, being showered by a garden hose and was entitled, "What is Money Laundering?" She picked it up and thumbed through it as she left. It spoke only of problems in Barbados and said nothing about St. Vincent or Antigua.

* * *

That night just before sunset, Lili, who had begun joining her fellow guests a few nights before, left her seat empty at the big round table at The Tower. Instead, she took one at The Paradise, underneath a covered porch between the dance floor and the beach. Looking toward the bandstand Lili could see the stars through the open wooden slats which formed the roof. *What am I doing here? Can I trust him? And what about that "no money laundering here" business?* Yet a warm tropical breeze caressed her skin and left her with sensations of magic and serenity.

Ten o'clock came and went and no one even looked in her direction. In between sets she could hear the clear waves against the shore, lapping ever so gently, shimmering in the moonlight. They soothed her. She watched the men—honeymooners or crooners, she wasn't sure which—clutching and pawing their companions, whenever the beat slowed from reggae to Calypso. *Men,*

who needs them? They're so juvenile, so one dimensional, so predictable.

Shortly after the band announced its last set and about the time she was ready to get up from the table and walk back up the dark, narrow lane to her hotel, the police inspector came to her table and sat down. *This can't be the same man I met this morning. This man is dashing!*

His physique, defined more closely by street clothes and moonlight, disclosed a trim, athletic appearance. He had approached from the beach in a sleek and agile fashion. He was casually dressed with his shirttail out and his collar open. Two gold chains contrasted with his dark, shiny skin—but he wore no medallion as was the popular fashion. She had not taken in the full effect of the man's appearance when she was in his arms—only the support of his frame and the comfort of his gentle strength.

"I'm sorry I'm late," he said. "I had some family business to take care of."

"Oh, do you have a family?" she asked.

The band had just started up again and the steel drums were raging. He spoke over the din as if he hadn't heard her. "What can I do for you?" he said. "Tell me about your problem. I think we can talk here."

"And not in the police station?"

"I sometimes wonder about the police station," she thought she heard him mumble.

She told him about how she had been accused of accepting a bribe. How she had weathered the trial, how terrified she had been that she might be convicted and go to prison. And that they had never caught the person or persons who gave her, or rather her former husband, the bribe that led to the trial and a Swiss bank account that led to Barbados and brought her here.

Lili said, "I'm here to find the source of the bribe money so I can clear my reputation and take care of some legal problems back in Hawaii. The county is suing me for more than a million dollars in punitive damages for allegedly misusing public funds. They claim the bribe money technically belonged to them."

The inspector looked attentive and seemed to be listening intently, above the din of the music. He ordered rum punches for each of them without first asking her.

Lili didn't object. "I spent some of it, unwittingly, from my checking account. Unless I can find out who arranged the payment and expose them, I'm facing

financial ruin, and so are my relatives who depend on me. My attorney, Izzy Kawamoto, has had to answer disbarment charges for accepting what the state called 'bribe money' from me for his retainer. But the voters are behind me. I know it! I was once the mayor of Kaua'i, the oldest and most wonderful of the Hawaiian Islands, and I'd like to run for governor and think I could win but I've got to get this cleared up first."

The inspector appeared to listen to all she had to say, raised his glass to his lips and finished his drink. He shook the ice against his glass, took a piece out every now and then and champed on it while appearing to listen all the while.

"Can you help me? Can you point me in the right direction?" She had to yell over the sound of the steel drums.

"Perhaps I can," he said, as he got up from his chair, reached out his hand and escorted her to the dance floor.

She had not expected this. She thought they would sit and discuss the ins and outs of public trust, banking and politics and she would be able to mine him for information about a place to begin her investigation. But the inspector had different ideas. She thought about resisting, in fact stiffened and held back, but his hand provided a counterforce, like that of a stubborn and forceful tide. It reminded her of the tide she had fought as a child in an effort to save her mother but this was a tide of a different sea. She felt as though she were entering a harbor, a harbor free from the torrents of the outside world. She flowed into it, hesitantly at first, but its lure became more pronounced as the evening progressed. She enjoyed the feel of the inspector's steady hand on her waist and the strength in his arms as he rhythmically guided her through an array of Caribbean dance steps.

She tried on several occasions to return to the subject of how to learn more about local banking practices, about whom to trust, about where would be a good place to start. Instead of responding to her questions, he promised to call her soon for further discussions. She found herself drawn in by his charm, his impeccable manners and politeness. The accent of his lime cologne, mixed with the smell of fresh salt air disarmed her. And for whatever reason, with no known basis in fact, she had the feeling his lure was wholesome and forthright. She wanted desperately to trust him. She decided to swim with the tide.

The moonlight cast shadows through the beamed trellis that overhung the circular dance floor. The incessant beat of steel drums reverberated. The rhythm and authority with which he guided her dance step made her feel ethereal. He was mesmerizing, bold and forceful. She liked him and found an unspoken mystery about him. *What deep, dark secrets does he hold?* There were few words but a magnetism that drew her close to the ebb and tide of his being. When the music stopped neither of them noticed as they kept dancing, marking time to their own private rhythm.

There was no one at the big round table when she passed back across the front porch of The Tower on the way back to her room. During the night she could not understand how she had spent so much time with this man and never once been able to revisit the subject for which she had traveled almost seven thousand miles. Instead she had been drawn into a tide pool of magic and intrigue that she did not fully understand—could not distill or define. It was delicious and she wanted desperately to pour it out and taste it. Two distant oceans linked through a tiny isthmus. Feverish bodies clutched together in the silver glow of a full Bajan moon, first on the dance floor and then in her room.

In the morning when she reached out to touch him, he was gone.