

Mary Kennedy

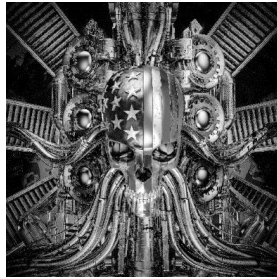
ETHAN

REAPER-Patriots:
Book Fifty-Three

ETHAN

REAPER-Patriots

Book FIFTY-THREE



Mary Kennedy

Copyright © 2023 by Mary Kennedy

All rights reserved.

This book is a work of fiction. The names, characters, places, and incidents are products of the writer's imagination or have been used fictitiously and are not to be constructed as real. Any resemblance to persons, living or dead, actual events, locales, or organizations is entirely coincidental.

No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review.

Editing provided by: [pccProofreading](#)

MAP of Belle Fleur and Cottage

Assignments

Readers – if you’re like me – you’re very visual – I hope this map helps as you’re reading. You will notice the additions of the new homes. *I’ve also added a guide to the families and books at the back. I hope you find these resources helpful.*

G1-8 = Garçonnière

Big House = Belle Fleur – main house of Matthew and Irene Robicheaux, with George & Mary

The Grove – where BBQs, picnics, and family gatherings take place



COTTAGE Assignments

<u>1</u>	Miller & Kari	<u>36</u>	Gunner & Darby	<u>G3</u>	Pork	<u>97</u>	Jalen & Stormy
<u>2</u>	Alec & Lissa	<u>37</u>	Ghost & Grace	<u>G4</u>	Hex & Gwen	<u>98</u>	Chase & Kennedy
<u>3</u>	Gabe & Tory	<u>38</u>	Zulu & Gabi	<u>69</u>	Kiel & Liz	<u>99</u>	Sam & Mia
<u>4</u>	Gaspar & Alex	<u>39</u>	Doc & Bree	<u>70</u>	Joseph & Julia	<u>100</u>	Milo & Lia
<u>5</u>	Raphael & Savannah	<u>40</u>	Paul & Elizabeth	<u>71</u>	Wes & Virginia	<u>101</u>	Hiro & Winter
<u>6</u>	Baptiste & Rose	<u>41</u>	Luke & Ajei	<u>72</u>	Dalton & Calla	<u>102</u>	Ryan & Paige
<u>7</u>	Antoine & Ella	<u>42</u>	Fitz & Zoe	<u>73</u>	Nathan & Katrina	<u>103</u>	Chase & Maeve
<u>8</u>	Ivan & Sophia	<u>43</u>	RJ & Celia	<u>74</u>	Keith & Susie	<u>104</u>	Duncan & Lindsay
<u>9</u>	Tristan & Emma	<u>44</u>	Carter & Ani	<u>75</u>	Marc & Ela	<u>105</u>	JT & Kennedy
<u>10</u>	Luc & Montana	<u>45</u>	Bull & Lily	<u>76</u>	Jake & Claudette	<u>106</u>	Torro & Melanie
<u>11</u>	King & Claire	<u>46</u>	Trev & Ashley	<u>77</u>	Frank & Lane	<u>107</u>	Bron & Mila
<u>12</u>	Sly & Suzette	<u>47</u>	Whiskey & Kat	<u>78</u>	Ian & Aspen	<u>108</u>	Fitch & Carsen
<u>13</u>	Rory & Piper	<u>48</u>	Tailor & Lena	<u>79</u>	Doug & Miguel	<u>109</u>	Bogey & Alice
<u>14</u>	O'Hara & Lucia	<u>49</u>	Angel & Mary	<u>80</u>	Dom & Leightyn	<u>110</u>	
<u>15</u>	Titus & Olivia	<u>50</u>	Bryce & Ivy	<u>G5</u>	Remy &	<u>111</u>	Tanner & Mic

					Charlotte		
<u>16</u>	Max & Riley	<u>51</u>	Wilson & Sara	<u>G6</u>	Magnus & Addie	<u>112</u>	
<u>17</u>	Stone & Bronwyn	<u>52</u>	Mac & Rachelle	<u>G7</u>	Chipper	<u>113</u>	Mo & Ophelia
<u>18</u>	Jazz & Gray	<u>53</u>	Nine & Erin	<u>G8</u>	Teddy	<u>114</u>	
<u>19</u>	Vince & Ally	<u>54</u>	Clay & Adele	<u>81</u>	Aiden & Brit	<u>115</u>	
<u>20</u>	Phoenix & Raven	<u>55</u>	Trak & Lauren	<u>82</u>	Callan & Juliette	<u>116</u>	
<u>21</u>	Noah & Tru	<u>56</u>	Lars & Jessica	<u>83</u>	Sean & Shay	<u>117</u>	
<u>22</u>	Griff & Amanda	<u>57</u>	Ian & Faith	<u>84</u>	Wade & Hannah	<u>118</u>	
<u>23</u>	Gibbie & Dhara	<u>58</u>	Kiel & Noelle	<u>85</u>	Parker & Dani	<u>119</u>	
<u>24</u>	Blade & Suzette	<u>59</u>	Jean & Ro	<u>86</u>	Eric & Sophia Ann	<u>120</u>	
<u>25</u>	Skull & Avery	<u>60</u>	Dexter & Marie	<u>87</u>	Bodhi & Viv	<u>121</u>	
<u>26</u>	Axel & Cait	<u>61</u>	Hunter & Megan	<u>88</u>	CC & Eva	<u>122</u>	
<u>27</u>	Sniff & Lucy	<u>62</u>	Cam & Kate	<u>88</u>	Sven & Ruby	<u>123</u>	
<u>28</u>	Noa & Kelsey	<u>63</u>	Jax & Ellie	<u>89</u>	Michael & Miriam	<u>124</u>	
<u>29</u>	Eli & Jane	<u>64</u>	Adam & Jane	<u>90</u>	Robbie & Carrie	<u>125</u>	
<u>30</u>	Grant & Evie	<u>65</u>	Ben & Harper	<u>91</u>	Cade & Cassidy	<u>126</u>	
<u>31</u>	Hawk & Keegan	<u>66</u>	Carl & Georgie	<u>92</u>	Garrett & Celeste	<u>127</u>	
<u>32</u>	Eagle & Tinley	<u>67</u>	Striker & Lucy	<u>93</u>	Tiger & Hazel	<u>128</u>	
<u>33</u>	Ace & Charlie	<u>68</u>	Molly & Asia	<u>94</u>	Eric Ryan & Rachel	<u>129</u>	
<u>34</u>	Razor & Bella	<u>G1</u>	Otto & Robin	<u>95</u>	Hannu &	<u>130</u>	

					Johanna		
<u>35</u>	Tango & Taylor	<u>G2</u>	Kegger	<u>26</u>	Will & Brooke	<u>IM</u>	Irish, Ethan

Contents

[MAP of Belle Fleur and Cottage Assignments](#)

[CHAPTER ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWO](#)

[CHAPTER THREE](#)

[CHAPTER FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER SIX](#)

[CHAPTER SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHT](#)

[CHAPTER NINE](#)

[CHAPTER TEN](#)

[CHAPTER ELEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWELVE](#)

[CHAPTER THIRTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FOURTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER FIFTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SIXTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER SEVENTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER EIGHTEEN](#)

[CHAPTER NINETEEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN](#)

[CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT](#)

[EXCERPT from IRISH](#)

[SERIES AND FAMILY GUIDE](#)

[OTHER BOOKS BY MARY KENNEDY YOU
MIGHT ENJOY!](#)

[ABOUT THE AUTHOR](#)

CHAPTER ONE

Ethan Dunvegan stared at his father, wondering how he was going to get the massive armoire up the stairs to his wife's bedroom. Cammie Dunvegan wasn't Ethan's mother, but she'd been in his life for as long as he could remember. His own mother died during childbirth. Almost unheard of in this day and age.

Unfortunately, he was born in Kenya, in a remote area where his father was working on a job there. She'd already visited the local hospital, and everything was planned out perfectly. Except things are never perfect. She went into labor while her husband was at work, and the village women didn't know what to do about a breach baby.

By the time the ambulance arrived, the medical personnel were frantically trying to turn the baby and save the mother. When Ethan's huge body came out screaming, they were all relieved. Not paying attention to the mother, they turned to see her unresponsive. There was nothing they could do.

A year later, his father met and married Cammie. She was a bubbly, happy woman that gave light to Evan

Dunvegan's world and love to a baby that needed it. Now, years later, they were settling into their new home back stateside.

"Evan, maybe we could ask a neighbor to help you," she said, worried for her husband's health.

"I got it," he frowned, growling as he lifted the armoire one more step.

"I can help, Dad!" called Ethan.

"I got it, son," he said.

Ethan watched for thirty minutes as he wrestled with the piece of furniture. When it was all done, it was placed against the wall of Evan and Cammie's bedroom, offering more storage for her extensive clothing collection.

"Thank you," smiled Cammie, kissing her husband.

He smiled back, nodding at his wife. He'd do just about anything for her, including moving a massive piece of furniture by himself. Still young, strong, and healthy, he turned heads when he walked into a room. Evan's parents were Scottish immigrants, and he was a bull of a man. Wide across the chest and shoulders, massive thighs, and a mind that seemed to compute any problem and present a solution.

“That was cool, Dad,” smiled Ethan. Evan laughed, ruffling his son’s reddish-blond hair.

“One day, you’ll be strong enough to do the same and more. You’re already bigger than I was at your age,” he grinned.

“I am?” asked Ethan excitedly.

“You are,” grinned Evan, trying to maintain a serious expression. “You’re going to be as big as your granddad one day. He was a mountain of a man, Ethan. Bravest man I ever knew.”

“He served in the Royal Marines, right, Dad?” he asked excitedly.

Cammie smiled at the boy she thought of as her own. All he talked about was joining the military, and it cracked her heart every single time she thought of it. One day he would walk away, a grown man in a uniform, and he might not come home. She wasn’t sure how she would handle that.

“That’s right, he did. He wasn’t just big, Ethan. He was quick of body and mind. Smart. Loyal. All the things a man would want in a friend or partner when facing danger.”

“I’m gonna be all those things, too,” he said proudly.
“I’ll be brave and strong and smart, and I’ll always be loyal to my friends.”

Ethan would never know, at the age of nine, how those words would follow him for his life. If there was a challenge, he would accept it. If someone said he couldn’t, he did. While in high school, he excelled at athletics and academics. And the girls took notice.

“I have to get home, Marilu,” he said, kissing her again, trying to move her hand away from his dick. It felt amazing, and she was highly skilled at using both her hand and her mouth. He appreciated it, but he also knew it couldn’t go any further.

“No, I want to do that again,” she moaned. “Touch me again. Put your fingers in me.”

He looked down at her dark brown hair and big brown eyes and wanted to say, ‘hell, yes,’ but the truth was he didn’t really like the girl. She’d come on to him and offered to give him a hand job. He returned the favor and thought that would be it. But it turned out Marilu had an appetite.

“I can’t,” he said, gripping her wrist with one hand while he zipped his jeans with the other. “I have to get home

to help my dad.”

“Come on, Ethan, you know that felt good. I need it again,” she said, rubbing her breasts against his arm. “I know you’re leaving for the Army soon. Tell me where you’ll be, and I’ll come stay with you for a while.”

“You can’t do that. I’ll be living on base and training,” he said, pushing her aside. “I’m sorry, but it just wouldn’t be possible.”

“Oh, come on! You know you’re gonna get horny and need me,” she smirked.

In that moment, Ethan realized how much he hated himself for ever touching Marilu Dennison. He wanted to take a scalding hot shower and rinse himself of her smell and touch. For a brief moment, she had him so addled he almost agreed to full-blown sex. All his plans would have been up in smoke.

“Listen, Marilu, that was fun, but that’s all it was. Fun. We can’t be anything serious because neither of us is ready for that. I have things I want to do with my life, and you should too.”

“You guys are all alike, you know that? A girl gives it up for you, you take it, and then run.”

“That’s not fair. You came on to me, not the other way around. You were the one that wanted to do this. It was offered, and I accepted, and I shouldn’t have. I apologize.” She looked like she was going to scream at him and then just shook her head, tears in her eyes.

“No, I’m sorry. You’re right, Ethan. I offered. I thought, I don’t know what I thought,” she said, laughing nervously. “You’re a good guy, and I hope you get everything you want in life.” She kissed his cheek and left him standing there wondering what had just happened.

He never saw Marilu again. He left two weeks later for basic training, then a year later enrolled in the Ranger program. The instructor told him he’d never make it. He didn’t have ‘it,’ whatever it was. He was too big, too tall, too muscular, too smart, too everything.

He was also number one in his class. After two years of being a Ranger, he wanted to challenge himself further and transferred his time to the Navy. When he told his commanding officer that he wanted to be a SEAL, he laughed at him.

“Nobody becomes a Ranger and a SEAL.”

A year later, his father was pinning his trident to his chest. For four years, he was deployed with his SEAL team in the worst possible parts of the world. Time and time again, he showed his prowess and abilities, saving his entire team, not once but twice.

Then he was bored again. MARSOC. Delta. Green Berets. Each time he was told no one could pass all of the elite soldier, sailor, Marine training. And each time, he did it. When five spec ops emblems hung from his uniform, command took notice. When command took notice, so did the president.

“I have an assignment for you. Rather, my team has an assignment for you that I will be totally unaware of.”

“I understand, sir,” said Ethan. A rebel leader who would become president in a West African nation would not be a good thing. Find him. Kill him. Get out. Just Ethan.

One assignment became two. Two became five. And before he knew it, Ethan Dunvegan was a one-man team who reported only to the president. Unfortunately for him, it was pre-President Bodwick, and the missions were becoming missions that weren't achievable by one man.

While on his last assignment, he knew from the beginning that it wouldn't go well. He was exhausted from being over-used, overworked, and not having a break in years. Ethan Dunvegan had finally found the one thing he couldn't do. He couldn't have endless amounts of energy, be a proficient killer, and do it non-stop.

The area seemed quiet, only a few insurgents that he easily cleared. Yet it seemed too clear, too easy, and he had that feeling in his gut that he should get the fuck out. Just when he thought he was clear of the area, insurgents came at him from all sides. Out of ammo and out of time, he was a dead man.

Or at least, he wished he were.

Day after day, his torturers amped up the game. Literally. Electrocuting all over his body. Their favorite spot was his genitals. The pain and swelling became so bad his dick just bled when he pissed. His balls were so swollen they looked like grapefruits.

When their 'holy' man came in, his stomach churned. The man enjoyed delivering torture more than the others. He delighted in ramming things into his rectum and his urethra. The pain was excruciating. He waited for them to ask their

questions, to ply him for information. Yet not once did they ask him for intel of any kind. They didn't care. They just wanted to torture the famous American. The man known as the Lone Warrior, feared by all.

Captured by them.

Three months. Three months, nine days, fourteen hours, and twelve minutes. That's how long he suffered. Then one day out of the blue, a woman walked into the hut in a full burqa. She stared up at him, then removed her niqab, revealing her face. He was going to die.

Removing a knife from beneath her garment, she cut the ties holding him to the ceiling. His heavy body fell, despite her efforts to hold him.

"You must leave now," she said in broken English.

"I c-can't," he said, shaking his head. "I-I can't walk."

"Come. Come," she demanded pulling on his arm, trying to get him to stand.

He tried to stand but barely got to his knees. The woman left him on the dirt floor, and a few moments later, two more women came in. With a woman beneath each armpit and one pulling him by his hands, they lifted his naked body. They

carried him outside, setting him in the back of an old pickup truck. The older woman threw a robe at him, the younger women helping him to dress.

He remembered very little after that. He was certain that she was taking him to his death, but couldn't understand why she would bother saving him, only to kill him. All he knew for sure was that this was the first time he'd been able to lie down and actually sleep. When the truck stopped, they were in front of the gates of a military base he no longer recognized.

“American!” she called. “American!”

The women helped him to sit up as two Marines walked toward him, weapons drawn. It only took one look to realize that Ethan wasn't going to do anything in the shape he was in.

It was two weeks in the base hospital, of which he remembered very little. Then he was transferred to Germany, where he underwent five surgeries to repair his urethra and the tears in his rectum. From there, they sent him to Bethesda. It was a month before he was pissing on his own and eating solid food. That first piss without blood was like a private victory.

“How are you feeling, Ethan?” asked the doctor.

“Better,” he said. “Still weak as a kitten, but I’m alright. I spoke to my folks, and they’ll be up this weekend. I didn’t want them coming too soon.”

“That was probably a good idea.” Ethan stared at the man, his face looking like he was headed to the funeral of his best friend.

“What’s wrong?”

“Ethan, we knew this was a possibility, but the damage done to your penis is beyond repair. The electrocutions, the probing, all of it, all of the horrendous, horrible shit they did has caused irreparable damage. Not only will you most likely never be able to have children. I doubt very seriously if you’ll ever be able to have an erection.”

Ethan was quiet for a long time, just staring out the window. They’d talked about it over and over again, preparing him for the possibility. He just didn’t think it could be real. He was Ethan Dunvegan. Six-feet-six, two hundred and forty-three pounds of rock-solid muscle. Or, he used to be.

“What about the rest of it? I mean, I can piss and shit like a man, right?” The doctor smirked at him, nodding.

“Yes, Ethan. All of that will still function normally, although there could be complications as you age. Listen, there’s a lot we don’t know about the body and how it heals. In time, you may find that you’re feeling sensations or that you achieve a partial erection.”

“A partial erection doesn’t cut it, does it, Doc?” he said, staring at the man.

“No. No, I guess it doesn’t. Not that it helps, Ethan, but I’ve treated young men that have had their genitals blown off their bodies. I know it doesn’t feel like it, but you’re a lucky man just to be alive and have everything attached.”

“You’re right. It doesn’t help.”

Three months he was in that hospital. Three months of building his strength back up, getting his mind as right as it could be, and planning. Planning every moment, every second of what he would do when he got out.

First stop, the village where it all took place. Fully rested, his muscle restored, Ethan killed every man that lay a finger on him. Most received more than they deserved – a swift, quick death. The holy man wasn’t so lucky. He took his time with him, giving as much as he’d got.

When all that was left were women, he sought out the three that helped him. He handed them an envelope with enough cash to go wherever they wanted, and then he walked away.

Second stop, the man who sent him there in the first place. Major General Carver Gillick. He'd hated Ethan from day one, calling him a rogue warrior with no purpose and no team. He wanted him gone, but the others wouldn't hear of it. So, Gillick took matters into his own hands, sending Ethan on that last mission that not only was doomed to fail, but designed to fail.

Major General Carver Gillick had an unfortunate incident with a bathtub and a blow dryer. No one seemed too worried that he was bald.

Third stop. His third stop was the one place he thought he might be able to heal and find new purpose.

“Fucking hell, it's good to see you, brother,” said Luke, pulling the big man in for a hug. Ethan couldn't help but grin. Luke was nearly as big as he was and one of the best SEALs he'd ever worked with.

“It's nice to be seen,” he smiled.

“We were surprised you called,” said Cam. “Do you need our help with something?”

“I need to tell you both a story, and I need you to promise it’s between us.”

It took the better part of four hours to get it all out, but Cam and Luke listened, only stopping to piss or grab another cup of coffee. When Ethan was done, they just stared at him.

“There’s a place for you here, Ethan. We need men like you, with your skill. No pressure. No discussions about what happened. You tell your story when, and if, you’re ready. In the meantime, we have the best surgeons on the planet and a pond that might do you some good.”

“A pond? No offense, Luke, but a pond isn’t gonna make my dick hard.” Luke and Cam both laughed, shaking their heads.

“Ethan, I need for you to trust us. This is an incredibly special and unique place that has things found nowhere else in the world. Let’s just see what happens, okay? For now, let me introduce you to the best medical team anywhere.”

CHAPTER TWO

Ethan stared at the silver-haired woman with the mesmerizing eyes. The other doctor was equally as beautiful, just not quite as striking. They were definitely the doctors you'd want, just not the doctors you want looking at your non-functioning dick.

“Don't stare, handsome. I have a jealous husband,” smiled Gabi.

“Who are you married to?” asked Ethan. Wilson and Cruz laughed, shaking their heads at the other man.

“Brother, she's married to Zulu.”

“Fuck,” muttered Ethan. “Sorry, ma'am.”

“Don't be. I'm flattered. Listen, the damage is extensive. Unlike anything I've ever seen. I'm sorry for what you went through, Ethan. I know it must have been horrible,” said Gabi. “But there is some good news. I think it can be repaired.”

“No offense, Doc, but I don't know that I'm up for another surgery on my dick. I mean, sooner or later, it's gonna fall off.” Gabi grinned at him, Riley smirking as well.

“We promise this will be the least invasive surgery you’ve ever had. We think if we give you a local so that you’re aware of everything we’re doing and do everything by scope, we can remove the scar tissue and begin the healing process. Riley has done a great deal of research on how our body parts function both separately and together.”

“That’s right,” nodded Riley. “We’re learning more and more about how our brain tells our bodies to do things and coordinates movement and function. A penis isn’t something we ever believed could ‘think’ for itself, although we joked about it having a mind of its own. But we know now that we may be able to do just that, have it think independently. Men have learned that if their thoughts go elsewhere, they can prevent their penis from hardening.”

“This is so uncomfortable to talk about with my brothers’ wives,” said Ethan, leaning his head back against the table. “I assure you this has nothing to do with me not wanting my dick to get hard. It’s all I think about, and I can’t make it happen.”

“We know,” said Gabi. “But we believe that by removing the scar tissue, advancing the healing process, and

then giving it time to recommunicate with your brain and other parts of your body, in time, it will be fully functioning.”

“Well, I broke about a hundred plates the other night. I gotta stay until I pay for them,” he said, shaking his head with a grin. “When do we do this?”

“Now,” said Riley. “No chance of escape for you. We want to get this done and watch you over the next few weeks. We wouldn’t be doing this if we didn’t think it would help, Ethan. We know what we’re doing, and we want to give you every chance to move on and live a normal, healthy, happy life.”

Wilson and Cruz got Ethan ready, telling him everything that was going to be done.

“I’m going to numb your penis, testicles, and the area around your bladder,” said Riley. Ethan’s eyes went wide when he saw the needle. “Relax. We’ve developed a topical deadening that will numb through several layers of skin, then we’ll inject the deadening. You won’t feel a thing. Everything will be done via microscopic tools either through the penis, rectum, or belly button.”

“I don’t think I wanted to know that,” he frowned. The others just smiled at him, understanding his trepidation.

Lying back on the table, Riley numbed the area, waiting a few moments for it to take effect, and then inserted the scope.

“There’s a lot of scar tissue, as we expected,” she said. “Do you have trouble urinating?”

“Sometimes. Not always, but sometimes it takes a while, and I feel like I haven’t completely finished, but more won’t come.”

“That’s not good, brother,” said Cruz. “You don’t want it to back up, or it could destroy your kidneys. You need to be sure and tell us when things like that happen. We can help.” Ethan nodded, then shook his head, smiling at his friends.

“I don’t know what I would have done had Cam and Luke turned me away. I left the government and never looked back. They wanted me to stay, of course, but I know that Gillick left me in that hellhole without caring shit about me, and no one bothered to follow up or come find me. I just wanted some peace and quiet for a change,” he said, watching the screen with the image from the scope on it. Riley stopped, staring into the scope, then up at the screen.

“What’s that?” he asked.

“I don’t know,” she said, frowning. “I think it might be a piece of metal or glass left behind by your abusers, but it’s exactly at the tunica albuginea.”

“The what?”

“It’s the area where trauma to the penis most often occurs. Usually, it’s minor, like from riding a bike with a bad seat for too long, or other types of minor trauma. Yours isn’t minor at all, but,” Riley held her breath, retracting the tiny device, “but it appears this was part of the problem.” She dropped the fragment into a metal dish held by Wilson.

“It’s glass,” said Wilson, looking at the piece in the metal dish.

“Will it be better now?” asked Ethan hopefully.

“We’re not done yet, cowboy. We need to get the rest of this scar tissue out of there and make sure it heals. Once we’re done here, you, Wilson, and Cruz are going for a swim.”

“A swim?” he asked.

“Don’t argue, hot stuff,” winked Gabi. “It will do you good.”

“You know, Gabi, any other time I’d appreciate the flirting while a woman has her hands on my dick, but right

now, I'm struggling with it." She shrugged, giving him a wink. "Can I go with the team to Hawaii? They're leaving in the morning."

"I don't see why not. You'll be fully healed after the swim," said Riley. Ethan stared at the woman with a disbelieving stare. "Ethan, you came with your secrets, and we will hold those to our chest for as long as you tell us to. Now, we're going to tell you a few secrets. Wilson? Cruz? I'm working here. Talk."

While Riley and Gabi focused on the surgery, Cruz and Wilson revealed the secrets of Belle Fleur beyond her resident ghosts. At first, Ethan chuckled, thinking they were pulling his leg. But when he realized they were serious, he couldn't believe it. Honestly, the stories were helping to distract him from what they were doing to his dick. He was so consumed with fascination around the tales he didn't look at the screen at all.

"Stranger things have happened, brother," smirked Cruz. "We see it all the time in the field. Something inexplicable that happens in a fight or on an op, and you just scratch your head."

"True," he said, turning to the screen again.

“Alright, I’ve done about all I can do,” said Riley.

“Gabi was able to use the cautery and burn away most of the scar tissue, and I’ve been able to remove it, giving a clear path for the urine to flow and for the blood to help with the hardening of your penis. With the foreign object removed and the pond, we can hope that things will return to normal in time. If it doesn’t, we could always do a penile implant or even consider a penile transplant.”

“Yikes. I’m not sure I want anything else shoved up there. How much time before we know?” he asked.

“Honey, I don’t know. This was a first for us, so we’re kinda flying by the seat of our pants. We think we’ve done everything right, but we can’t be sure.”

“Fair enough,” he said, nodding at the women.

Wilson and Cruz helped him to sit up, then placed a blanket around him, and they wheeled him to the ATV and took him out to the pond. He stared at the crystal-clear waters and then looked back at Wilson and Cruz. They both undressed and instructed him to do the same. As they lowered themselves into the water, he followed.

Lowering himself in the warm waters, Ethan let out a long slow sigh. An inexplicable blanket of warmth and

comfort covered his body. It was as if the demons were leaving his body. Emotions were high. He felt them edging their way to the surface, and he couldn't control it. All of the pain, all of the anguish, all of the anger was spewing from his body.

Quickly, he swam toward the waterfall, going behind the veil of water and leaning against the rocky ledge. He stayed there for twenty minutes, just crying uncontrollably, unable to move.

“Ethan? You okay, brother?” called Cruz from the water behind him.

Ethan wiped his eyes, sucking in a deep breath. Turning, he swam through the waterfall to face Wilson and Cruz.

“What the hell is this?” he asked, holding back more tears. “What just happened to me?”

“We're not sure, brother. All we know is that it has the ability to heal,” said Wilson. “Now, before you get your hopes up, it can't grow back limbs, and when Miguel had his stroke, it couldn't repair all of his brain, but for almost everything else, we've been able to see tremendous results.”

“But no one else has a limp dick,” he frowned.

“Ethan, brother, your dick isn’t who you are. We recognize that it’s important to all men, but it’s not you. You’re right. We haven’t had anyone with your condition. But we have had a few women who couldn’t have children, then could. But there have also been a few that nothing changed for them. I don’t know how it works or why it works on some and not others, but I know that it works, and if nothing else, it’s healing you from the surgery.”

“How will I know?” asked Ethan.

“Well,” smirked Cruz, “a good first sign will be a full piss without pain and that it comes easily.”

“Well, I feel like I gotta piss,” he said, swimming toward the dock.

He stepped out, bare-assed naked, and walked toward a grouping of trees. Wilson frowned at Cruz as they moved toward the dock. Ethan’s body was covered in scars, and it tore them apart to see it. It wasn’t unusual. They all had them. But when you see scars that weren’t accidental, or weren’t part of a larger scenario, knowing they were done by one human to another with intention, it’s harder to look at. He turned, smiling at them.

“I think that was a success,” he laughed. “I haven’t pissed that much and that long in years. No pain. No discomfort at all.” The other men nodded, drying themselves off and pulling on their clothes.

“Alright. Let one of us know if you’re feeling any discomfort at all. Cruz, Doc, and I will be with everyone in Hawaii, along with Lena and Kelsey. Just ask one of the professionals if you’re having problems, brother. Don’t hide it, or it might get worse,” said Wilson.

“I know, I know,” he said. “I promise I won’t. I can’t thank you all enough for what you’ve done so far. I already feel better. I stepped into that water, and it was as if something were sucking out all the negative from me. All the emotions and fears, the hate and bottled-up anger seemed to float away. It was as if everything just washed away when I hit that pond. I couldn’t control my emotions.”

“It happens like that on the first time. The next time won’t be so bad.”

CHAPTER THREE

Koana Ogi kneeled beside the bed of her dying grandmother. Her mother had died more than ten years ago from a stroke. Since then, she'd spent most of her days with her grandmother on their ancestral property.

The man she called father, Akua Ogi, was a mean, bitter, abusive man who liked to punch anything smaller than he was. Koana had learned from a very young age to stay out of her father's way.

"Grandmother, please, don't leave me," she whispered. "Please. I can't do this by myself. I can't fight him alone."

"You must call your uncle," she said in a raspy voice. "Call your Uncle Noa and Auntie Ani. They will come. Tell them I have died. Tell them, and they will come to help you. Trust me in this."

"But they've been gone for years, Grandmother. They won't come now."

"They will. They will because the mana, the power and love, is strong. I don't have long, Koana. I am old and I am sick. The ancestors are calling me home. It's time for me

to go. Don't let Akua convince you to sell this land. It's our land. Our family's land. We have lived here for hundreds of years. It belongs to you, not him."

"He'll kill me, Grandmother," she whispered with tears in her eyes.

"Go. Call your uncle and auntie now. I will be gone by morning, and they will be on their way. Akua cannot have this land, and he cannot sell it. Stay away from him until they get here."

"Yes, Grandmother," she said.

She kissed her forehead, knowing it would be the last time she saw the old woman. Akua hadn't even been to visit her. He was too consumed with how much money he might make on their property. The property that he had no control over.

In their family, the property belonged to the women. The oldest daughter would inherit it, and her oldest daughter, and her oldest, and so on. Koana was the oldest daughter, the only daughter of her mother.

"Auntie? It's Koana. You must come. Grandmother is dead."

Koana barely knew her aunt and uncle. They'd visited one time when her mother died but only stayed two days. She was just a teenager then and was more worried about where she would live.

Akua made it very clear that he hated her and didn't want her around, but he also wanted the land that she was living on. Instead, she stayed with her grandmother, and that kept Akua away for the most part.

Waiting for Noa and Ani to arrive, she spent her time ordering the leis that members of the family would wear at the funeral. She chose her grandmother's favorite colorful, floral dress and made sure that friends and family would tell stories of the old woman. Everything would be traditional, as she requested.

Two days later, a large tour bus pulled up outside her grandmother's home. Her stomach dropped, believing that Akua was showing the property. Instead, her beautiful Aunt Ani and handsome Uncle Noa stepped off the bus with dozens of other people.

"Auntie! Uncle!" she called, running toward them. Ani held her niece for a moment, remembering the death of

her sister and how young the girl was back then. Noa lifted her up, swinging her around.

“How are you, Koana?” he said, kissing her forehead.

“I’m scared,” she whispered. “I’ve been able to avoid Akua, but I think that’s because he’s out celebrating what he thinks is his chance to take the land and sell it. I can’t let him have this land, Uncle Noa. I can’t.”

“I know,” he nodded. “We won’t let that happen. It’s a lot of land, Koana. How will you take care of it? Are you going to live here?”

“I-I don’t know, but I won’t sell it.” She stared at the mass of people behind her aunt and uncle, then looked up at him. “Is this my security team?”

“Sort of,” laughed Noa. “Let me introduce you to everyone.”

It took nearly an hour for Noa and Ani to introduce everyone to Koana. When they were done, she led them to the back of the house, where the real beauty of her family home made people breathless. Kukuihaele was a tiny speck on a tiny island, but it was their home. The front of their home had

views of Waipio Bay and Kaluahine Falls. It was absolutely breathtaking.

Ethan stood on the precipice of the land, staring over the ledge at the stunning waters below. It seemed like paradise had leapt out of a book and was laid out before him.

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” said the young woman next to him. He looked down at the long silky black hair and huge almond-shaped brown eyes. Her skin was golden perfection, her lips full and wet. Swallowing, he nodded at her.

“It’s the most beautiful place I’ve ever been to,” he said, speaking truthfully.

“You’re Ethan, right?” He nodded again. “Koana. My mother was the oldest daughter. This land is ours, and Akua has intentions of selling it to a hotel investment group. I can’t let it go to them. I just can’t. It’s not just that they’d ruin the land, but it would change everything here. Everyone’s way of life.” Ethan took note of the fact that she didn’t call her father by a loving name. She used his first name always.

“I can understand that,” said Ethan. “I’m sure your aunt and uncle will do the right thing in helping you.” She stared at the water and horizon beyond.

“Akua is going to be very angry,” she said, turning to look up at him. “I’m scared.”

That brought Ethan to attention fully. He didn’t like bullies, but he definitely didn’t like bullies who made young women frightened.

“We won’t let anything happen.”

“Do you know I’ve never been off this island? Never. Not even to Honolulu. My mother never wanted me to leave, afraid that if something happened to me, Akua would do something with the land. I think she was right.”

“How old are you?” he asked quietly.

“Twenty-five. Almost twenty-six. How old are you?” she asked, staring at him.

“Thirty-seven.”

“That’s a good age,” she whispered. “That’s a very good age. I’m glad you’re here, Ethan.”

She turned to walk away, and her hair swung wide, brushing over his forearm, sending chills up his spine. He watched as she walked toward her aunt and uncle. Her tiny white shorts barely covered her ass, but her long legs told him all he needed to know. What shit for timing.

“Damn.”

CHAPTER FOUR

The home of the Lim family was large with a massive back patio. Over the years, the small cottage had been expanded to accommodate more and more children and family. The construction of each addition could easily be seen by the different colors and styles.

Extended family members were cooking at the grills, making food for the huge group of attendees. Ethan stood on the periphery, watching the beautiful young woman he'd spoken to. She moved effortlessly from one person to the next, hugging them, thanking them for coming.

The RP team had been there for two days already. Most of them were camping on the land in tents. There weren't many resorts or hotels nearby, so it was their only option. They didn't care. It was like paradise, and the land offered them everything they needed.

Akua, Koana's father, had shown up twice, screaming for everyone to leave, yelling at his daughter like she was a dog. Ethan held his tongue, knowing that Ani and Noa would stick up for the young woman, but it was beginning to grate on

his nerves. Tonight, they were holding a feast to celebrate the life of her grandmother and to tell stories of her amazing life.

Beneath the covered patio, a dozen tables were set up with people mingling around them. Koana's head popped up, listening for something. The only thing Ethan heard was a loud truck slamming on its brakes out front. When the shadow of a short, wide man came around the corner, he knew immediately who it was.

“Koana! What the fuck are you doing?” he yelled. Noa stepped in front of his brother-in-law, staring down at him.

“Hello, Akua,” he frowned. “Wish I could say it was nice to see you again, but it's not.”

“Get out of my way,” he snarled. “You left this island and our people. You left this land. It doesn't belong to you any longer. It belongs to me.”

“It doesn't belong to you,” said Ani, stepping forward. “This land has always belonged to the oldest daughter of the oldest daughter. It belongs to Koana, and we will make sure it stays that way.”

“Move,” he growled. Ani took another step forward.

“Make me,” she sneered. He only sneered back, then looked around the property.

“Who are these people? Get them off my land.”

Noa just shook his head. Akua was never the brightest bulb on the shelf. He wasn't sure why his sister had chosen him as her husband, but he knew that he wasn't going to get his hands on this land.

“It's bad enough you let my sister die without calling for help. You're not going to destroy the land that was my family's for centuries,” said Noa. He looked around at his extended family of aunts, uncles, cousins, and friends. The RP men and women were mixed right in with them. “You're not getting the land, Akua.”

Ethan tried to stay on the outskirts of the conflict. This was a family issue from what he could see, but Noa and Ani were really angry with the man standing in front of them. He'd watched him these last few days acting like a total asshole to everyone around him, including his beautiful daughter.

“You have no right, Akua,” said Noa. “This land doesn't belong to you. It belonged to my grandmother, then my sister, and then back to my grandmother. They've both

died, so it belongs to Koana now. It's our way and you know that."

"She's my daughter," growled the older man. "That makes the house and land mine."

"No," said Ani, "that's not how it works, and you know it. The land belonged to our mother, and it would have belonged to her mother, and it passes to her, the blood of our family. Our other siblings are gone now. Noa and I live stateside. The land will be taken care of by our niece, not her father."

"This is my home," he growled, flexing his fists at his side. "You two have no rights here. You deserted the family. You left your home, the islands, for these people. Nothing belongs to you any longer." Ethan stared at the man, worried he might do something stupid, and he was right.

"Akua," said the beautiful woman stepping forward. She looked younger than her age, her long silky black hair sweeping across her back. She wore another pair of white shorts and a floral tank top, highlighting her golden tan and finely honed muscles. Ethan was certain it was to torture him. "Akua, please. Let's speak about this inside. Ani and Noa have a right to speak here."

He moved so quickly no one could stop it. His arm raised, and he backhanded his daughter, her body flying across the patio, landing against the side of the house. Kelsey and Carter knelt beside her.

“God, Koana, are you alright?” asked Carter.

She looked up at her uncle and shook her head, blood coming from her already swelling nose. They turned, expecting to see Ani or Noa kicking Akua’s ass. Instead, Ethan had the man by the throat against the wall. His knuckles were white, he was holding his throat so tightly. Akua’s bulky body barely breathing from the grip around his neck.

“Ethan!” yelled Noa.

“If you ever lay a finger on that woman again, I’ll kill you.” Noa gripped the other man’s shoulder, knowing that Ethan could probably kick his ass blindfolded. It would take at least five of the RP men to get him off of Akua if he truly wanted to kill him.

Ethan released his grip, letting the man fall to the ground, coughing and gasping for air. He stared down at him.

“You were lucky this time,” said Ethan. “If I see that you’ve touched that woman again, I will kill you, and no one

will find your body. No one.”

Akua struggled to stand, bent over, coughing and spitting. He glared at Koana as Kelsey held an ice pack to her nose, Carter wiping away the blood from her face.

“I’ll be back, and they won’t be here to protect you. You’re going to do what I say or else.”

Koana had tears in her eyes, shaking her head. When Akua left, she finally broke down, crying against Uncle Carter’s chest.

“It’s okay, honey,” he said. “It’s going to be okay. We can make sure he doesn’t bother you again.”

“While you’re here,” she sniffed. “What happens when you leave? I’m here alone, and the cousins can’t be around me all the time. He’ll make my life miserable. It’s already started. I lost my job because of him. I can’t find another because he’s telling everyone lies about me. I can’t be here alone.”

“I’ll stay.” She looked up, trying to find the voice of the man who spoke. There were dozens standing around her. “I’ll stay with you until this gets handled.”

“I-I... why would you do that?” she asked. Ethan shrugged, looking down at her.

“I have a thing about bullies and abusers. I’ll stay and help you figure this out.”

“We’ll all stay,” said Luke, walking toward the young woman. “We’ve needed a bit of a vacation, so this will help serve both purposes. I’ll have the team rotate watching the land for you while the others get some time in the sun and surf. Two for one.” He smiled at the young woman, and Noa and Ani grinned at him.

“Thank you,” she said, still in her Uncle Carter’s arms. She kissed his cheek, smiling at her Aunt Ani. “Grandma knew you would come if I called. I’m sorry he’s so awful.”

“Has he hit you before?” asked Ethan. She nodded, twisting her fingers.

“He drinks and gets angry about everything. I still have ringing in my ears from the last time he hit my face.”

“Your nose is going to be swollen and sore,” said Kelsey, “but it’s not broken. This time.” Koana nodded.

“He’s been talking to an investment group already, promising them that I’ll sell when the time comes. They want

the entire property to build a resort of some sort, and they're not taking no for an answer. They want to build pools, golf course, the whole nine yards. It will destroy everything you see here. I can't do that to our community, to our land. I can't let that happen," she said.

"You don't have to," said Noa. "We won't let it happen." She gently touched her nose and winced, then nodded.

"Well, for now, let's eat and celebrate Grandma," she smiled, trying to change the subject and create a different mood. It was difficult to do with a swollen nose and bloody face, but she was damn sure going to make an effort. "The food is ready, and it's delicious as always. Please. Enjoy!"

Everyone moved toward the tables of food, trying to lighten the mood with laughter and joking. Koana's great-aunts, great-uncles, and cousins gave her the pathetic 'we're sorry' look, but none of them had ever tried to go up against Akua. She walked around the front of the property, staring at the setting sun. Crouching on her heels, she began to cry into her hands. She was so consumed with fear and grief she didn't think she could continue to fight.

Someone sat behind her, pulling her back to their chest. Whoever it was, he was big and strong, holding her tightly, rocking her back and forth. She turned, curling her body into his chest. Finally, looking up, she saw that it was Ethan. She was seated between his thighs and had never felt safer in her entire life.

“It’s going to be alright,” he said, staring at the setting sun.

“How did you know I was out here?” she asked, wiping her eyes.

“I was watching to make sure you were okay. I didn’t want your father to sneak up on you again.” He tilted her head up. “Let me see the damage. It’s gonna be black and blue, but it will be okay.”

“He’s done it before,” she said. “I’m ashamed to say it, but he’s done it many times. When my mom was alive, she didn’t put up with it. He would try to hit her, but she would go after him with a frying pan or a walking stick. She wasn’t about to let him touch her. When she died, I tried to stay away from him and live here with Grandma. When she died, I knew I’d be in trouble.”

“You’re not in trouble,” he said, looking down at her. “You’ve just hit a little speed bump. We’ll handle this for you.”

She nodded, staring at his handsome face. He had a hollow in his chin, a jaw that looked as if it were made of granite. His light brown hair, with just a hint of red and blonde, was cut short, his golden hazel eyes sparkling in the waning light. His expression was serious, but there seemed to be a playfulness in his eyes as well.

“You’re very handsome,” she whispered. He gave her a little smile.

“And you’re very beautiful,” he grinned.

He never expected her to take the lead and jump right on board. Gripping his neck, she pulled his mouth down to her own, tasting his sticky lips from the barbecue sauce. Ethan moaned, feeling her hot breath and the firm muscles of her body pressed against him. His eyes went wide when for just a moment, he felt something move. It was brief, but it was there.

“I’m sorry if that was forward,” she said, pulling back.

“It was beautiful,” he said. “I just want to be sure we have our signals right. I’m only here to help you and make sure you keep your land. Then I go back stateside. I know this is where you want to be, so I don’t want any misunderstandings.”

“I understand,” she nodded. “It’s just that I’m very attracted to you.”

“Same, honey.” He wasn’t about to explain that he couldn’t do a damn thing with that attraction, but it felt good to know he was still capable of having feelings for a woman.

They sat on the grass, watching as the sun sizzled into the water. The sky filled with a kaleidoscope of oranges, yellows, and reds. When the last of the light left, it was as if God flipped a switch, and the stars were turned on. Their bright blinking lights illuminating the sky.

“Do you surf?” she asked.

“Only when forced to,” he smirked, remembering a time when a surfboard was his only escape from an op.

“I surf every morning if you’d like to join me,” she smiled. “Just meet me here at six.” She stood, wiping the

grass off her bottom. He stood with her, more than a head taller. He let his hand rest at her waist.

“I’ll be here,” he smiled.

She kissed his cheek, racing back to the house. Her cute ass wiggled as she jogged back in her bare feet. It was the hottest thing he’d seen in years. She looked as though she’d stepped off the cover of a surfer magazine or an advertisement for some coconut-scented suntan oil.

He felt the twitch again and just the hint of a hard-on beginning. Looking down at his groin, he frowned.

“Of course, you decide to work with a brother’s niece. Traitor.”

CHAPTER FIVE

“Akua always was a piece of work. I have no idea why our sister married that asshole, but she did. I’m going to bet our brother-in-law has made promises he can’t keep,” said Ani, staring at her brother.

“I’m not stupid enough to take that bet. I’m sure he did as well. What I worry about is that it’s not just a normal developer.”

“What do you mean?” asked Carter.

“Well, a long time ago, our grandfather was approached by some men wanting to use the island as a halfway point for a hand-off of whatever they were shipping in and out of the states. He knew it was a bunch of bullshit and refused, but not before they burned down two houses that belonged to my uncles.”

“Seems the land is in hot demand,” said Luke.

“It’s not the land, brother. I mean, it is. It’s beautiful, lush, and tropical, for sure. It’s where it’s located. We’re just a few miles from the Pu’u O Umi Natural Area Reserve. Some of the most amazing hiking trails, waterfalls, and landscape you’ve ever seen. This is a lot like Belle Fleur,”

said Noa. “The foliage here, birds, trees, flowers, all of it are unique and rare. There are spiders and lizards that can only be found in this part of the island.”

“Is it because of the volcanic rock?” asked Lindsay.

“It could be,” nodded Ani. “I’m not sure anyone really knows. All I know is that we were taught to be protective of it, and I’m happy to see that Koana was taught the same. Unfortunately, our brother-in-law didn’t see the wisdom in it.”

“Hey, no offense,” said Cam, “but if Koana’s mother was your older sister, she had to have been much older when Koana was born, right?”

“She waited a long time to have a child,” said Ani.

“Almost too long. Koana was definitely a surprise baby. I remember Liani calling to tell us. She was shocked. It was a time when she and Akua were taking a break from one another. We really thought this was it and that she’d finally divorce his ugly ass. He’d been living on the other side of the island for almost two months.”

“I hate to ask this,” said Cam, “but are we sure Akua is her father? I mean no offense. She looks just like Ani, but she looks nothing like that man.”

Noa looked at his sister, Ani, then back at the team.

“We’ve asked the same question to one another. She may not be Akua’s daughter, but she’s definitely Liani’s. We could ask for a DNA test. That might keep him away from her. Then he has no rights at all,” said Noa.

“I’m not sure how we would explain this to Koana,” said Ani.

“Explain what?” All eyes turned to see the young woman walking toward them. It was late, all the extended family long gone from the property. They were seated around a warm fire, just listening to the crashing waves and bird calls. “Explain what?”

“Koana, have you ever questioned whether or not Akua is your father?” asked Noa. Ethan watched the young woman staring at her uncle, then looking toward her aunt. He was surprised when she looked up at him, just staring for the longest moment.

“He is not my father.” Her statement was so ‘matter-of-fact’, they were all shocked.

“What?” called several people.

“You knew?” asked Ani.

“Mom knew. She told me. It’s why she insisted I never give up the land to him. Never. You said something last night, something about him not calling for help when Mom had her stroke. I knew that he would speed up her death if she were to get sick. He was just waiting for his chance. She confided in me that she’d told him, and she was really worried about it. She told him that he wasn’t my father and he would never get the land. That’s why he let her die. Because of me.”

“No,” said Ethan, standing from his spot. “No, not because of you. Because of him being a selfish, evil man. You had nothing to do with it, but it does make being around him dangerous for you.” She gave a small smile to him, her eyes and nose already black and blue from the earlier hit.

“Who is your father? Did she tell you?” asked Noa.

“I don’t know,” said Koana, shaking her head. “She said it didn’t matter. She said he wouldn’t be coming back to the islands ever again but that she loved him desperately and should have divorced Akua and married him. I have only one clue.”

She disappeared into the house and returned a few moments later with a wrinkled photograph of her mother with a man. They looked happy, laughing and smiling. Her mother

looked younger than her years, her long black hair swept over her shoulder, a flower at her ear. The man was handsome, with a broad smile. He was definitely white and had a great build.

“He looks familiar,” frowned Luke.

“Holy fucking shit bird,” murmured Tanner. He looked up, searching the faces around the fire. “Pork. It’s you. You were here.”

Pork stood from his spot, looking at the young woman. He walked slowly toward the others and reverently touched the photograph, staring at the images. He suspected it the moment they pulled up to the house. He just never dreamed it was possible to be back here again at this moment in time, and he damn sure never dreamed he’d have a child.

“Pork? Brother, are you her father? Are you my niece’s father? Were you with my sister?” asked Noa, the questions pouring out of him.

“Maybe. I mean, I could be,” he said, nodding, unsure of what to say. He looked down at the photo, tears in his eyes, shaking his head. “God, she was so beautiful. So beautiful and full of life and love. She was everything I ever dreamed of.”

“Brother, you need to explain,” said Luke.

“Our team was at Pearl Harbor for training. We were given a week off to just relax before we were to be deployed. The other guys, Otto, Kegger, the rest, they partied in Honolulu. I wanted rainforests and surfing. Just some peace and quiet, so I came here to spend the week.

“I took a small plane to the island and just hiked around, camping on the beach mostly. I was coming over the ridge right there when I saw your mother standing at the edge near the banyan tree. God, she was exquisite. Her hair was nearly to her knees back then. Her eyes were closed, and she was just letting the wind hit her face. I thought she wasn’t real.

“I must have stood there for ten minutes, and she finally said, ‘are you going to say hello?’ She never even opened her eyes. I chuckled and walked toward her introducing myself. I asked her what she was doing, and she said...”

“Getting herself right,” whispered Koana. He nodded.
“She went out there all the time. I do too.”

“We talked for hours, and then she asked if I would stay for dinner. I fell in love with her almost immediately.

There was an ethereal quality to her. This other-worldly aura that made it feel like she was one with the land and sea and sky. I know that sounds corny, but it's the truth.

“That night, I knew she was going to be the woman I would marry. We made love, and I stayed with her for three more days. Then, she told me she was already married but considering leaving her husband. I felt like shit. She was married. I'd slept with a married woman, and I felt terrible for it. I loved her, but I didn't want to be the 'other' man. I knew I had to leave because we were deploying.”

“Unhappily,” said Koana, staring at the man who was allegedly her father. He looked at her sideways. “She was unhappily married. There is a difference.”

“You didn't recognize the house when you walked up?” asked Noa.

“It's changed. A lot. It was smaller and a different color. So much here looks the same. I couldn't be sure. It was just too much of a coincidence for it to be her.” He turned to Koana. “I swear to God I never knew about you. Never. I got deployed and came back once. I tried calling her, but the phone was disconnected.”

“Probably one of the many times my father forgot to pay the phone bill,” she frowned, shaking her head. “I mean, Akua. You’re my father.”

“I think I might be,” said Pork with a forced smile. “My name is Forrest Milner, but they call me Pork. Your mother gave me that name, uh, for a lot of reasons. Mostly because I loved the pork she made on the open fire. I ate my weight in it.”

“You’re my father,” she repeated. “Not that horrible human who’s been hitting me my entire life. You’re my father.”

“I’m damn sorry I didn’t know,” said Pork, taking a step toward her. “I would have come sooner. I would have taken you away from here.” She shook her head, her long hair swirling so much like her mother’s. Pork swallowed, tears filling his eyes as the memory of the only woman he ever loved filled his soul.

“C-can I hug you?” she asked.

Pork gripped her shoulders, pulling her into his embrace. He rubbed her back, remembering the feel of her mother in his arms. The lovemaking. She’d told him she didn’t believe she could have children, but he knew that it was

in her to be a mother. If she only knew how many times the vision of her filled his thoughts while he was deployed. The memories flooded his brain, bringing him back to the moment he knew he was in love.

“I knew that monster couldn’t be my father. Mom told me, but he insisted. I knew it,” she whispered. “Are you a good man? Please tell me you’re a good man that doesn’t hit women.”

“Oh, honey, I’d like to believe I’m a good man. I can say without a doubt I never hit women. Never. I guess we have a lot to talk about. I’m a retired SEAL, like your Uncle Noa.”

“Wow,” she laughed, pulling back. “Then I know you’re a good man. She held that picture to her chest every time she got sad. I asked her so many times what the picture was, and she would just say, ‘the happiest time of my life.’ I never invaded her privacy and didn’t look at it until she shared it with me. She loved you so much. I knew she loved you, but I didn’t know who you were. She died before she could share your name.”

“I loved her, too. God, I’m a father. I’m the father of a grown daughter.” He kissed her forehead and looked around

at the crowd. "I'm a father!"

The entire mood shifted to one of happiness and congratulations. Noa and Ani were sad that their sister never got to be with the one man she truly loved. Pork was one of the best, and he would have been a loving father and husband. He'd missed Koana's entire life and now was stepping in.

"We should do a DNA swab, just to be sure," said Cruz. "Once we have that back, we'll be able to attack Akua from a different direction."

"I'm willing," said Koana. "I just know it's true. I feel it already." She turned and spotted Ethan. Taking long strides, she wrapped her arms around his waist, hugging him tightly. Ethan wasn't sure what to do other than hug her back.

"I'm so happy for you," he said, smiling down at her.

"I have a father. A father who is a good man," she said. Ethan nodded at her, then saw Pork standing behind her, frowning.

"Something you want to tell me, Ethan?" said Pork.

"Fuck, you've been a father for like five minutes, and you're already gonna give me shit?" said Ethan.

"Yep."

“Pork... Forrest... uh, Dad. Can I call you dad?” she asked.

“I think I’d like that,” smiled the older man.

“Dad, I like Ethan. He’s been very nice to me, and I want to be his friend, maybe more. He’s explained that he’ll go back with all of you when this is done, but I’d like to get to know him.” Pork never thought he’d have this conversation with anyone, but he nodded, giving a smirk.

“He’s a good man. Probably the best of any of us. I don’t have a problem with it.” She kissed his cheek, then turned to Ethan.

“There’s something I’d like to show you all. Will you follow me?” She turned to the entire team. “All of you. Will you follow me?”

CHAPTER SIX

Koana led them through the dark trails of her family's land. The dwindling light had them using lanterns as nearly a hundred people followed her further and further into the foliage. She stopped at a narrow gap and pointed downward.

“Careful of your step. There's a rope to hold onto if you feel uneasy. The steps can be slick, so just walk slowly.”

Ethan was right behind her, with Pork behind him as they took the dirt, root-covered, and wooden steps further and further downward. With the last few steps, they heard the sounds of the rushing sea. When everyone was on the beach, she turned toward an opening in the side of the cliff and pointed.

“We're going in there. It's perfectly safe, but if you're claustrophobic, you might want to stay out here.”

No one said anything, just nodding at her as they followed her inside. She held the lantern next to her legs, and the others did the same, waiting for her to say something. Slowly, she lifted the lantern, and the others followed her actions.

The cave filled with an eerie yellowish-green glow. The walls, covered with large rocks, shimmered in the light.

“Holy shit,” muttered Bogey. “What is that? Emeralds?”

“No, they aren’t found on the islands,” said Koana, “but peridot is. It’s the purest, highest quality that anyone has ever seen. I took three gems to a jeweler on the other side of the island to ensure that my... that Akua didn’t know about it. The jeweler said he’d never seen anything like it before. He told me that one rock was worth hundreds of thousands of dollars.”

“And you’re sure Akua didn’t know about this?” asked Ani.

“I didn’t think so, but now I’m not sure. What if he’s not trying to sell the land for a resort, but instead, he wants to dig and blow it up for this? I can’t let that happen,” she said. “I’m not sure what to do, Uncle Noa.”

“Well, we could legally mine it by calling in someone that would do it responsibly and pull it out without destroying everything around it.”

“Do you really think that would happen? I mean, I’ve read these horror stories of mining companies going in, and the waters get contaminated, the land is dug up and destroyed. It’s awful.”

“That is a possibility,” said Ani.

“Or,” said Ethan from behind her. She jumped, then turned, grinning up at him. “Sorry. Or you could close off the cave. Make sure that no one comes in here again, ever.”

“What if the family needed this money? I mean, what if the aunts or uncles need it? I worry about them,” she said, staring at Ani and Noa. “Some of them are getting old, and many of the younger cousins don’t have jobs. Times are hard on our island, and they don’t want to leave.”

“You have a soft heart like your mother,” smiled Noa. “Are they having financial issues now?”

“No. Not that I know of,” she said, shaking her head. “I don’t think Akua knows about this, but what if he finds out. What do I do then? He’ll want it all the more. And what if he finds a loophole to the way Mom’s will was written.”

“He won’t,” said Ani. “We’re here to make sure that doesn’t happen. For now, let’s all get to bed. We’ll take a

look at things in the daylight and see what we have. Nathan? Joseph? Would you mind setting something up that would tell us if anyone tried to get down here?"

"Consider it done," said the two men.

The rest of the team walked back up the unstable staircase. Noa knew that if the staircase was there, someone knew about the cave long before his niece found it. He just needed to find out who that was and pray that it was his sister.

The tents were all aglow with lantern light and torches as everyone waved goodnight and made their way to their own beds. Pork pulled his new-found daughter into his arms, kissing her forehead.

"I can't believe we found one another," he smirked.
"I'll never let you go again. Never."

"Me too," she smiled, kissing his cheek. As the last of the team left, Koana stood in the field behind her home alone. She wrapped her arms around her waist, shivering.

"Are you cold?"

"Oh geez!" she jumped, turning to see Ethan. "You scared the hell out of me."

“Sorry,” he grinned. “Are you cold? I can start another fire. I’m not tired.”

“Actually, I have a favor to ask of you,” she said, taking a step closer to him. He felt the familiar sensations in his lower gut, but he’d felt that before and nothing came of it. “I’m the only one who sleeps in the house, and I’ll be honest, I’m a bit frightened with the way Akua behaved tonight.”

“You said it wasn’t the first time he’d hit you.” She shook her head.

“No. He enjoyed it all too often, especially after Mom died. Grandma did her best to keep him away from me, but I think looking at me was a reminder of the fact that I wasn’t his. He hated me. He hated everything about me.”

“Well, he is a fool,” said Ethan, taking a half-step closer. He reached out, pushing back a long strand of her silky black hair. Standing this close, he noticed just a hint of gold in her eyes, very similar to Pork’s hazel eyes.

“Will you sleep in the house with me? I mean, you don’t have to sleep in my bed, but I’d just appreciate the company.”

“Koana, there is nothing I’d like more than to be in your bed, beside you, tonight and every night, but I need to tell you a story.”

She nodded as Ethan began his tale. Many times, she held back a gasp or outrage, knowing that he didn’t need that from her. Not now. She felt tears come to her eyes and shook her head. Finished with his tale, he just shrugged.

“So, I don’t know what will happen. I mean, something could happen. I mean, happen down there,” he grinned. “Or nothing could happen.” His expression sobered.

“Ethan, a woman would be a fool not to love you for just the man that you are. Sex is a beautiful thing, but it doesn’t have to always be just intercourse. There are a lot of ways a man and woman can love one another.” He stared down at her with confusion.

“I want to ask how you know all that, but I’m worried what the answer will be,” he frowned.

“Ethan, I’m almost twenty-six. Not sixteen. I’ve been with a few men. Not many, but definitely a few. Plus, I had a mother that was a firm believer in honesty with her daughter. She openly spoke to me about sex and intimacy, about our bodies and what they can and cannot do, what they should and

should not do. My mother wasn't a woman with a lot of formal education, but she was close to the land. She was close to this island, and everything led back to being natural for her."

"I'm glad you had someone like that in your life," said Ethan. "Let me grab my gear, and I'll sleep in the house."

He disappeared and a few moments later reappeared with his duffel. They walked into the house, and she automatically locked the door, but Ethan took note of the rickety lock.

"We'll need to reinforce the door tomorrow," he said, frowning at the lock. She nodded, taking his hand and leading him to her bedroom. The wide expanse of windows gave her a view of the ocean over the cliff's edge. The banyan tree waved in the wind.

"What a great view," he whispered.

She nodded, removing her clothing, standing in the room as naked as the day she was born. She reached for a thin, white cotton nightgown with spaghetti straps and pulled back the covers. Ethan swallowed hard, staring at her.

"Just lay with me, Ethan. That's all I'm asking for."

Ethan nodded, stripping off his clothes as well. He pulled on a pair of cotton gym shorts and slid between the covers with her. Lying back on the bed, he reached for her hand, holding it gently. It was the most innocent, sweet moment of his entire life, and those had been few and far between.

“This is perfect,” she whispered. “I can’t think of anything better than this.”

He stared at her perfect skin glowing in the moonlight, then at her perfect lips. Her long lashes fluttered against her cheeks. Rolling to his side, he stroked her jawline, turning her face toward him.

“I have to do this,” he whispered.

She nodded, reaching for his neck as he placed a soft kiss against her lips. The moment he touched her, he knew. This was the end of his life as he knew it. Gripping her waist, he pulled her close to his own body, tasting her, savoring in the flavors of Koana.

Threading her fingers through his hair, she held his head to her mouth, tangling her tongue with his. His big strong hands pressed against her nightgown, the heat from his flesh scorching her own.

Ethan thought he felt his cock move but ignored it. This was perfect. Everything about this moment was perfect. Pulling back, he smiled at her as she wiggled into his arms, resting her head against his chest.

“I’m glad you’re here,” she whispered.

“So am I, beautiful. So am I.”

The fit of nightmares that usually invaded Ethan’s sleep seemed calmer for some reason. He was seeing his tormentors, but almost from a distance, not up close. He watched what they were doing but knew that he was strong enough to survive. Then the women came in, rescuing him. Women that looked eerily similar to the one in his arms.

His eyes opened with a flash, panting with short, heavy breaths. He stared at the ceiling, the smell of ham, bacon, and sausage cooking somewhere. He kicked back the covers and tried to sit up. Something was different. Something was wrong. He looked down at his legs, then grinned.

Something wasn’t wrong. Something was definitely right.

“Well, I’ll be damned. Morning wood.”

CHAPTER SEVEN

Ethan grabbed a cup of coffee from the table set up outside, smiling at his teammates and friends. Koana walked toward him, handing him a hot sticky bun, and kissed his cheek.

“Good morning,” she blushed.

“Good morning. You left the bed before I could give you a proper good morning,” he smiled.

“Oh, no,” she giggled. “I saw the proper good morning and desperately wanted to test it, but I thought you might want to be the first to test that monster out.”

“Monster, huh?” he grinned.

“Ethan Dunvegan, you know good and well that you are a man blessed with more than most. I’m a little afraid of it,” she grinned.

“Liar,” he smiled. “You’re not afraid. You’re curious and I love that. Hell, I’m curious to see how it will work or if it will work. When we’re ready, we’ll satisfy your curiosity.”

“Ethan? I can’t get pregnant and have you leave me here like my mom. I mean, I want to be with you, but we have

to take every precaution.” He nodded, not sure of what the right thing to say would be.

“I would never do that to you,” he whispered. She kissed his cheek, smiling.

“I’m sure that’s exactly what Pork said.”

He watched as she walked toward the others and just stood there, swallowing back the sick feeling in his stomach. He would have to leave here eventually. Hawaii wasn’t his home, and as beautiful as it was, he wanted to be near his teammates and their families. His family.

Behind him, he heard a car door slam, then another. He walked around the side of the house, then turned back to the crowd and let out a whistle. Walking toward Akua and three men in suits, he straightened his shoulders, staring at the four men.

“Help you, gentlemen?” he smiled.

“Get the fuck off my land,” snapped Akua.

“See, that’s where you’re wrong. This isn’t your land. It’s Koana’s, and you know it. You have no legal right to the land. None. And you know exactly why,” said Ethan, staring

at the man. He took a sip of his coffee and heard the others walk up to stand behind him.

“You said the land was yours,” said one of the suits.

“Well, I mean, technically...”

“Technically, legally, ethically, morally, it’s not his,” growled Noa. “It belongs to my niece. It’s been passed from the oldest daughter to the oldest daughter for centuries. It sure as fuck won’t stop here. Akua has no legal or moral right to this land, especially since she is not his daughter. Is she, Akua?”

“Seems like we need to speak to the owner then,” smiled one of the men reaching into his pocket for a business card. Before he could even bring it into the light of day, Trak had a blade at his throat.

“Remove your hand,” he said in a low murmur. The man slowly took his hand from inside his coat, and Trak reached inside, pulling the white card out. He handed it to Noa, then gradually lowered his blade. “Do not ever make a sudden move around us again.”

“Got it,” he nodded, swallowing hard. “Listen, we want to talk business. We’ve had our eye on this land for a

while, and your grandmother refused to speak with us. Akua guaranteed that the land would be ours when she passed, but, well, we see now that wasn't his right to say."

"I'm not selling the land to developers," said Koana. "I refuse."

"Refuse," smirked one of the other men. "Not many people refuse us."

"We're not average people," said Ethan. "She's not selling. Not now. Not ever. We're done here. If you step foot on this property again, she and all of us have the right to defend it, which means I can happily shoot your ass."

"I'm allowed!" yelled Akua.

"Actually," said Koana, "you're not allowed. You've known for a long time that we are not blood. You hated me, and you hated my mother because she found true love with a man who is genuine and true. She found happiness. She found that in this man." She turned, pointing to Pork. He stared at the short, squat man and walked closer.

"You took the only thing from me that ever mattered," said Pork. "You're done here. You have no right to be on this

land. Do it again, and I will personally put a bullet in your brain.”

“You? You’re the sailor who fucked my whore of a...” He didn’t get to finish his sentence. Pork planted his wide fist straight into his nose, blood gushing from his nose and mouth.

“If you ever speak like that of the most beautiful, kind, loving woman I’ve ever known, no one will find your pieces.” Akua held his hand over his mouth and nose.

“Please, p-please, Koana. I gave you a good home. I provided for you.”

“You provided for me? You barely worked a day in your life. Mom worked. I worked. Not you. You didn’t pay the bills. You drank away the money. You attempted to hit Mom, but she nearly beat the shit out of you. But you did manage to hit me on more than one occasion. Why would I ever, ever consider helping you?”

“Because you have to!” he screamed. The three men in suits smiled at Koana, causing chills to run up her spine. She stared at them, then down at Akua. Her gut was in knots telling her what he’d done.

“He took money from you, didn’t he?” she asked.

“We gave him a fifty-thousand-dollar advance when your grandmother was dying. We thought it was a done deal.”

For just a moment, Noa and Ethan thought that Koana would cave and help Akua. Instead, she stared down at him, then back at Pork.

“You were waiting for my grandmother to die. Just sitting like a fat cat waiting for the canary to be distracted. When Mom went on blood pressure medication, you saw it as your opportunity to torture her and make her life miserable. She was constantly trying to keep it low, and then you would come around. You allowed my mother to die while you watched. Your hate has consumed you and made my life miserable. I owe you nothing. Your attempts to sell my family’s land are done. Get off my property.”

Koana turned and stood beside Ethan, tucked under one arm. He kissed her forehead, grinning at the other men. Pork stood on the other side of her, holding her hand.

“They’ll kill me!” screamed Akua.

“That is what usually happens with you mess with the mob,” said Noa. The three suits stared at the big Hawaiian,

then at one another. “Did you think I wouldn’t do my own homework when you threatened my niece? Did you believe I would let my drunken brother-in-law tell me what was right and wrong? We knew who you were the moment you stepped from that car. You’ve fucked with the wrong island boy, bruh.

“You are Tony and Cosmo Marietta.” He looked at the third man and frowned. “You? I’m guessing you’re for decoration.” The third man started to come forward, but Noa just laughed. His boss held up a hand, shaking his head.

“Congratulations,” said Tony. “You know who we are. Now, someone owes us fifty thousand.”

“I’d say he’s the one lying in the dirt,” said Ethan.

“We’ve tried that already. He spent it. We’ll take what’s left, but it’s not enough. We want our money or the land. Your choice.”

“You don’t seem to get it,” said Luke, stepping forward. “Her land is now protected by us.”

“And who ‘da fuck are you?” asked suit number three, finally speaking.

“We are REAPER-Patriots,” said Luke. “And this land and this woman are under our protection.”

All three men raised their brows, then looked down at Akua. Gripping his arms, suit number three dragged him toward the car as he kicked and screamed. The other two stared at Koana.

“We’ll handle him for what he owes us. But it doesn’t change the fact that we want this land,” said Tony.

“When did the Mariettas get into resort building?” asked Ethan, staring at the man with a sideways glance. “I mean, you’re into drug trafficking, stolen goods, casinos, all the usual crime family businesses. But I’ve never known you to open a resort.”

“Everyone needs to diversify,” smirked Cosmo. “We can’t have all our money tied up in the markets or traditional places.”

“Traditional? You mean like casinos, drugs, women, and money laundering?” asked Luke. “You’ve never invested a penny in building resorts, hotels, or anything else. You want this land for another reason, and you’re not getting it, so move along.”

“You might terrorize small nations, but we’re not cowardly foreigners,” said Cosmo. “Our family is much larger

than yours and every bit as willing to die for what we believe in.”

“Die? For land?” frowned Pork. “No. No, you’re not telling us the whole story, and like it or not, my daughter is the one who owns this land.”

“Yep,” smirked Cosmo. “She does. But she’s not married and has no daughter. What a shame. If she dies, the land goes to the Hawaii Land Trust.”

“And let me guess, someone there owes you a favor,” said Ethan. Neither Cosmo nor Tony said a word, just smiling at the group of men and women.

“We’ll let you folks get back to your camping trip. Can’t stay here forever, and you damn sure can’t protect her and this land forever. We’re patient. To a point.” They turned, and then Tony turned back. “Have a nice day.” He stared directly at Koana, and she felt a cold shiver creep up her spine.

“Oh, my God. I’m going to lose my land.”

CHAPTER EIGHT

“You’re not going to lose anything,” said Ethan. “You will lose nothing unless you want to sell the land.”

“You know I don’t. I can’t,” she said with tears in her eyes, “but he’s right. I have no husband, no child, nothing.” Ethan stared at her, then looked up at Noa, Ani, and Pork. His eyes communicated everything.

“We can fix one of those things immediately,” said Ethan.

“Wh-what are you saying?” said Koana. “Ethan, we just met. We barely know one another.” Laughter rippled through the crowd, all shaking their heads as husbands and wives kissed one another.

“Koana, baby, Kelsey and I barely knew one another when we were married. Ani and Carter married just a few weeks after knowing one another. Pigsty and Sira back there,” he said, pointing to the couple, “they knew one another an hour.”

“An hour!” yelled Koana. “This is crazy. You don’t want to marry me. You don’t want to throw your life away. You don’t...”

“I really wish you’d stop telling me what I want to do,” smiled Ethan. “Koana, I told you my story last night, and you never once gave me a look of pity. You held my hand all night, then rolled into my arms, giving me the best night’s sleep I’ve had in five years.”

“But, Ethan, that was one night. What if you wake tomorrow and realize it was all a mistake?” she asked, filled with emotion.

“Honey, I’m not sure how loving you could ever be a mistake,” he smiled, kissing her sweetly. “I wish I could explain all of this to you, Koana, but I can’t. Honestly? I don’t want to. I knew that the moment I saw you, something in my body knew that this was where I was supposed to be. You were where I was supposed to be.

“Marry me, Koana. Marry me, and we’ll figure out the first daughter thing as we go,” he said, grinning with a hidden sense of panic. What if he couldn’t deliver on that?

“Ethan?” whispered Cam.

“I know, brother. I know. This morning I woke with an unexpected surprise,” he whispered to Cam. “If I can’t do this for her, I’ll make sure we find someone who can do it for

her. I won't leave her side. Not ever. But I will make sure that she has a daughter, one way or another."

Luke, Cam, and the others all stared at Ethan, then looked around at everyone else and back to Koana.

"It's up to you, honey," said Ani. "I can tell you there's not a better man here to protect you. He's superior in every way. He's honest, true to his word, faithful, and not bad to look at." Ani tried to smile at the young woman but knew that this was weighing heavily for her.

"Aunt Ani," she cried, shaking her head.

"Is there someone else?" asked Ethan, hoping he wouldn't have to kill anyone.

"No! Of course not. I would never start something with you if there was someone else. I don't want you to hate me, Ethan. I don't want you to wake up one day and hate me like Akua hated my mother."

"I am not Akua, baby. I am Ethan Dunvegan, standing here in front of the only family I have here on this island, telling you that I want to marry you. Telling you that I'm falling in love with you."

“Ethan,” she cried, resting her forehead against his chest. He laughed, rubbing her back as he kissed the top of her head. “Are you sure?”

“I’m positive.” She nodded, and Ani squealed, clapping her hands.

Taking out her phone, she made one phone call. Only one. Her mother’s cousin, Makoa Teng, an island minister. Within an hour, dozens of extended family members crowded the lawn. Leis were presented to everyone, and traditional Hawaiian haku headpieces were worn by the bride and groom.

Ethan was in his best pair of khaki cargo pants and a Hawaiian shirt presented to him by Koana’s great-uncle. She wore a simple white sundress that she’d owned for years. Staring up at him as the minister spoke, she couldn’t believe she was about to marry this man. Tall, handsome, solid, and true, he was everything she’d dreamed of. Leaning forward, she whispered to him.

“You don’t have to do this, Ethan. I can find another way,” she said with tears. He only grinned, kissing the tip of her nose.

“Try to stop me.”

Another thirty minutes later, they were receiving their first toast of the day. Food arrived by carloads from everywhere on the island. Cakes, fruits, meats, and more were laid out on the tables as the celebrations began. Hula and fire dancers entertained everyone. When her Great-great Uncle Kaimana stood, leaning on his cane, and walked toward the young couple, everyone stilled.

“Koana Ogi, nee, Koana Lim Milner Dunvegan, you are the oldest daughter, of the oldest daughter, of the oldest daughter as far back as our history takes us. You have been trusted with the care and protection of this land, and you have been performing those duties faithfully. You have taken this man, not of our island, as your own. I can tell he is a good man.

“Your aunt and uncle approve of him, and that gives me hope that he will guide you to do what is right. The mana is strong. Your family is strong. We are here for you. Rely on us, on your friends, and most importantly, on this man you have taken as your husband. Your cousins know this land as well as you. They will help, and we will ensure that these men do not harm the land.

“We thank the wind, the water, the island for all of her gifts as our ancestors sing their songs of praise and thanks. Koana Dunvegan, you are the daughter of your ancestors and will forever belong to this island. No matter where you go.”

Koana stared at her great-great uncle, unsure of what he meant by the last statement. No matter where she goes? Where the hell would she go?

The music and revelry went well into the night, but it didn't go without notice to Koana that the RP men and women seemed to constantly be on the alert, watching and waiting for something to happen. When darkness fell, Ethan took her hand and walked toward the house.

Nervously, he led her to their bedroom and shut the door. Without a word, they both undressed and slid between the sheets. The windows were open, the sounds of the party floating through the house along with gentle waves below the cliff.

“I'm not sure what will happen,” said Ethan. “I know that I was hard this morning when I woke, but I don't know if it will actually... work.” He shrugged and realized he was making it worse by talking about it.

“What do you say we just relax and hold one another. Tell me about your childhood, where you grew up, everything. I want to know why you went to work for RP.”

“All of that is easy,” he grinned.

He began talking, and Koana rolled into his side, lifting one leg and wrapping it over his own. As he spoke, her hands feathered up and down his chest. Occasionally, she would stop him for a kiss, and then he would continue. He barely noticed when her hand wrapped around his semi-hard cock, stroking him up and down.

“So, I had nowhere to go,” he said breathlessly, “nowhere... Fuck! That feels great!”

“It looks great,” she grinned, staring down at the thick cock in her hand. “You’re a beautiful man, Ethan.” Straddling his hips, she raised her body and lowered down onto him.

“Shit,” he growled.

“Holy hell,” she said through her teeth. “Jesus, you’re huge!”

“Baby, you fit me like a glove,” he moaned. “Damn! I’m so fucking hard I feel like I’m going to die.”

“Don’t die on our wedding night,” she huffed, rocking her hips against him. “If this is any indication of what it’s going to be like, I’m going to need you to be alive for a long, long time.”

Gripping her hips, he flipped her to her back, driving into her. He knew that this one was going to come hard and fast, so rubbing her clit with his thumb, he helped her along while he exploded inside her.

But Koana, it seemed, had an insatiable appetite with her new husband. Ethan had previously thought his dick might actually fall off for all the wrong reasons. Tonight, he was worried it would fall off for all the right reasons. Again and again, she made him cum, and his body responded, wanting more and more.

As they fell asleep, he stared out the window at the night sky, praying he could give her the one thing she desperately needed. A daughter.

CHAPTER NINE

Cam, Luke, Bogey, and Mo watched as Irish paced back and forth across the back of the property. His hands and face moved in animated expression as he spoke to someone on the phone. When Chase walked up, he frowned.

“He speaking to Lucinda?”

“He’s trying,” said Mo. “I think the good doctor is doing most of the talking. He really fucked it up, brother. Seems she had an ex-boyfriend that lied about everything. Not really a taste she wanted to savor again.”

“Well, Irish isn’t known for giving up,” said Chase. “He’ll figure it out, one way or another.”

“Morning,” said Ethan, walking toward the men.

They all turned in unison, in a sing-songy voice said, “Goo-ood morning, Ethan.” Ethan just laughed, shaking his head.

“You’re all such dicks,” he laughed.

“Question is, brother. Were you a dick with a dick last night?” asked Cam. “Like, were you a big, straight dick?”

“Yea, brother. I was.”

“Fucking happy to hear that,” said Luke, hugging him. “Seriously, Ethan. I couldn’t be happier for you as a man but also as that young woman’s husband. Seems like the surgery and the pond worked.”

“Well, it worked, at least from a function standpoint,” said Ethan. “We’ll pray that it worked well enough to let me get her pregnant. After last night, I don’t know how I’d feel about doing a donor or something like that. I’m fucking possessive as hell this morning.”

“Damn,” smiled Chase, “that’s a surefire sign that she’s yours. We’ve all been there. You can go all the way back to Nine and Erin. He was growling at his teammates while she was being rescued in a cave. Brother hadn’t even seen her in the light of day. Just like that.” He snapped his fingers, smiling. Ethan nodded, grinning at the others.

“Yea, who told Matthew and Irene about the wedding?” he asked.

“No one,” said Luke, shaking his head. “We haven’t spoken to them since we left. I don’t think anyone has.” Ethan laughed, shaking his head.

“Come on, you’re jacking with me,” he laughed.

“I swear, brother. We haven’t spoken to them. Why?”
asked Luke.

“I got a text from them immediately after the wedding congratulating me and telling me to bring my wife home where she belongs. Mama Irene even said, ‘that baby needs to be born here.’ What the fuck, dude? How in the hell would she have known anything? I mean, do we have cameras running on us twenty-four-seven?”

Luke could only laugh, the others all nodding and then shaking their heads. It wasn’t unlike Mama Irene to know more about their lives than they did.

“That woman scares the shit out of me,” muttered Ethan. “What’s the plan with the Marietta brothers?”

“Noa and Ani are working with their extended family to be sure that the land stays in the family no matter what. Even if Koana doesn’t have a daughter, we want to make sure that it cannot be taken over or controlled by the land board. There are a lot of options. They can change the family’s long-standing policy of girls only, or they could donate the land to the state.”

“What about the cave and the peridot?” asked Ethan.

“That’s another matter entirely. We have Lindsay, May, Thomas, and Mila down there now with Bron and Duncan. They’re going to take some samples of the soil and check the stability of the cave and surrounding area to determine what, if anything, can be done. It’s a helluva lot of money down there that might be able to help the extended family and ensure this land doesn’t get touched,” said Luke.

“We also want to be sure that the Mariettas don’t know anything about it. If Akua found it and spilled the beans, we might have a war on our hands. If they just want this land because it’s a convenient stopping point between the U.S. and Asia for them to transport their drugs, then that’s another matter entirely.”

“Nothin’ is easy,” said Ethan, shaking his head.

“Listen, just between us, but you need to know. I don’t think there’s any possibility of the Mariettas knowing this, but I was the one that killed their old man.”

“Shit,” muttered Mo.

“I went in by orders of the DOD to take him out because of some shit he was stirring up in South Africa. I always said I thought the sons were in on it. They were there

but left the old man on the patio of the villa completely unprotected. It was way too easy.”

“Well, ain’t that some fine shit,” muttered Luke.

“Tech boys are working on everything in the background they can find. We know all the surface shit that the feds have been trying to nail them on for years. But there’s something on this island, on this land, that’s of interest to them. If it was just about a halfway point, they would choose something more crowded. The port in Honolulu would be less obvious. Ships could come and go from there, and no one would take notice,” said Cam.

“Yea, but they want this land,” said Ethan. “It’s possible they found the cave, but they could have dug up half that cave without anyone noticing. There’s more to it.”

“Well, mysteries are what we do,” grinned Luke.

“Where is Koana?”

“Surfing with Ani and some of the cousins,” smirked Ethan. “She asked me to go with her, but I don’t really have a death wish with sharks.”

“Brother, they’re not all bad,” smiled Mo.

“Yea?” said Ethan, raising his brows. “I don’t see your big black ass out there, Mr. Seal.”

“Oh, shit no,” said Mo, shaking his head. “I’m a SEAL, not stupid. I don’t like to test mother nature. I’ve pissed off enough people in my day. I don’t want to piss her off too.”

The men all laughed, nodding as Ani, Koana, and a few cousins walked around from the front of the house. They were laughing and nodding their heads.

“How was it?” asked Ethan, kissing his new wife.

“Fantastic! The waves were perfect this morning, and Aunt Ani hasn’t lost a step. She was amazing,” smiled Koana. “Nikia and Poa hit some huge waves!” One of the big cousins laughed, shaking his head, then looked down at his leg.

“I think I hit some coral on that last one,” Poa said, wiping the blood.

“Why don’t you let one of the medics look at it?” said Ethan.

“No medics needed, bruh,” he grinned. “I’ll be fine. See you later, baby cousin.” The two men waved, walking

back down the road toward their own homes.

“How many people actually live on the land?” asked Ethan.

“All of us,” said Koana. “I mean, I have the main house here, but all of the aunts, uncles, and cousins live on our land. It was something Mom insisted on. She wanted everyone to belong to the land and knew they would help to keep out anyone who didn’t belong.”

“That was smart,” said Luke. “So, there are three dozen people on the property?”

“About that,” said Koana. “What are you thinking?”

“Did your mother or grandmother give them the land and the houses, or did she do a land transaction?” Koana stared at him, frowning. “What I’m asking is, do they have documents that say they own their piece of the land?”

“Oh, yes,” she said excitedly. “Grandma was the one that made sure of that. She wanted them to know that they owned part of this. The only stipulation was they couldn’t sell to anyone except family if they decided to leave. Which, of course, no one has ever done.”

“We did,” said Noa quietly. “Ani and I left. I don’t regret it at all. I followed my dreams and met Kelsey, but we left.” Koana smiled at her uncle, shaking her head.

“You don’t know, do you?”

“Don’t know what, Koana?” asked Ani.

“Grandma. She kept your homes for you. Untouched. They were not to be sold or leased to anyone. She always believed that one day you would come back with your families and spend time here. She knew you wouldn’t come back to stay, but she hoped you would come once a year and stay in touch with your roots.”

Ani laughed, shaking her head. That was so much like her mother, planning ahead for something that may or may not happen.

“Wait. So, we’ve been sleeping in tents when there are empty houses on this property?” asked Pigsty.

“I guess so, brother,” laughed Noa. Koana shrugged, blushing at the others.

“I just liked having you all right here,” she said. “It made me feel better. We can move your senior team members to the houses.”

“My back would appreciate that,” smirked Nine.

“I’ll have one of the cousins take you to them. They’re close, and you’ll be within walking distance.” In the distance, coming through the foliage and trees, they saw Thomas, May, Lindsay, and Mila walking toward them. Nine stared at the group, shaking his head.

“Why do I have the feeling we’re not going to like this?”

CHAPTER TEN

The team was crowded into the cave once again, staring at the shimmering green stones. Only this time, there were other things shimmering as well. The edge of a ruby shone in the daylight coming into the cave. In another spot, they could see the shimmering pieces of gold.

“What the hell is this?” asked Noa.

“I’m not sure,” said Mila, “but Lindsay and Thomas agree it’s not native to the island. I hope you don’t mind, Koana, but we removed one of the stones to examine it more closely. It wasn’t natural to this cave.”

“I don’t understand,” she frowned. “Did someone place it there?”

“No, we don’t think that’s it. The stones are stuck into the wall of the cave by calcification and pressure from the natural surf. Over time, it beat the stones into the wall, and they calcified in place. But they’re not native to the island.”

“I’m so confused,” said Koana. “Are you telling me that it doesn’t belong to my family?”

“Technically, it does. It’s on your land, and you found it, so yes, it’s yours. What I’m saying,” said Lindsay, “is it isn’t from this land. You see, there are certain mineral deposits made into every gem that help us to identify where it comes from. May, Thomas, and Mila all agree with me.”

“Then someone brought that here and hid it in the cave,” said Koana.

“That’s one possibility. The other is that it washed ashore, possibly centuries ago. We’re still working on all the samples around it, but we’ll find its origins. It’s just going to take some time.” Koana nodded, looking from her uncle to her aunt and back again.

“I know this is reaching,” said Noa, “but could the volcano have delivered it here during an eruption? Sort of an underground mine, if you will.”

“I’m not ruling that out,” said May, “but it would definitely be a stretch. Volcanic ash can contain high concentrations of sulfur. It’s mostly fragments of rocks, minerals, and volcanic glass. I suppose it’s possible that if a volcano here, or on another island, erupted, it could have spewed its contents this far.”

“That’s just incredible,” said Koana. “We’ve certainly endured our fair share of eruptions, hurricanes, cyclones, even snow on the tops of the mountains. It can all be very overwhelming when it happens within a one-year span.”

“One of the first things we learn as SEALs is that we can’t control the weather,” said Ethan. “I was in Iceland once during a volcanic eruption. I don’t plan to be near one ever again.” Koana gave a sad smile, nodding, and he realized his mistake.

“Well, ours have been quiet for some time now,” she said. She just stared at Ethan for a moment, awkward silence between them, then turned to speak with the scientists. “Is there any way to tell for sure if it was placed there by someone?”

“What do you mean?” asked Noa.

“Well, these islands were a favorite for white men traveling from the British Empire, America, Australia, all over. We are the only thing between those places. I’m just wondering if perhaps someone stashed it here and never recovered it.”

“It’s another possibility, but it’s going to take some time for us to figure this out,” said Thomas. “We’re going to

use the stealth and hologram technologies to block the cave entrance. That way, if anyone tries to come back, they'll just think they have the wrong spot.”

Koana knew they were talking about technology that she didn't understand, so she said nothing. If Ethan, her aunt, and uncle all thought it was the right thing, then she would follow their lead.

As the others began to make their way back up the steep, treacherous steps, Koana pulled on Ethan's hand, holding him back.

“Everything okay?” he asked.

“Ethan, what happens when all this is done? I mean, we're married, and if we have another night like last night, I'll be pregnant before the next full moon,” she quipped. “Those people are your family. I can tell you don't want to leave them.”

“You're right. They are my family. But they're your family too. It doesn't mean you give up all of this, but you could share locations. We could live here part of the time and live in Louisiana part of the time.”

“This is why I knew we would be a bad idea,” she said, shaking her head.

“Bad idea? Where is that coming from? We’re perfect together, Koana. I’m crazy about you, and I know you’re falling for me, too. This wasn’t just a marriage of convenience for me. I’m falling in love with you, baby. We can make this work.”

“I don’t think I can leave here, Ethan. Ever.” Ethan swallowed, staring at the young woman. Could he leave her? Could he walk away, knowing that she might be pregnant or that she would marry someone else?

“We’ll figure it out,” he said, holding her to his chest. “One way or another, we’ll figure this out.”

CHAPTER ELEVEN

Ethan watched from above the beach as Ani, Noa, and Koana walked the stretch of land. He wasn't sure what they were saying, but he knew they were talking about the cave and how they would protect the land.

“It's important to her,” said Trak, standing next to Ethan. He nodded, not bothering to look at the man beside him. They had an unspoken respect for one another. “My people felt the same about their land and were foolish enough to leave it for reservations, but not before thousands died. I admire Koana and the people here. They're not going to lose any more land than necessary.”

“I know, Trak, but I don't know if I can leave here, and I don't know if I can stay here. My family is all of you. I mean, obviously, it's her as well, but...”

“Family will always be there for you, Ethan. We won't leave you just because you're in another location. Any more than this land would leave her if she were in another location. I think she's been fighting so hard to keep this, she doesn't really know why she wants it any longer. Keeping land

because your parents or grandparents wanted it doesn't mean you have to do the same."

"Tell her that," smirked Ethan. Trak shook his head.

"I'm much wiser than that." Ethan laughed, nodding at the older man.

"You know, I always knew about the legendary Redhawk and his sons," said Ethan quietly. "When I decided I would try to qualify in all spec ops, everyone said I was crazy."

"You were," smirked Trak.

"Yea, I suppose I was, but I did it anyway. I needed to prove to myself and others that we have no limitations other than those we place in our minds. I guess that's what I'm struggling with here. A limitation."

"Instead of guessing, ask her why this land calls to her. Have her show you so that you understand. It will matter to you both and to your children."

Trak silently turned and walked back toward the house as Ethan stared at Ani hugging her niece, then Noa doing the same. The sun was setting, and something was glimmering on the water in the distance.

“Trak?” he called back to the man. “Something is out there.”

Trak walked back, standing next to Ethan, staring at the dark waters in the distance. Barely visible to the naked eye was a large pleasure boat, far enough away to not be identified but close enough that it was watching.

Ethan felt something hit the top of his head and looked up, hoping it wasn't a bird shitting on him. When it hit him again, he turned in a circle, then looked up into the tree.

“If you two would stop staring, we might be able to get a better photo,” said Hiro, sitting on a tree limb. Nathan and Joseph were seated beside him, staring at the object in the distance with binoculars.

“I think they've got this,” said Trak. He walked away as Noa, Ani, and Koana walked up the path from the beach, laughing as they crested the edge. Koana kissed Ethan's cheek and crossed the road to her home.

“It will all be okay, brother,” said Noa. Ethan nodded his head toward the water. “I know. I saw it too. Trust the process. You're not a lone wolf here. You've got a huge team behind you. We'll figure this shit out. Just give her time to come to grips with everything.”

“I’m not a very patient man, Noa.”

“Bullshit,” laughed Noa. “You were the man that sat in the brush in Africa for a week, staving off predators, only to kill one yourself. You were the man that endured sub-zero temperatures in Russia to ensure that we all would live another day.”

Ethan jerked his head at Noa, wondering how he knew all of that.

“There’s not much we don’t know, brother. Give her time, Ethan. Believe me, rushing a woman never works. Never.”

Ethan stared out at the water, watching as the sun set into her depths. He heard the three men behind him climb out of the tree and cross the road to the house. A few moments later, he turned and did the same. There was a new tent set up in the middle of the field. It was much larger and would serve as the meeting space and headquarters for everyone while they were here.

Everyone was bustling around, setting up for the evening meal. Men and women chipped in when it came to chores, and dinner was no exception. He smiled as Koana walked toward him, then kissed him sweetly.

“I’m sorry if I got upset earlier,” she said, hugging him.

“You had a right to get upset,” he said. “This land is important to you, and if it’s important to you, it’s important to me. We’ll find our answers, Koana. One way or another, and we’ll live as husband and wife and have our family.”

“Really?” she asked, looking up at him with hope.

“Really, baby.”

“I love you, Ethan. I thought it was crazy for me to feel this way, but Uncle Noa and Aunt Ani explained about your team. It’s unbelievable. I mean, seriously, all these stupid reality dating shows that have people married before they see one another or married in ninety days. You all have them beat and are doing it without fanfare. Just BAM! You’re in love.”

“Yea,” laughed Ethan, “I thought it was crazy too until I met you. Now, I know that it’s possible, and we’ll be a team. You and me. Did you have a good walk with your aunt and uncle?”

“I did. I just needed to ask them some questions about why they left and if they regretted it. I mean, I know I don’t

want the land sold, but I listened to all the stories over the campfire this past week. The places you've all been and what you've seen. I know some of it was during a war or conflict, but still. You were there. I've never been anywhere!"

"Do you want to go somewhere?" he smirked.

"Yes, I think I do. I want to see the world. I want to visit places I've only read about. Aunt Ani was right. I can leave here and know that the land is in good hands with the cousins. Nothing would happen to it. I don't have to be here to make sure that it's safe."

"I'm very happy to hear you say that," said Ethan, hugging her. "I know this place means everything to you, but I need my team. My family." She nodded, smiling up at him.

"It's hard to explain what the land means to me and my family. Cook was here in the late 1700s, but the first white men to settle here said they were here to spread Christianity. In a short period of time, that turned to becoming the 'Lords' of our land and using our people for labor. It only took one hundred years to push out our monarchy and destroy centuries of tradition.

"Our last monarch, Queen Lili'uokalani, was the first female ruler and our last monarch. We've fought to hold onto

our land for a long time. We've bled for it, much like Trak and Zeke's ancestors." Ethan nodded, remembering his conversation with Trak.

"There are plants here that cannot be found anywhere else in the world. The banyan tree is unique to our islands. We have sun, sand, snow, waterfalls, hurricanes, cyclones, rainforests, and more. We are paradise because we contain all the things the Garden of Eden had.

"Did you know that the Haleakalā silversword plant is so rare that it not only just grows in Hawaii, it also only grows in one spot in Hawaii. It can grow as tall as five-feet and live as long as ninety years, but it only blooms at the end of its life. Can you imagine?"

"No," he said softly, smiling down at her, "I can't imagine waiting ninety years to see its beauty."

"I know that there is beauty everywhere, but this is the beauty I grew up with. I want to make sure it's preserved for generations after me."

"Have you thought about getting a degree in horticulture? I mean, Lindsay, May, Mila, and Stormy all work to help preserve the land, watch the changes in weather patterns, the flow of the river and her currents, even the water

tables and types of things found in the water at Belle Fleur. Maybe you could follow that path and help others protect this land.”

“Maybe,” she said thoughtfully. “I never thought about it. We didn’t have the money for me to attend college, so I worked odd jobs around the island helping Mom.”

“You said Akua was telling lies about you, and that’s how you lost your job. What is he saying?” asked Ethan.

“He’s telling people that I’m the one planning to sell the land and that I’m already destroying it. What bothers me is that they believed him and not me. All they had to do was ask the cousins, aunts, or uncles. They know the truth, and they trust them.”

“We’ll figure this out, honey. For now, let’s enjoy a meal with our family. Tomorrow will be another day.”

CHAPTER TWELVE

“We need that land, Cosmo,” said Tony.

He watched as his brother landed another punch into Akua’s fat face. He was close to death, but neither really cared at this point. How one man could go through so much money in such a short span of time was beyond them.

“You’re not gonna get anything more out of him,” said Tony.

“I know. It just feels good. Prick took our dough and thought he’d get away with it.”

“How much was left?” asked Tony.

“About twenty grand. Lost almost ten at the racetrack. He’s a piece of shit and a piss-poor gambler,” smirked Cosmo, wiping the blood off his hands.

“We can’t touch the girl. Not now. I don’t want RP breathing down my fucking neck. We have to get that part of the island. It’s important to the business.”

“I know that,” nodded Cosmo. “What if we set fire to the trees and shit around the property? It would force them to leave, or we could set fire to the house.”

“We’d never get close enough,” said Tony. “Besides, this fucking place is so humid. There’s too much water and moisture to start a fire. We just have to find another way.”

The brothers sat in silence for a while, while Cosmo washed his hands and then poured them a glass of whiskey. They both took two long shots, then turned the glasses over. A soft knock on the door had them both standing with their weapons drawn.

“It’s us, boss,” said one of their men. The four men walked in and didn’t even bother to acknowledge the broken body of Akua.

“Anything?” asked Cosmo.

“Nothing. They’re swarming the fucking place, and it doesn’t look like they’re leaving anytime soon.”

“Shit,” muttered Tony. “Alright, take him out to sea and finish him. I’m tired of looking at his fat face. Make sure he’s not found.”

“Then what?” asked Cosmo.

“Then we find another way.”

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Koana tightened her lips around Ethan's cock, her tongue flicking across the top as he pumped into her, spilling himself all over her mouth and tongue. It was round three, and he was already feeling ready for round four. When she turned on all fours and wiggled her ass at him, he thought he might die right there.

Kissing up her spine, his fingers got her ready for the massive invasion he was about to bestow upon her. When she gasped, he smiled, realizing how fucking perfect this woman was for him. Adventurous, loving, flexible, beautiful, smart. She had it all.

"Fuck, you feel good," he moaned.

"More, Ethan, more!" she cried. Reaching between their bodies, she rubbed her clit as he slammed in and out of her. When she screamed as her body reached the plateau, he ground his hips into her ass, growling like a wounded animal. Plopping against the mattress, he was sweaty and panting.

"Fuck me, you really are going to make my dick fall off," he smiled.

“It wouldn’t matter,” she grinned, kissing his jaw as she cuddled into his side. “I’d love you anyway, Ethan. That beautiful tongue of yours could still make me happy.”

“Aww, baby, that’s why I love you. You’re willing to go beyond the mainstay and get very creative.”

“Ulani,” she whispered.

“What?” he frowned.

“Our daughter. Her name will be Ulani. It means happiness. She will only know happiness in her lifetime.”

“I like that,” smiled Ethan. “What if it’s a boy?”

“Kainalu. It means the surf. He will always be part of the water.”

“If he’s my son, he’ll most likely become a SEAL or something close,” grinned Ethan. They were both quiet for several long moments, then he shook his head. “A son or daughter. I never thought it was possible.”

“Well, as far as I know, I’m not pregnant yet. Odds are pretty good it will happen if we keep this up, though.”

“I hope you’re right, Koana,” he said, kissing her sweetly. “I can give you anything in the world, but I’m not certain I can give you this. I want to. I desperately want to.”

“It won’t change my love for you. Not now, not ever.”

They made slow, passionate love one more time before falling into an exhausted sleep. Ethan still had the nightmares, only they seemed less invasive, less painful somehow. He was able to watch them as a spectator, not experience them as a participant. It made him appreciate the women in the village all the more, and he wondered where they were and if they were well.

Waking to the sounds of thunder and rain brought him back to Belle Fleur. Outside the bedroom window, huge raindrops were hitting a large palm leaf. The sound was relaxing, and he closed his eyes, just listening for the longest moment.

He heard talking coming from the living room and rose to dress. When he opened the door, he stood still for a moment, hearing the faint sounds of Bull singing. He quietly moved down the hallway and recognized the song. It was actually the song Judy Garland made famous in the *Wizard of Oz*, “Somewhere Over the Rainbow.”

But Bull, sweet, massive, tough as shit Bull, was singing the version by the famous Hawaiian singer, Israel

Kamakawiwo'ole. The version was sung with a ukelele, the sweet melody feeling much like an island tune.

Ethan turned the corner and realized that the living, dining, and kitchen area was packed with the team members. With all the rain, they were seeking a place to stay dry. The front and back doors were open, people milling about. But it was Bull that had everyone's attention.

He was seated on the front porch, staring out at the ocean beyond, rain falling in buckets with a sliver of sunshine coming through the clouds. And sure enough, a massive rainbow spread through the sky. When he sang the last note, Ethan looked at Koana, tears streaming down her face. She hugged the big man, kissing his cheek.

“That was the most beautiful version I've ever heard,” she sniffed.

“Don't cry, honey,” smiled Bull. “I don't sing much anymore. Mostly just for my beautiful wife, but I sure love that version of the song.”

“It was beautiful, Bull,” said Ethan, walking into the room, bare-chested.

“Put some clothes on, dude,” said Zulu.

“Wait now, not so fast,” smirked Gabi. “I’m beginning to enjoy the ‘less is more’ attitude of the islands. I mean, if you guys get to wear shorts and no shirts, then we get to run around in tiny bikinis.”

“I’m all for that, but only for me,” grinned Zulu, kissing his wife.

“Everyone, take a seat,” said Luke. “The tech team has been doing their exceptional work, as usual, and have some information for us.”

“Thanks,” said Pigsty. “We looked into every possible reason the Marietta brothers would want to build a resort here, and none of it pans out. They haven’t contacted architects, construction firms, and they damn sure haven’t approached the city or state with any plans for the alleged hotel.”

“I don’t understand,” said Koana, shaking her head, “then what do they want?”

“I can’t be certain,” said Pigsty, “but were you aware that at least a dozen ships wrecked right off your beach out there?”

“Of course,” she said. “Everyone knows those stories. From Captain Cook to a hundred others who were coming

from South America, America, England, and headed to Australia or headed back. They all stopped or tried to stop at these islands. Some of them never made it.”

“Right, but some of those ships were heavily laden with gold, coins, pottery, and gemstones.”

“Wait, you think that’s where the peridot came from?” asked Koana.

“I don’t know,” said Pigsty. “Someone else would have to tell us that. What I’m saying is that this could be a reason why the Mariettas want this property. If they suspect that a ship was downed right out there and had gold and gemstones, they would need to get people away from the beach and this part of the island.

“Technically, any U.S. state owns the rights to ships found off their coastal waters. Hawaii is especially particular about this since they’ve been robbed so many times. That’s why they would need a clear coastal area.”

“Have you seen any of these wrecks, Koana?” asked Cam.

“Sure. I mean, there are a few that you can explore that everyone knows about. With shifting tides and storms,

sometimes wrecks are moved.”

“I can remember diving off the shore on the other side of the island to see a wreck out there. It was from the early twentieth century, but as a kid, it was cool,” said Noa. “But it was also against the law to touch or take anything from the wreckage.”

“No offense,” said Ethan, “but I don’t think the Marietta brothers give a fuck about the law. We need to know what’s out there.”

“Well,” grinned Noa, “I know a shit-ton of certified divers. Who’s up for a swim?”

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

“I think while you guys tap into your inner Jacques Cousteau explorer, I’m going to go into town to get some groceries and pick up a few supplies,” said Koana, walking toward her car swinging the keys around her finger.

“Whoa, whoa,” said Ethan. A dozen heads were shaking, and Koana stared at the men, waiting for an explanation. “Not alone, babe. You take a few of our men with you. We’re leaving a dozen or so here on the property with the cousins, and the rest will be diving.”

“Seriously? Ethan, I know my way around the town. I don’t need bodyguards.” Ethan started to speak, but Hazel stepped forward with a wink.

“It’s not a big deal,” said Hazel. “We’ll go with you. Me, Ani, Kate, Piper, Lucia, and Addie.”

“Come on, you can’t say no to that,” said Koana innocently, smiling at Ethan. “I mean, that’s seven women together.”

“No,” said Ethan, smiling as he shook his head, “no, I can’t say no to that. Be safe, and make sure you stay in touch with someone here.”

She kissed his cheek and led the women toward the big, rusted Wagoneer. The back top was cut off, and benches were placed in the bed in order to provide for more seating.

“It’s not luxury, ladies, but it will get us to where we’re going. Can you believe him? I mean, I don’t need a bodyguard.” She pulled out onto the road, and Hazel smiled at her.

“Well, it’s not really about a bodyguard,” she smirked, “it’s just about safety in numbers and that sort of thing. The Marietta brothers aren’t someone you want to fuck with. To be honest, Koana, we’re all former military or police.”

“Are you shitting me?” laughed Koana. “So, you guys are my bodyguards?”

“No, nothing like that. Let’s just say we’re here for extra security. We’ve all been trained in martial arts. We know how to use a weapon, and we tend to spot trouble faster than other people.”

“Well, I have to admit it’s kind of badass,” she smirked. “I wish I’d known some self-defense moves when Akua was coming at me. Man, he’d start drinking and look at me with such hate. I knew why, but it didn’t make it any

easier. I tried to stay out of his way, but sometimes he'd catch me off guard."

"I'm sorry you had to go through that," said Ani. "I wish you would have reached out to me or Noa sooner."

"I wanted to, but Grandma said I shouldn't bring my business to others. I think she was ashamed," said Koana, shrugging her shoulders.

"Oh, honey, I don't think she was ashamed. I think she was an old woman who'd lost almost all of her children. When your mother died, that was the last of us on the island. She knew that Noa and I wouldn't come home to live here, and maybe this was her way of keeping you here."

Koana thought about that as she slowed, driving into the small town. She parked outside the little market, and the women stepped out of the vehicle to stares from the locals. Some were stares of curiosity, but others seemed to be glaring at them.

"You know, I was accepted to the University of Hawaii, and she wouldn't let me go. She said that's what took Noa away. She'd say, 'that damned football took my boy off this island.' Then she would rant on and on about how he got all those NFL offers that would have helped the family, but he

made the decision to join the Navy and become a SEAL. I tried to talk to her, but she just wouldn't hear it. I wanted to go to college so badly, but she didn't want me to leave this island."

"Well, you can go now," said Ani. "It's never too late. I know Ethan would support your decision, but so would Noa and I. Anything you want to do, you can."

Koana smiled at her aunt as the women entered the tiny market. Behind the counter was one of the owners and a longtime friend of her grandmother's.

"Aloha, Mrs. Ikani," she smiled. The older woman looked up at Koana and frowned.

"So, it's true," she snapped.

"What's true?" asked Koana innocently.

"You're hanging with the haole and selling out. Your grandmother would be ashamed of you, Koana!"

"I'm not selling to anyone, Mrs. Ikani. This is my aunt, Ani, and these are my friends. They're staying with me to help settle some things with the property. The property that Akua Ogi was willing to sell to developers, and I stopped.

Me, Mrs. Ikani. So don't speak poorly of my friends, and don't speak of something you know nothing about.

"I love our land. I love our island. I will do whatever I can to preserve it and make sure men like Akua don't sell it."

"You're not calling him your father," she smirked.
"So, you finally found out."

"I knew a long time ago that Akua was not my father. My father is a kind, loving, honorable man and ex-Navy SEAL. He's not a drunk, jobless abuser. Do me a favor, Mrs. Ikani. Don't speak of things you know nothing about other than rumor. I've known you my entire life, and I've always been an honest person. I wouldn't lie to you or to the people who live as my neighbors.

"Now, if you don't mind, I need some groceries and supplies. We'll be out of your way soon."

The old woman stared at Koana but never said a word as she moved around the tiny market. The others helped to fill the small baskets, setting them on the counter. When they were done, she tallied up the total and then smirked at Koana.

"That will be six hundred and seven dollars."

"Six hundred," gasped Piper.

“What are you talking about? This isn’t six hundred dollars worth of food.”

“No, it’s not. But your grandmother had a tab here that hasn’t been paid.” She grinned at the young woman, knowing that she wouldn’t have that kind of money. She didn’t expect for Ani to step forward.

“Here,” she said, counting out seven one-hundred-dollar bills. “That should be enough to cover everything and leave some on her tab for next time.” The woman stared at the money, then back up at Ani.

“We’d like a receipt,” smiled Piper. “We wouldn’t want any confusion next time.” She wrote out the receipt with the credit on her account, and they left the little market.

“Well, she was a charmer,” smiled Lucia.

“She’s never treated me so poorly,” said Koana. “I’m sure it has to do with the lies that Akua was spreading, but it still hurts my feelings. These people know me and know what kind of person I am. I can’t believe they were believing his lies.”

“When people spread false truths, the ones hearing it have to make a decision,” said Piper. “There’s not a lot

happening around here. You're a small community, and I would guess that when something does happen, everyone knows about it. They're grasping at new news. Or they think they are. It will settle down and get better."

"Maybe," frowned Koana as they got back in the vehicle. "Or maybe this is a sign for me. Maybe it is time I leave the islands."

"Don't rush to any decisions, honey," said Kate. "We're with you all the way."

"Thanks, everyone," smiled Koana. "I'd say this calls for some Hawaiian ice cream. Best on the island, and I strongly recommend the pineapple-coconut flavor. Out of this world!"

"Girl, you had me at ice cream," laughed Lucia. "I'm in!"

Koana tried to remember the last time she had a true girl date. A few of the cousins would come into town now and then, but they mostly stayed to themselves. Shopping with the girls was like competing in an Olympic sport. They knew their way around a bargain and weren't afraid to ask for a deal.

The ice cream was a huge hit, and by the time they pulled into the driveway, the men were back from their first dive, already preparing the evening barbecue. Ethan smiled at Koana as she stepped from the vehicle laden with bags. He kissed her, then frowned.

“Is that ice cream I’m tasting?” he said with a serious expression.

“Yes,” she said innocently. “We all stopped for Hawaiian ice cream. Pineapple and coconut.”

“It was divine!” said Hazel.

“Seriously, babe. You got ice cream without me?” Ethan frowned at her.

“Don’t worry, you big baby, we brought back enough to feed the entire island. It’s in the cooler if you’ll just put it in the freezer,” laughed Koana.

“Did I hear ice cream?” said Noa.

“I heard ice cream,” said Zulu.

“Ice cream?” cried Noah.

“Good lord, they’re like two-hundred-pound children,” said Koana. She stepped out of the way and watched as they

took out the ice cream bars, standing on the side of the truck eating them one by one.

“Hey!” yelled Piper. “Those were supposed to last all week!”

“All week?” smirked Rory. “Babe, you know us better than that. We’ll send one of the boys into town tomorrow to get more. We’re gonna need a lot of this.” He kissed his wife, walking away with an ice cream bar in each hand. Koana just laughed, shaking her head.

“Children. They’re all children.”

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

“Did you find anything on the dive?” asked Koana.

“Well, we didn’t not find anything,” said Ethan, grinning. Koana frowned at him in confusion. “We found some shards of pottery, some old wooden planks that could have been from a ship, and a few other things. There’s no way to tell whether or not it has anything to do with our cave, but it’s worth exploring further.”

Poa came walking up to the group, limping. His leg was wrapped, but it was the sweat rolling off his face and the anguish that had Koana worried.

“Poa! Are you alright?” she said, running toward him.

“Not sure,” he said, shaking his head. “I don’t think I cut this on coral. It’s killing me, and I think it’s infected.”

“Sit down,” said Cruz, pushing him into a chair.

“Kelsey! Doc! Lena! I’m gonna need all of you. When was your last tetanus?”

“My last what?” he frowned.

“Tetanus shot,” said Cruz. “When was your last tetanus shot?”

“I-I don’t know. It’s really hurting,” he said. Cruz cut away the bandage and saw the oozing wound filled with puss of green and yellow.

“Shit,” he muttered. “This is seriously infected. Are you having any trouble eating or drinking? Turning your head?”

“Yea,” he said. “I can’t seem to open my mouth very wide, and I have a terrible headache.”

“Brother, you should have come and seen me sooner,” said Cruz.

The big islander stared at the other man. They weren’t so different. They both fought for a land they believed in. They were willing to sacrifice anything for family. Lena looked at the wound and then at the man, frowning.

“Unbelievable,” she muttered. “How long were you going to let this go?”

“Hey, I...”

“Never mind, that was rhetorical,” she frowned.

While she and Cruz cleaned and debrided the wound, Kelsey drew up a stiff shot of penicillin, and Doc drew some bloodwork. As Cruz slid the scalpel across the wound, the

drainage was excessive. It seemed never-ending. Once they felt certain it was cleared, they cleaned it again, leaving it open to continue to drain into the gauze. Doc came back and nodded.

“Positive for clostridium tetani.”

“What the hell does that mean?” asked Poa.

“It means you have a tetanus infection from a bacteria called clostridium tetani. If you’d let this go any longer, you would have died,” said Lena.

“I don’t understand,” said Poa. “I surf those waves in that exact spot all the time. I’ve never hit anything before. Never.”

Ethan stared at Luke and Cam, then back at his wife’s cousin.

“Poa, how far out were you?” asked Ethan.

“At least two hundred yards. I was directly in front of the banyan tree. I remember looking up at it and thinking I saw Liani standing beneath the tree. I took it as a sign that she was watching over me, but maybe she was pissed about me eating the last of her cake before she died.”

“I think we need to investigate that area,” said Ethan.

“I agree,” said Luke. “We’ll try to go out there again tomorrow.”

“No,” said Poa. “We’re expecting a big storm. Waves will be killer for surfing if you’re a fool. But you won’t survive out there in a boat. Give it a day or two, and then I’ll take you back out.”

“You’ll do no such thing!” yelled Lena. “You’re going to keep your leg still and clean, and you’re going to get well. Don’t test me, young man.”

“Wow, that’s kind of hot,” smirked Poa. A big dark shadow crossed over his body, and he looked up to see a mountain of man-sized beef.

“She’s my wife. Slow your roll, junior.”

“No problem, bruh,” he grinned. “Just an observation.”

“Poa? While they finish with the leg, you said you’d never seen anything in that area before. Never a shipwreck or remnants of a shipwreck?”

“Never. I’ve been surfing since I was a boy, and I’m thirty-three now. I can promise you nothing was in that spot a few weeks ago.”

“Maybe the tides or storms pushed something in,” said Koana.

“I don’t know,” said Poa, wincing as Lena pressed on the dressing. “That hurts!”

“It’s supposed to,” she yelled back. He grinned at her and gave a wink, then promptly received a slap to the back of his head.

“Sorry,” he smiled up at Tailor. “As I was saying, I think if that were the case, lots of wrecks would have been swept into the cove. It could have been buried beneath the sand. Maybe the tides and storms moved enough of the sand that it was exposed. On the other hand, it could just be junk. A piece of metal or something that was tossed from a freighter.”

“Well, we won’t know until we get down there,” said Ethan. He no sooner said the words than lightning flashed across the sky, and the winds picked up. “Let’s get you inside. You can stay with us until you’re able to move better.”

“Thanks, Ethan. You’re okay for a haole,” he smiled. “Sorry to be so much trouble and ruin your honeymoon.”

“You’re not ruining anything,” said Koana. “We’ll have our whole life to honeymoon if we want.”

“Does that mean you won’t sell?” asked Poa.

“How could you think that?” asked Koana, shocked by her cousin’s question. “You know me as well as anyone. I would never sell this land. Never.” He nodded, grinning at her.

“I thought so, but Akua was telling everyone that the deal was as good as done. Grandma, she wanted us to all stay here, and for me, there’s nothing else like it. I give surf lessons to the tourists, take them on hikes to see the sights, and I make enough for my family to live. That’s all I need.”

Koana smiled at her cousin, realizing how much he loved the land as well. They’d been much closer as children but had drifted apart after his marriage and divorce. Now the father of two children that he shared custody of, his ex-wife lived on the other side of the island with her new husband.

“You’re raising your boys right,” said Koana. “They love the land like you do.”

“They do,” he smiled, nodding at his cousin. “Damn, is that supposed to be throbbing as much as it is?”

“You’re lucky I didn’t chop it off,” said Lena.

“She’s joking,” said Cruz, looking up at the man, then back at Lena. “You’re joking. Right?” Lena said nothing, finished the wrapping, then ordered Tailor to help the man into the house.

“Stay off the leg,” she growled. Poa looked up at Tailor, shaking his head.

“Brother, she’s something else. You’re an interesting pair. But she’s bossy, a little mean, hot, and smart as shit. You’re a lucky man. Are you sure she’s not Hawaiian?” Tailor smirked at the man, shaking his head.

“Worse. Navajo.”

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The storms kept everyone inside the house or in the big tent for three days. But it did give them an opportunity to do a lot of digging on the Mariettas and possible wrecks in the area.

“Did you find anything?” asked Ethan, looking up from the computer. He rubbed his eyes and then opened them to look at Pigsty, Code, and Hiro. Others gathered around, listening to the information.

“Get ready for a history lesson,” smirked Code.

“There have been a number of whaling ships that sank off the various islands. The *Balaena*, *Equator*, *Young Hero*, *Jefferson*, *Dymo*, and *Paulina* are just a few. Then, of course, we have the obvious wrecks in Pearl Harbor, which would be unlikely to make their way here.

“The steamship *SS Maui* was lost in the mid-1800s, as well the *Carthaginian II*, a replica whaling ship. There are so many private yachts and boats I can’t even count them, but they seem unlikely suspects for what cut Poa’s leg.

“There are two, however, that really stand out. One is a World War II submarine, *USS Patriot*. She was carrying precious cargo, according to the manifest, from Hawaii to the

south Pacific troops. Part of the cargo was listed as trade with the islanders for information and service against the Japanese, but it doesn't say what that cargo could be."

"Well, it seems unlikely that they would trade gemstones and gold to south Pacific islanders," said Nine. "It would have been something like weapons, most likely."

"True," said Code, "which is why I continued to search for other possibilities. I think this might be our ship. In 1778, a vessel known as the *Crown Jewel* was traveling from London to the Caribbean and then to southern parts of South America, Hawaii, and Australia. She was carrying convicts to live in Australia, but she was also carrying coin for the British troops in Australia. It had only been about forty years since white men had landed in Hawaii and Australia, but they knew it was their only way to gather supplies and make the trip.

"According to historical records, she pulled into Buenos Aires with more than half her convicts dead. Unable to fulfill the needs of the penal colony, she took on board fifty convicts from South America. Apparently, the captain paid for the convicts with gemstones of ruby, peridot, emerald, and pearl. But it was also noted that they'd never seen anything

like her before. An Argentinian fishing captain said, ‘the hull of her was covered in iron.’”

“Code, what happened when she got to Hawaii?” asked Nine with frustration.

“That’s what I’m getting to. She never arrived in Hawaii. There was a massive storm, and she was lost at sea, all of her passengers and crew assumed dead. The British government insisted that she’d been taken by pirates in South America because her cargo was so valuable, but no one was ever able to find any truth to it.”

“Then, why do you think it could be our ship?” asked Ethan.

“Well, the weather records weren’t wonderful at that time, but according to Stormy, given the way the currents and tides were in those weeks, it would logically be a place near the Hawaiian islands.” Code opened up several maps of the area, spreading them on the table. “I know this is a bit old-fashioned, but it’s the best way to show what we mean.”

“Currents would come from here and here,” said Stormy. “Given that they left Argentina in late May, they would have arrived here roughly around late June. Perfect storm season. If they were approaching the islands from this

point, they would have crashed off the southern coast. If they were approaching from this point, it would have crashed right there in the cove. My guess is they would have seen the shore and thought they could make it but didn't."

There was complete silence as everyone took in the information, staring at the charts and maps.

"But if the *Crown Jewel* crashed out in the cove," said Koana, "what metal would have cut Poa's leg? Weren't ships made of wood back then?"

"They were, for the most part," said Code. "Although, she would have had canons and other metal on board, so it could be anything. But remember, the fishing captain said her hull was made of iron. I doubt it was iron, but it was obviously a metal of some sort."

"We won't know until we get down there and find it," said Ethan. "I say once the weather is clear, we do dive teams of four in quadrants around the area where Poa was cut. No more than an hour below the surface, then back up, and we switch teams."

"I agree," said Luke. "We need to send a team into town and fill the tanks, get whatever gear we need. Poa? Do you have some additional boats we can use?"

“Sure,” he nodded. “I’ll call the cousins and get everyone ready for the morning. Weather should be calmed down by then.”

“Stormy? If the ship sank out there and her cargo fell overboard or set loose, would the tides and waves have brought it ashore?” asked Ethan.

“No doubt about it,” she said, nodding. “The cove sort of acts like a drain, pulling in debris from whatever is out there. I’m going to bet that you’ve found all kinds of treasures on the beaches around here.”

“Absolutely,” smiled Poa. “We’ve found lost luggage, boxes of canned goods, fruit, and other items. It happens all the time, especially after a storm.”

“Okay,” nodded Luke, “Noa, Trevor, O’Hara, Mo, Rory, and Alec. Go into town with Nikia. He’s on his way here now and will know where to find everything we need. The rest of us need to keep working the Marietta angle. If they didn’t know about the cave, then they obviously want this cove as their drop-off point for merchandise.”

“How far is the airport from here?” asked Ethan.

“About twenty miles to the east,” said Koana. “It’s very small, as you saw. Your jets were probably the biggest planes that have landed there in decades. We usually just get small planes hopping from island to island.”

“Okay,” nodded Cam. “We’ve got our plan. Now let’s figure this out.”

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

Noa drove the big truck into town, passing all the familiar places he remembered from his childhood. His elementary school where he first learned to play football. The high school where he won award after award, then left for Honolulu. The homes were still small and seemed unkept, but Noa knew differently.

Islanders weren't wrapped up in keeping up with the Joneses. They were happy living an easy, uncomplicated life. The warm sun, the soft surf, and food on the table for their families is all anyone asks for. Not riches. Not fame. They just wanted their island life and for others to leave them alone.

Parking the truck, the men stepped out as the shocks creaked from the release of weight. People were sitting at outdoor restaurants and at tables set around food trucks, enjoying their lunch and a break from the storms that seemed to have passed over them.

"I'm hungry," said Alec.

"You're always hungry," said Noa.

"I know," frowned Alec. "I try to fill up, but it never seems enough. What's that?"

“Poke,” smirked Noa. “It’s basically sushi without the roll. But it’s delicious. Looks like they still serve pineapple floats, poi, and lau lau. Oh, man! They’ve got lomi lomi salmon and kalua pua’a.”

“Brother, I don’t give a damn what it’s called. It smells delicious,” said Alec. He stepped up to the window of the truck and nodded at the man. “I’ll have one of everything he said.”

“Hey! What about us?” yelled O’Hara.

“Okay, I’ll have seven of everything.” Nikia laughed, shaking his head as the cook’s eyes grew wide. This would make his day and probably allow him to leave early and spend the evening with his family.

Twenty minutes later, he brought out tray after tray of the food listed on his truck. There were loud groans and moans of satisfaction, Noa and Nikia laughing at the men as they enjoyed the unusual fare.

“You know, we do have work to do while we’re in town,” said Noa. “If we don’t get back soon, they’re going to send a party to find us.”

“Just a few more bites,” said Alec. He ate the last pieces of the pineapple, wiping his mouth as he did, then looked up to see two familiar faces coming from a small inn.

“I think our friends are still hanging around,” said O’Hara. They stopped on the sidewalk as another man came out of the inn, standing to speak with them. “Who is that?” Nikia looked to where he was nodding.

“Brother, that is trouble,” he frowned. “That is Percy Black. He was responsible for nearly killing the entire population of sea turtles off the coast of the Big Island. He started a business of doing tours through the harbors in these passenger submarines. The problem was none of them were to code. He bribed someone with the state and got them approved, but they were leaking oil and gas into the bay, killing fish and turtles at an alarming rate.”

“How is he still walking around?” asked Noa.

“Like I said, he knows people,” said Nikia.

“Personally, I’d like to get him alone and beat the shit out of him.”

“You might get your chance,” said Noa. “Get the tanks and the other scuba gear we need. Alec? Rory? Come with

me. I think we need to have a conversation with the Mariettas.”

“Finally,” smirked Rory, “I’m going to get to hit someone.”

“Let’s try to play nice,” said Noa.

The three men walked slowly down the sidewalk while the others ducked into the scuba shop. Nikia ordered everything they would need and then made sure they had enough for all of the men, loading it into the truck.

“Well, if it isn’t our friends from RP,” smirked Cosmo. “Still on the island protecting the little girl?”

“My niece is married and expecting soon enough,” smiled Noa. He noticed the smile leave the man’s ruddy face, and he took great satisfaction in being responsible for that.

“We want that land, and we’re willing to pay for it,” said Tony. “I’m not sure why it matters. We only want the cove and the house. That’s it. We know there’s more land, but we’re willing to let her have that.”

“Why just the cove and house?” asked Noa. “Planning on entertaining some friends? Or maybe you just need to make sure that your drop-off point is clear.”

“You do have an active imagination,” smiled Cosmo. “We’re businessmen. That’s all. We want an island getaway for friends to enjoy now and then.”

“Find one on another island,” said Alec, suddenly standing behind the men. Both jumped a little but tried to cover it, staring up at the giant.

“You assholes act like you’re the only people on the planet with big, strong men working for you. My boys would slaughter you.”

“We’ll test that one day,” said Rory. “But I wonder, would they really come running if we just killed the two of you and left your bodies for the sharks. You’re included in that invitation, Mr. Black.” His eyes grew wide, and he shook his head, trying to take another step off the sidewalk.

“You fucking stay where you are,” said Cosmo. “Listen, we want no trouble with RP. We just want the land that was promised to us.”

“It was promised by my brother-in-law, who seems to be missing, by the way. He had no right to make such a promise or take money for it. It didn’t belong to him. In fact, sad to have to tell you this, but Akua is not Koana’s father.

Even if he were around, which he is not, he would not have legal rights to the land.”

The Marietta brothers stared at Noa, then looked at Black, who only shrugged his shoulders.

“Find another piece of land. You won’t win this,” said Rory.

“People have been saying that to us for years,” smirked Cosmo. “Yet here we stand. Winners. As we said before, you can’t protect the girl forever. We’ll find a way to take that land.”

“Good luck,” smirked Alec.

“See you around, Sasquatch,” said Tony. Alec reached for the collar of his jacket, but Noa held his arm, shaking his head.

“Not here,” he whispered. “Too many witnesses. However, we do know where they’re staying. Maybe a little recon on the room is a good idea.”

“How will we do that?” asked Alec. “There’s probably only ten rooms in the whole place.”

“Seven,” said Noa. “There are seven, and if I’m right, Kailea, my eighth-grade crush, still runs this place with her

parents. Let's find out." The three men walked into the inn and stood at the weathered wooden reception desk. Alec rang the bell, then smirked at the others, tapping it rapidly.

"I heard you!" yelled a female voice. A heavy-set woman walked out wearing a stained floral dress. "What do you need?"

"Kailea?" asked Noa. She stared up at the big man, then shook her head.

"Noa Lim. The prodigal son has returned. How nice of you."

"It's good to see you, Kailea." He tried to remain friendly and calm, despite her venomous tone.

"Is it, Noa? You chased me around from seventh grade to ninth grade, and when I finally decided to let you catch me, you turned me away." Noa cleared his throat, nodding.

"You wanted me to catch you because you smelled a way off this island when I received my football scholarship."

She was silent for a long moment, just staring at the big man. She looked at his friends, her eyes moving up and down their bodies, then back at Noa.

"What do you need?"

“Those two men that just left here, the Mariettas, are they staying here?”

“No one by that name staying here,” she said, shaking her head. “Mr. Black is staying here, but the other two just come in every morning for breakfast or lunch with him. I think they rented a private house on the cliffs on the north side of the island. Some big fancy place. This isn’t to their liking.”

“Listen, Kailea, I’m trying to stop those men from stealing my family’s land. They’ve threatened Koana, and my friends and I are here to protect her. Have you heard anything? Anything at all that might help us?”

She stared down at the registry book, then looked back up at the three handsome faces. Noa Lim. He was as beautiful as the day he left the island. Without her. She’d offered everything to him, including her body, if he would just take her with him. But he refused.

“No. I haven’t heard anything,” she said decidedly. Noa didn’t believe her, but he nodded, turning to leave the inn. Kailea watched as they moved toward the door. “Wait. I might have overheard them saying something about a ship that needed to anchor soon, or they’d lose her cargo.”

“Did you hear where?” asked Noa.

“The cove.”

CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

As the team told Luke and the others about what they'd heard, the tech boys began searching the seas for a ship that wasn't planning on docking in a legitimate port. Needless to say, it was a long process. There were hundreds of ships in the Pacific working their way toward Hawaii and other points.

“There are one hundred and seven ships with food as their cargo. Another ninety-one have vehicles or vehicle parts. Forty-four have oil. Forty have electronic components or parts. There are six that the cargo is listed as unidentifiable.”

“What the fuck does that mean, Hiro?” asked Cam.

“It means they don't want anyone to know about it,” smirked Hiro. Cam saw no humor in his statement, staring at the man with his arms folded across his chest. “Sorry.” He looked back at his screen and frowned, then turned to Code, pointing at something.

“What's wrong?” asked Ethan.

“Nothing wrong,” said Code, “but one of these ships left Houston fully loaded with a shipment from Cornwall Industries.”

“That’s the number one manufacturer of weapons in the U.S.,” said Luke, frowning. “Where the fuck is that ship?”

“I’m looking,” said Hiro. He frantically tapped on the keys, then looked up at the other men. “It’s about two hundred nautical miles from here. Headed straight toward the islands.”

“That cannot be a coincidence,” said Luke. “We need to find out what is on that ship and why the Mariettas would want it.”

“I’ll call Bodwick,” said Nine. He walked away from the group while the others just stared at the screens and data.

“I can’t believe all this trouble,” said Koana. “All because of weapons on a ship or stones in a cave. We don’t even know which yet.”

“Men have died and fought for less,” said Ethan, rubbing her arm. “We just need to figure out if we can stop it and save the land while also stopping the Mariettas.”

“Is this what you do all the time? I mean, not exactly, but is this your job?”

“Pretty much,” nodded Ethan. “We help those that can’t help themselves. We fight for the underdog, for what is right and just. Sometimes, that can be dangerous. But we’re

all equipped with skills that the average man doesn't have.”

She nodded.

“If I were to get pregnant, would you still do that job?” All eyes turned toward Ethan, waiting to hear his response.

“I think I would, honey. This is who I am and what I do. I trained for a lot of years to be able to work with elite sailors, soldiers, marines, and airmen in an environment where we call the shots. It's important to me and to our team. I don't want to give it up.”

“I would never ask you to give it up,” she said. “What would I do? How would we manage this? Would you fly back and forth?”

“No clue, babe. I really don't have any idea how we would make this work, but I know I want to try. We'll talk about what works for both of us and then we'll find a compromise in the middle. I know how important this place is to you because I feel the same about working with RP.”

“R-36 ICBMs,” said Nine, walking back to the group. Men groaned, shaking their heads and staring at him.

“What does that mean?” asked Koana.

“They’re Russian missiles with enough warheads in them to start a nuclear holocaust. We stole them from the Russians and had them hidden in our weapons factory in Texas. That ship was scheduled to head up the East Coast and meet a team for disposal. Bodwick said that no one notified him that the ship had been taken. My guess is the Mariettas offered to steal them and give them back to the Russians for a few favors.”

“We can’t let that happen,” said Koana. “We have to stop that ship.” The men all smirked at her.

“That’s our plan, honey,” said Ethan, kissing her cheek. “Do we have any drones in the area?” He turned to look at Hiro.

“Yes, we have one in Honolulu,” said Hiro. “I’m going to get it in the air now and get eyes on that ship. Luke? Cam? We need to be prepared. If that ship has been taken over by Mariettas’ men, they could unleash one of those weapons on the island.”

“Yea, I know,” said Luke, nodding at the other man. “But not if we get to her first. We dive as planned in the cove. Poa? Does anyone have a boat that’s big enough and quiet enough for us to get out to that ship as it gets closer?”

“Maybe,” he said, frowning. “That’s a long way out, and if the seas are rough, it could be a disaster. What if we waited until it was about twenty or thirty miles out.”

“That’s awfully close, but it may be our only hope,” said Luke.

“Why aren’t we just notifying Pearl Harbor?” asked Koana.

“The President asked that we handle this, but he’s putting the base on notice,” said Nine. “If the ship saw the Navy coming at them, it could be catastrophic. They’re going to hold back while we figure out what’s happening. If we need them, we just call, and they’ll come. But we might ask about borrowing a sub.”

“What do I do?” she asked.

“Nothing,” said Ethan. “I won’t risk your life in this. Stay back, and we’ll find a way to stop this.”

“Ethan, I’m used to doing things on my own, not having a man save the day for me. Please don’t treat me like I’m made of porcelain.”

“I’d never dream of it,” he smiled, kissing her. “You’ll have a part in this, I assure you.”

When the truck pulled up with the scuba gear and the men from town, Noa gathered everyone around to tell them what he'd found out at the inn.

“We need to send a few men up to that house,” said Luke.

“Oh! Oh! Please pick me! Please pick me!” said Hiro, raising his hand in the air. Luke shook his head, smirking at the man.

“Fine. Hiro, Nathan, Joseph, Hawk, Eagle, and Griff. After dark, make your way.”

“I'll come with you,” said Nikia. “I know my way around the island and can get you there without anyone knowing about it.” Hiro nodded.

“After dark.”



The island seemed eerily quiet at the late hour. There were only a few lights shining in the homes, most completely dark. Nikia parked the truck at the bottom of the beachhead, then pointed to a trail up the side of the cliff.

Slowly, they made their way, stopping to ensure there were no cameras or sensors along the way. Hiro tapped Nikia's shoulder, then turned to the others, pointing out to sea. There were two luxury yachts moored off the coast in a most unlikely place.

Lifting his long-distance night vision goggles, he scanned the decks and saw what he knew he would find. The Mariettas were enjoying a party with a few friends and a few strippers.

“Move it,” said Hawk. “Let's get this done before they come back.”

Moving twice as fast, they crested the ridge to see two guards walking the back lawn of the mansion. Eagle aimed his weapon, lining up his sights in the direction of the two men. With his silencer engaged, he brought both men down as Hawk ran toward the bodies, pulling them to the cliff's edge. He rolled each one into the water, watching them sink to the bottom of the ocean.

Circling the lawn, they saw no additional guards.

“Get everything off the computers,” said Joseph to Hiro. “We'll look for any other evidence. You two make sure our path is clear on the way out. Nikia? Stay close to Eagle or

Hawk. Griff, keep an eye on those boats.” The other men nodded.

The patio doors were wide open, allowing the warm pacific breezes to flow through the home. Hiro found three laptops, all sitting on a large dining table. Quickly, he placed a drive in each and then went to work to download their contents.

Joseph and Nathan searched the bedrooms for any scrap of evidence that might give them the information they needed. Nikia tapped Eagle’s shoulder, pointing into the water. Three small boats were leaving the large yachts.

“Time’s up,” he whispered.

Nathan nodded, tapping Joseph’s shoulder. In the living room, Hiro was on the last download, waiting for the large file to finish loading.

“Let’s go,” growled Eagle.

“I’m trying,” said Hiro. “You can’t make this shit move any faster, you know.”

Just as he pulled out the slip drives, the boats docked at the beach, partygoers laughing as they jumped into the sand. They walked toward a long staircase that led up to the mansion

while the RP men took the same trail down, hiding in the darkness.

Back at the beachhead, they loaded into the truck and drove back to the other side of the island and home.

“Did you guys get anything?” asked Hiro.

“Yea,” said Joseph. “Two satellite phones and the last calls were to a number in Russia.”

Eagle and Hawk stared at the other set of twins, and in perfect harmony, the whole truck said what they were thinking.

“Fuck.”

CHAPTER NINETEEN

“What do you mean I’m meeting with the Mariettas to discuss a potential sale?” screeched Koana at breakfast. Noa stared at his niece and moved to sit next to her.

“Koana, listen to me. There will be no sale. We need the Mariettas distracted while we try to get out to that ship. If they’re here with you, we’re going to have fewer distractions to get on that ship. The Navy is going to take our team out to the ship in a submarine that will be fitted with our stealth technology.

“Ani and a few others are going to stay with you, as well as a few of the men. The cousins are helping as well. After all, it’s a family affair. We’re going to put on a true Hawaiian feast. I know it will be difficult, Koana, but I need for you to think of all the questions you would ask any potential investor about why they want to purchase the land.”

“Uncle Noa,” she whispered, shaking her head. “I’m not sure I can do this. I despise those men and what they’re planning.”

“Look at it this way,” said Ani, “this is you being evasive with someone like Akua who only wants to harm the

land. You're playing a game and forcing them to sweat a little. Don't say yes or no. Just ask lots of questions. Take notes, like you're really into it."

"We need for you to keep them here for at least two hours," said Ethan.

"Wait, where will you be?" asked Koana.

"I'm going to be on that ship, honey. We have to get those warheads back in our government's hands. Once we have the ship, the Navy will take it from there. We'll disable all of her tracking software and navigational equipment and replace it with something of our own," said Ethan.

"What if I screw this up?" she asked nervously.

"You won't," smiled Noa. "This is too important to you and to our family. I know you, and I know that you'll be able to pull this off. I know because you're my sister's daughter and the wife and daughter of two of my teammates. You're going to do amazing." Koana smiled up at her uncle, then looked at her father beaming with pride and admiration, something she'd not seen from a father-figure before.

"Okay, tell me what to do."

Koana couldn't believe the detail of the plan and how she would contribute to this mission. If she showed any signs of nervousness or looked in the wrong direction at the wrong time, this could all be over with before it started.

"It's ringing," she said.

"Marietta."

"Mr. Marietta, this is Koana Dunvegan."

"Well, well, hello, Mrs. Dunvegan. What can I do for you?"

"Actually, Mr. Marietta, I believe it's what I can do for you. You see, since I've recently married, and my husband's employer is located stateside, I'm reconsidering the idea of selling the land. I have a lot of questions and a lot of conditions, but I'm willing to discuss it."

"I'm impressed, Mrs. Dunvegan. I was beginning to wonder about your intelligence, but this clearly shows you're much smarter than Akua."

"As I've said, I'm not related to Akua," she ground out. "My entire family will be having a traditional Hawaiian barbecue. Unfortunately, my husband cannot attend due to

work, but my aunt will be here, along with my cousins. I can't promise anything, Mr. Marietta. But I will listen."

"Well, that's more than we had a few days ago. What time should we be there?" he asked.

"Please be here at seven."

"Seven could present a problem," he said. Nine and Ethan rolled their fingers, indicating they wanted her to keep him on the line.

"I'm afraid that's the best time for us, Mr. Marietta. If I'm your only business on the island, I'm struggling to see why this presents a challenge." Ethan grinned at her, giving her two thumbs up.

"You are a feisty thing, aren't you?" said Marietta.

"Alright, Mrs. Dunvegan, seven it is."

She ended the call, her hands shaking as she set the phone down. Koana looked at her aunt and uncle, then at Ethan and Nine.

"I don't like that man," she whispered.

"I know, honey," said Ethan, hugging her. "There will be plenty of men here with you. We're leaving Nathan and Joseph, as well as Eagle and Hawk. They'll be visible and

moving around the property, but what they won't see are a dozen men hidden."

"Okay," she nodded. Looking at the back of the property near the trail down to the steps for the cave, Koana spotted Julia pacing back and forth. "Is she okay?"

"Oh, yea, she's fine," smiled Ani.

"I don't think she's fine. She's talking to herself."

"Julia is an incredible individual with an amazing gift," said Ethan. "She can speak to ghosts when they allow her to do so."

"Is that a joke?" frowned Koana.

"It's not, I assure you. You don't seem surprised," said Ethan.

"The Hawaiians believe in aumakua, ghosts who didn't move into Po, the land of King Milu. It's sort of like heaven for Hawaiians. We believe those ghosts remain in the land of the living, guarding their former families. If she's speaking with one of my, one of our ancestors, maybe they know something about the cave."

"I'd forgotten about that," said Ani, walking toward Julia at the back of the property. She gently touched her

shoulder, and Julia turned, her face pale. There was a fine sheen of sweat, and she looked frightened by something.

“Get Joseph,” said Noa to Koana. His niece ran toward the large tent, searching for the right twin. When he emerged, he took off toward his wife.

“Julia? Julia, baby, what’s wrong?” he asked, hugging his wife. She was shaking, her face pale with perspiration beading across her cheeks and forehead.

“She was walking back and forth, talking to herself. When I touched her, she looked confused,” said Ani.

“Julia, what’s wrong, honey?” he asked again.

“So much pain,” she whispered. “So much pain and death.”

“Baby, are you in pain?” asked Joseph. She shook her head.

Noah walked toward them, as others began to gather around them. Julia reached for Noah’s hand, something they often did when attempting to comfort spirits. Julia felt and heard far more than Noah, but together they were able to reduce the noise for one another. As big as he was, Noah was like a rock in the black void of the spirits.

“There are dozens coming at her,” said Noah, shaking his head. “We mean you no harm. We’re helping Koana and her family save this land.”

“They’re in pain,” said Julia. “They’re all in pain.” Noah shook his head, squeezing Julia’s hand as her husband held her.

“We will help you,” said Noah. “Please, stop yelling at her. It’s too much. STOP!” Julia let out a long slow breath, nearly collapsing in Joseph’s arms.

“Is she alright? Will she be okay?”

“I’m okay,” she whispered, “I’m okay. There were just so many, and they were in so much pain. They all came at me at once.”

“Who were they?” asked Koana.

“Your family. All of yours,” she said, pointing to Ani, Noa, and Koana. “They were trying to tell me something, but it was so loud I couldn’t hear anything clearly.” She looked up at Noah, who was still holding her hand.

“I couldn’t hear anything clearly either. I think we have to try again to speak with them, but not tonight. Tonight, we have the Mariettas coming.”

“This is crazy,” said Koana, shaking her head. “You’re speaking to ghosts on my land, on our land, and I don’t even know what they want. Why are they still here? Why didn’t they pass on as they were supposed to?”

“I can’t answer that yet,” smirked Julia. She kissed Joseph, tenderly stroking his cheek. “Thank you for being my rock.”

“I’m not sure I am in these situations,” smiled Joseph. “I believe it’s the only time I’m happy a brother is holding my wife’s hand. Thank you, Noah.”

“Of course. It was a lot for me, so I can only imagine what it felt like for Julia.”

“It’s just a soft hum when I’m further away from the path. I think for tonight, I’ll stay closer to the house.”

“I think that’s a good idea,” said Joseph. He wrapped an arm around Julia, walking her toward their tent.

“What now?” asked Koana. Ethan and the others all looked at her, but it was Luke that stepped forward with a frown.

“Now, we set a trap.”

CHAPTER TWENTY

Ethan held Koana tightly to his chest, kissing the top of her head over and over again. He inhaled the floral fragrance of her hair, embedding it into his memory. He had a million things running through his head. Julia and Noah's encounter with the ghosts at the back of the property, the Mariettas getting close to Koana, and of course, the mission to reclaim the warheads.

“I love you,” he whispered.

“I love you, too,” she said, kissing his jaw. “Come back to me.”

He finally let her go, following the other men out to the trucks that would take them to the beach below. Nikia had arranged for several small boats to bring them to the west side of the island, where they would meet the submarine.

Once they were gone, the rest of the team left behind with the family, all began to make preparations for the dinner. Seeing her Great-great Uncle Kaimana, she moved to sit next to him for a moment.

“Uncle, how old are you?” she asked. The old man laughed, his wrinkled skin scrunching up and hiding his eyes.

“I am nearly ninety-seven,” he laughed. “Too old for a young girl like you to sit with.”

“You’re my uncle. I love sitting with you and hearing your stories. But I have a question about something that happened earlier today. Two people here can see and hear ghosts. They were overwhelmed by the voices of our ancestors near the back of the property. She was actually in pain because they were in pain. Do you know anything about that?”

“I know a great deal,” he frowned. “It’s a very long story, so perhaps, for another day.”

“We need to know, Uncle,” she said softly. He nodded, realizing that at his age, there might not be another day.

“Our islands were once peaceful. We had plenty to eat, plenty to make our lives full and complete. White men came and saw our paradise and decided it was theirs for the taking. We didn’t sit well with that, but we were outnumbered. Their weapons were more powerful.”

Koana tried to be patient. She’d learned all of that in school and knew the stories. But what about their land?

“One stormy night, there was a ship moored in our cove. The men could not get off the ship because of the storm, and our ancestors watched from that very cliff out there as it tossed back and forth. It didn’t take long for her to break apart in a thousand pieces, her crew and cargo sinking to the bottom.

“What we didn’t know was that the cargo was stolen from other islands. Our brothers and sisters in Samoa, Polynesia, Tahiti, and others. The cargo was cursed. Our men thought to bring it ashore, but something happened to each man who tried. So, we left it alone and told no one.”

“Uncle, I think some of that cargo made its way into the caves below our property.” He stared at Koana but said nothing at first.

“Leave it. It will only bring misery.”

“But Uncle, what if it can help the family?”

“It cannot. Leave it.” Koana nodded, standing to help the others with the feast. She walked a few steps and then turned back to her elderly uncle.

“I can’t promise that I will leave it, Uncle.”

The tables were set up end-to-end with long leaves used as a table runner, flowers dispersed artfully along its

center. The food smelled amazing. Trays of pineapple, coconut, papaya, kiwi, and mango were sliced and displayed like works of art.

“I think we’re ready,” said Ani, hugging her niece.

“What if I screw this up?” asked Koana. Ani smiled at the young woman.

“Not possible,” said Ani, shaking her head. “You’re a Lim, and we don’t give up the ship easily. You’re going to do great, and I’ll be right beside you.”

“They’re here,” said Hazel. “Both brothers and a bodyguard.”

“Alright, let’s do this,” said Koana, walking toward the men to greet them. “Mr. Marietta and Mr. Marietta.”

“Please, dear. It’s just Tony and Cosmo.” Koana nodded.

“And who is your plus one?” she smirked. The Mariettas laughed at her sense of humor, nodding toward their bodyguard.

“This is Pan. He doesn’t talk much, but he’s still getting used to us. We had an unfortunate incident at our

rental property the other night. Two of our guards are missing, presumed dead.”

“That’s terrible,” said Koana, genuinely portraying her horror. “This is a very safe island, and things like that don’t happen here. Did you report it?”

“In our business, dear, we don’t report anything.” She nodded, frowning at the two men.

“Please, take a seat. Would you care for wine?”

“I will never turn down a glass of wine,” smiled Cosmo. Tony nodded as well as Sara poured the men each a glass of wine.

“Well, shall we get down to business?” asked Koana.

“Indeed.”

“I’ve asked you here to try and better understand your reasons for wanting my family’s property. Obviously, with having married a man who doesn’t live or work here, I have some decisions to make.” The pit in Koana’s stomach grew wider with the truth of her own words.

“As we said, we need this property for our business.”

“I understand, Mr. Marietta, but if you’re not going to be honest with me about this business of yours, I’m afraid

we're done here. I want to know how you're going to protect my land."

"If you sell, it won't be your land," said Cosmo.

"We're going in circles here. What are your intentions with this property? Will you chop it up? Will you build on it? Will you destroy the foliage?"

"There would be some destruction of the foliage. It would be necessary to build the type of resort we want to build here."

"And what type of resort is that?" asked Ani. The men both stared at the older woman, then back at Koana.

"She's my aunt and has a right to know. All of these men and women have a right to know."

"The resort will be for a very specific clientele with highly unusual tastes, shall we say," smiled Tony.

All of the cousins began peppering the men with questions, removing some of the burden from Koana. She was grateful because she was running out of courage and questions. As the food was brought out, she lifted a hand, telling everyone that there would be no more discussion during the meal.

It bought her the time she needed. When the food was finally cleared, it was already more than two hours since they'd arrived. Hopefully, Ethan and the other men were successful in their mission, and she could let these men leave her property.

CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

More than two dozen men crowded into the small crafts provided by Nikia and the cousins. The boats were bobbing up and down in the waters of the Pacific. Fortunately, the sea-savvy islanders and the RP team had no qualms with rough seas. Although it technically wasn't rough seas, it felt as if it was for the small boats.

Although against doctors' orders, Poa was seated at one end of the second boat. He stared out at the water, then around their boats. Something was happening.

"What is that?" he asked, pointing. Luke smiled at him, nodding.

"That, my friend, is bonafide American muscle made to scare the fuck out of anyone who comes within her reach. That is an Ohio-class nuclear submarine, and our ride out to that ship."

"Holy haole," said Poa.

Ethan laughed, slapping the man's shoulder. In the blackness of night, against the black of the sea, her dark gray image appeared just above the surface. When the hatch opened and two men signaled to the team that they were ready,

men began dropping into the sea and swimming toward the vessel.

“This is where we leave you, Poa. Get the boats back to shore and wait there. We’ll signal you when we’re ready to be picked up. Don’t tell anyone where you were or where we are,” said Ethan.

Poa nodded, still bewildered at how the men would get into the submarine and then onto the ship.

“Good luck,” said Poa. “And Ethan? Thank you for what you’re doing. Not just for Koana, but for all of us.”

“It’s what we do, brother.”

Ethan slipped into the water as the cousins all stared at the men swimming toward the submarine. In their wetsuits, they looked like seals skimming the water at night. When Ethan’s head disappeared beneath the hatch, the last man closed the lid, and within minutes, the submarine was submerged once again and gone.

“I never thought I’d see that,” smirked Poa.

Inside the submarine, Luke and Cam spoke with the captain. He already had a read on the ship’s location, and she

had been moving fast all day. She was now only seventy-five nautical miles from the island.

“We’ll be there quickly,” said Captain Hollingsworth. “Once we’re alongside her, we’ll open up the hatch again. She’s so big, you won’t be seen. I have it on good authority from your comms team that her signals will be scrambled, and she won’t see us.”

“Yes, sir, that’s correct,” said Cam. “We’ll make our way up her side and take the ship over. How many men do you have that will take her back?”

“I’ve got ten Marines and ten hand-picked crew that know how to maneuver the ship. We were told that you would ensure she had no tracking or traditional navigation. You’re replacing it?” he asked with some trepidation.

“We are, sir. I know it seems unclear how you’d do that, but my men are extremely good at what they do. That ship will be totally under your control, and no one will know where she is.”

“I believe you,” said the man, shaking his head. He looked behind the group, frowning. “Is he trying to text someone in a submarine?” He pointed to Irish, and Cam

frowned. Nudging Mo, the big man moved to the back of the room to grab his friend.

“Brother? What the fuck are you doing? There’s no signal down here.”

“I’m just trying to get Lucinda to stay at Belle Fleur. She’s talking about taking some job up in Seattle. I can’t let her do that.”

“Irish, you got no control over what she does. She’s a grown woman, and you hurt her feelings, brother. You betrayed her trust. That was something pretty important to her.”

“I know that,” said Irish. “I know that.” Mo nodded, slapping his back.

“Focus, Irish, or I’ll tell Cam to take you off this job.”

“I’m good, I promise,” said Irish, putting his phone back in the plastic bag and placing it in his pack.

While waiting for the submarine to reach her destination, the men hovered in the war room, looking at the schematics for the ship. The drone had been able to identify twenty-one men aboard the ship, but they weren’t sure if those

were all the Mariettas' men or if they were former crew held hostage. They also didn't know how many were below deck.

"It's a lot to take on," said Captain Hollingsworth.

"We're a lot to take on," smirked Luke. The man laughed, shaking his head.

"You know, we all hear the stories and know that you're the best at what you do, but you're not immune to death. Be careful out there and watch your backs. The Mariettas are no joke, and neither are the Russians."

"You sound like my wife," said Cam.

"Maybe you should listen to your wife more often."

He nodded his head at the men and stepped through the portal.

"We're fifteen minutes out."

"Alright," called Luke to the others. "Get your shit and be ready. We board that ship, neutralize the tangos, and turn it over to the USN. Get the fuck off, and let's get back to the island."

As the submarine slowed, they felt her ascend through the water. When the hatch opened, they were shocked to see how close the captain had been able to get her to the moving ship. With her bowing sides, the submarine was virtually

hidden from view above. It wouldn't have mattered anyway.

No one was looking over her sides for a submarine.

“Good luck,” said the senior chief.

Using magnetic grappling hooks that were connected to the sides of the ship, they climbed aboard, edging over her sides. Other than the command center, the ship was dark.

Mo, Rory, Irish, Bogey, Eli, Carter, and Trevor carefully made their way below deck to the sleeping quarters. Wade, Hex, Bron, Fitch, Magnus, Cade, and Griff checked the common rooms for any insomniacs. The ship most likely didn't expect anyone to know about who or what they were, but when things are easy, it makes RP nervous. And this was easier than they expected, which only amped up their caution and suspicion.

“Seventeen found and neutralized,” called Carter into comms.

“We're in the cargo hold,” said Ethan. “We've got the warheads.”

“We've got something else,” said Dex, who was with Jax, Hunter, and Jean. “We're in the aft cargo area, and if I'm

not mistaken, we have vials of some sort of biological weapon.”

“Fuck,” muttered Cam. “Any signs of the original crew?”

“Affirmative,” said Torro, who was with Tiger and Jalen. “We found them locked in one of the produce holds. They’re cold, hungry, and tired, but they’re alive.”

“Sweep the ship,” said Luke.

It was nearly an hour before the forty-plus men of RP were able to effectively and satisfactorily sweep the entire ship. The Marietta crew was bound and held on the surface of the deck until the Navy was able to take over. When they were sure they had it secured, they signaled the submarine.

Now, feeling confident that they wouldn’t be seen, the ship pulled to a complete stop as the submarine moored next to her. The Marines and Navy personnel boarded, listening intently to Ryan’s instructions on how to handle the new navigation and stealth systems. One of the Marines stared at his prosthetic, wondering how he functioned with it.

“Do you have a question?” asked Ryan, looking at the man. He didn’t mind it. In fact, he welcomed the opportunity

to talk about all of the amazing things G.R.I.P. was doing with prosthetics for other men and women in service.

“Sorry, man. I’ve never seen a prosthetic like that, and I’ve seen a lot of them in my life. Too many.” Ryan nodded with a smile.

“I appreciate that. It’s one of my wife’s designs. I can do a lot with this, more than you could possibly imagine. Happy to give you an example another time.” Ryan turned back to the navigation equipment, pointing at different features they would need to know.

“This shit is cool,” smirked one of the men.

“It’s cool,” smiled Ryan, nodding at the man hovering over the new system, “and very expensive. It’s not a toy. We’ll recover the system once she’s back safely in U.S. hands.”

“Yes, sir.”

“RP! Let’s go. Our ride won’t wait forever.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

By the time the team returned from the boats, it was well past midnight, and almost everyone was asleep. Everyone except for Nine, Trak, and Noa.

“Everything okay?” asked Nine.

“The ship now has U.S. military members running her, and she’s being taken back to her rightful place. The Mariettas will figure it out when she doesn’t arrive at her location tomorrow.”

“Great job,” said Noa. “Everything went as well as we could hope here. Koana did an amazing job, and the family really stepped in. They were getting so frustrated with the family questions I think they were almost ready to just admit what their plan was.

“In the end, all they kept saying was that it would be a resort for very specific clientele, which we all know is bullshit.”

“Thank you for being here,” said Ethan. “I know it wasn’t easy.”

“It was easy enough,” he grinned. “When the women in my family get to poking at you and asking questions, brother, there is no hope of salvation.”

“Goodnight,” said Ethan, waving at the others.

Not wanting to wake Koana, he stripped in the bathroom and rinsed the salt water from his body. When he was done, he turned off the lights and slid in beside her. Instinctively, she rolled toward his body, feeling his strength and warmth.

He was surprised when he woke to warm sunlight. They’d slept well past eight, which was late for both of them.

On the back lawn, everyone was mingling around, eating breakfast. Koana sat with the team, explaining how the previous night had gone. Although she’d gotten no definitive responses from the Mariettas, she was able to keep them on the property for nearly three hours.

“It sounds like everyone delivered what was needed,” said Nine. “I’m proud of you all.”

The sound of slamming car doors had them all alert, especially when they saw the Mariettas and four large bodyguards walking toward them.

“Cosmo, Tony, nice to see you again so soon,” said Koana calmly.

“Don’t give me that bullshit, you little bitch!” said Tony. Ethan stood in front of Koana, his towering six-feet-six making the man stop in his tracks.

“You might want to rethink the way you just spoke to my wife. From what I understand, she was a gracious host to you and your brother last night. Something she didn’t have to be.”

“Right, of course,” smirked Tony. “A gracious host. And you just happened to be busy with work. Would that work have been a ship we owned?”

“A ship? That you own?” asked Luke. “I’m afraid we don’t know anything about a ship.”

“You’re all fucking liars!” yelled Cosmo. “Where the hell is that ship?”

“You call me a liar once more,” growled Rory, taking three long strides toward the men, “and you won’t have the ability to speak again.” Two bodyguards stepped forward, ready to take a swipe at Rory, but he dropped them both so quickly it gave pause to the others.

“Oh, please,” laughed Cam. “Do that again. He’s been dying to really get some exercise in, and I need the entertainment. Please? I’d like to see what happens next.”

“You took our ship,” said Cosmo. “Where is it?”

“See, you still haven’t told us what ship you’re talking about and why it’s so important to you. Besides, you don’t see any ships parked out there,” said Ethan. “What the fuck would we do with a ship?”

“You have no idea who you’re fucking with,” said Tony. “I will get what’s mine, one way or another.”

“Threaten me or my team again, and you’ll leave here in a body bag,” said Luke. The Mariettas just smirked at one another, then nodded toward Koana.

“I’ll have your land and you for what they’ve taken,” said Tony. Ethan started to move toward him, but Cam and Luke held him back.

“You come near her, and I’ll skin you alive,” he said through clenched teeth. The Mariettas just stood for a long moment, looking at each one of the men, then sizing up each woman. Now all of the RP men were on alert. Tony stared at Koana.

“Your little game last night failed,” said Tony. “We’ll be back for you and this land.”

When they had driven away, Koana fell into Ethan’s embrace, shaking.

“It’s okay,” he whispered. “They won’t touch you.”

“They will!” she cried. “Didn’t you hear them! They’re going to come back, and they’re coming for me and this land. You can’t protect me forever.”

“I can. And I will,” said Ethan.

“Maybe it’s time we end the Mariettas completely,” said Noa. “We know we can take them out, and no one would care one way or another. Someone else would take over their business, and we’d be free of at least two pieces of shit in our lives.”

“Let me talk to Bodwick,” said Nine. “I know he’s on his way overseas and may not be able to get back with me right away.”

“Tell me about the dinner last night,” said Ethan, trying to calm Koana.

She walked through everything that happened and what was said, speaking calmly. When she was done telling him

about the dinner, she talked to him about her conversation with her great-great uncle.

“So, he thinks whatever was on that ship was cursed?” asked Ethan.

“Yes, I think so. But what if it could help the family?”

“You know what? It would be a good distraction today,” said Cam. “Let’s do our dive today and see what we can find.”

“I agree,” said Ani, “let’s make it a day at the beach. The boys can dive, and we’ll lay on the beach and enjoy ourselves.”

“Sounds like a plan,” smiled Koana.

As the men carried their gear to the beach, Koana and the others packed picnic baskets and coolers. When they stepped onto the warm sand, the men all turned, smiling at one another.

“And that, boys, is why we are the luckiest bastards on the earth,” smiled Nine. “Don’t ever forget it.”

Erin smiled at her husband, walking toward him in a modest black one-piece that did absolutely nothing to conceal

her gorgeous breasts and full curves. She kissed his cheek, smiling at the others.

“And that’s why we love you all. You still think we’re beautiful, no matter how old we get.”

Some of the men stayed on the beach, watching as the teams went out to dive. The women laid out blankets and towels, then alternately swam in the warm waters and basked in the tropical sun. There were plenty of leftovers from the evening before, so they snacked on fresh fruit while they watched.

“Is it normal to be so turned on by watching them dive?” asked Koana. Ani laughed, shaking her head at her niece.

“Honey, it’s normal to be turned on by anything they do,” laughed Ani. “They’re sexy, muscular, daring as shit, and brave beyond common sense. But, wow!”

The women giggled, enjoying the show that the men put on. In the water, the show was completely different.



“What are you seeing?” asked Cam.

“Shit we shouldn’t be seeing,” said Noa. “It’s definitely a wreck of an eighteenth-century ship, but there’s an awful lot of metal on this ship. Maybe they figured some shit out that no one knew about.”

“Are we talking canons?” asked Luke.

“It’s more than that,” said Ethan. “There are canons, canon balls, but this ship had a metal hull. That’s what Poa cut his leg on. We’re seeing bottles of wine, plates, dishes, and two locked chests.”

“Can we bring them up?” asked Luke.

“I think the question is, do we want to,” said Noa. “After hearing what my great uncle said last night, maybe we shouldn’t touch this shit at all.”

“Is there any way to tell how she sunk? Was it just the weather?” asked Cam.

“From what we can see, yes. I’m not a shipwreck expert, but I’ve been on enough ships to know when one has been beaten to hell and back by waves. These poor bastards never had a chance. Once the wooden sides started to give way, I’d bet that the heavy metal hull just pulled her downward to the bottom.”

“Alright,” said Luke, “let’s attach the inflatables to the chests. That should bring them to the surface and allow us to get them on board.”

The team on shore watched in fascination as the chests were lifted to the surface and hauled on board the small boats. It took tremendous effort to get them back to shore, but when they dragged them onto the sand, everyone watched in awe.

“Oh my God!” said Koana. “You brought it up.”

“We need to know what’s in there,” said Cam. “That ship was made in a way it shouldn’t have been. It was too far advanced for that time, or at least what we’ve been led to believe.” He nodded to Noah as he pried the lock off the first chest. Carefully opening it, there was no surprise to see jewels, goblets, and other items.

“Those are from South America,” said May. “That crown is Greek. This is from all over the world.”

“Looters? Pirates?” asked Ethan.

“No, I don’t think so. What’s in the other chest?” Noah opened the second chest to reveal thousands of gold coins from all parts of the world. May touched the coins, running her fingers over the chest and then sitting back.

“What is it?” asked Koana.

“They’re of every age and from every part of creation. Some of those are roman coins from the time of Christ. Others are from Great Britain, South America, even China. This was payment for something from someone.”

“Well, if that ship was the *Crown Jewel*, it would have been British,” said Hiro.

“It doesn’t mean they were sailing her for the crown,” said May. “I think someone took this ship and was going to give the treasure to someone else.”

“Maybe they bought something,” said Koana. All eyes turned to her, frowning. “I mean, if my great-great uncle said that it’s cursed, maybe it’s because they were buying something they shouldn’t have.” Cam looked down at the two chests.

“Jesus, what have we found?”

CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

“Irish, I need you to stop calling me,” said Lucinda.

“Please, please, listen to me,” he said pleadingly. “I never meant to lie to you. I was just trying to get to know you better. I wanted to get close to you, and I felt like if I continued to be hurt, you’d allow me to get to know you.”

“I would have allowed you to get to know me if you’d just asked. In an honest, grown-man way. You were deceptive, lying to me about everything. Telling me there was some magical pond. I’m not an idiot, Irish.”

“I never said you were an idiot, and the pond is real. Just ask Mama Irene. She’ll tell you,” he said.

“I can’t.”

“You can’t? Why not?”

“I can’t because I’m not at Belle Fleur any longer,” she said calmly. Irish’s stomach flipped, bile rising in his throat.

“Y-you’re no longer there,” he whispered. “Where? Where did you go?”

“I told you that I had a friend from medical school that offered me an opportunity in Seattle. It will give me more

experience in a trauma center.”

“But Gabi offered you a job with us. Please, Lucinda, don’t leave. I’ll leave you alone, I promise. Just don’t leave.”

“I can’t trust you, Irish. You say you’ll leave me alone, and then you’ll be on my door with flowers or some weak-ass apology. You lied!”

“I know!” he yelled. “I know, for fuck’s sake. I’ve apologized over and over again. How many times does it take, Lucinda? Have you never told a false truth? Have you never told a little white lie to someone to get around a rule? Lied to your parents about where you were when you came in late at night? Are you so without sin that you’re going to judge me on this one mistake?”

There was silence on the other end of the line, and he waited, hoping she would answer in a way that would make him feel better about the situation. In his heart, he knew that she was the woman for him. But his head couldn’t get past her refusal to hear him out.

“He had an entire other life,” she whispered.

“What? Who?”

“My ex. He lied about everything. At first, it was little lies. He had to go out of town on business. His check was short again. His car was in the shop. All lies. On the other side of town, he had a wife and two kids. Hell, he even had a dog. The wife needed the car, which is why he didn’t have his. His check was short because she needed it for groceries.

“Everything that came out of his mouth was a lie. Everything. And it all started with one small lie.”

“No,” said Irish. “That’s what you want to believe. What you don’t want to admit is that it was all a big lie from the beginning, and you fell for it. You refused to see all the warning signs, and you’re blaming me for his bullshit.

“I never lied to you about anything other than how fully recovered I was. It was a lie. I agree with that. But it was for all the right reasons. I care about you, Lucinda. I risked my life for you, and I would do it again. If you can’t see beyond that, then I guess I was wrong about us.”

There was a deathly silence on the other end of the phone, and he thought she’d hung up on him. Then he heard beepers and buzzers going off and knew she was in the hospital.

“I have to go, Irish. Take care of yourself.”

“No! Wait!” But the line was dead, and he was left standing there with his phone screen black. Mo looked at him, frowning.

“Everything okay, Irish?” He stared at his friend for a long moment, then shook his head.

“No. Nothing is okay.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

The team spread out across the lawn, trying to determine what their next move should be with the treasure. If they called someone in, they'd be diving off the coast and tearing up the land. If they turned it over, someone would start to ask questions. Either way, the land would be overrun with treasure hunters and curious onlookers, something they didn't want for anyone.

“Noa?” said Kelsey, walking toward her husband with a curious stare. “There's a woman here to see you.”

“A woman?” he frowned. He looked beyond Kelsey to see Kailea walking toward them. She looked tired, her expression unreadable from where he was standing. “Kailea. Are you alright?”

“Yes. I'm fine. Sorry for just barging up here, but I wanted to apologize for the other day.” She looked at Kelsey, then back at Noa. He pulled his beautiful wife beneath his arm, kissing her forehead, almost as a mark of ownership. Kelsey wasn't sure how she felt about that, but she'd let him have this moment.

“Kailea, this is my wife, Kelsey.” At first, the other woman appeared to be angered but then reached out a hand to her.

“It’s nice to meet you. I went to school with Noa, and I wasn’t very nice the other day in town. I wanted to apologize for that.”

“You didn’t have to come up here to say that,” said Noa, staring at the woman.

“I didn’t come up just for that,” she said, shaking her head. “The man at the inn. Black. He was there with those two other men today. They asked if I had a private meeting space, which of course I don’t, but I gave them my office.”

“Okay,” said Noa as the crowd gathered around them.

“I don’t know what made me do it, but I decided to record the conversation. My folks still have this old cassette recorder that they keep in the desk drawer. I haven’t listened to it. I don’t know what’s on it, but I figured it might help you.”

“Hi, Kailea,” said Koana, smiling at the older woman. She’d known her for years, just as she knew almost everyone on this part of the island. She’d never married, had no

children, and still lived with her parents, despite being the same age as her Uncle Noa.

“Hi, Koana. Sorry to hear about your grandmother, but I’m happy to hear you’re not selling the land. There’s too much of that around.”

“What do you mean?” asked Noa, frowning at the other woman.

“Almost everyone on the south side has sold out to Black. He’s offered huge sums of money for little plots of land that have no value, but they all face the beach. The O’hana’s had that enormous stretch of land. Their entire family lived there for as far back as I know. They sold the whole thing, bought a house on Kona, and left the island.”

“What the fuck?” frowned Noa.

“Look, I’m fighting my folks now about not selling the inn. It’s all I have, and all I’ve ever wanted to do is run it my way. But Black told them he wanted to expand it and incorporate some of the local food trucks as restaurants in a bigger version of it. I don’t believe it for a minute, but I’m still just an employee and the owner’s daughter. The things he was proposing can’t happen given where we’re located and the amount of land around us.”

Noa and Koana stared at the cassette tape, wondering what was on it.

“Well, that’s all I wanted to say. I’m sorry again, Noa.”

“Hey, Kailea,” he called, reaching for her hand. “Thank you. You risked a lot to get this. We were friends once. I hope we can be again.” She smiled, nodding, and then smiled at Kelsey.

“You make a beautiful couple,” she said. “I hope you’re happy.” They watched as she walked away, a sadness to her slow step.

“She was important to you?” asked Kelsey carefully.

“She was a classmate. That’s all. She wanted to date me once she knew I had a football scholarship and was leaving the island. I admit I had a crush on her in middle school, but it never led to anything. I feel bad for her now. She’s sort of trapped under her parents.”

“I think she’s sad. But I’d be sad too if I’d lost you.” Kelsey kissed Noa and then went back toward the house. He shook his head, realizing how very lucky he was.

“We need to play that tape,” said Ethan. “Anyone have a cassette player?”

“Everyone on the island has a cassette player,” laughed Koana. She ran into the house and brought out an old boom box.

“Cool,” laughed Code. “I had one just like that.”

“Play the damn tape,” growled Cam. Code slipped the tape into the player and waited as shuffling and the sounds of chairs moving could be heard.

“Where’s the fucking ship?” asked Cosmo.

“No sign of it anywhere,” said Black. “I’ve asked every fishing vessel, every cruise boat, anyone who’s been out there in the last three days, and no one has seen it. It’s like it’s just vanished.”

“Ships don’t just fucking vanish! We had tracking systems on that ship and knew every move it made. Those fucking RP dicks took that ship!”

“No offense, Mr. Marietta, but I don’t see how those men could have gotten to that ship, climbed aboard with more than twenty armed men, and taken the ship. They’re all accounted for on the Lim property. Your own men said so.”

“Trust me, those fuckers could do it. The Russians are going to be pissed when they don’t have that ship. They’re going to be even more pissed when we don’t have this island cleared for them.”

Everyone on the RP team stared at one another. The Russians wanted this island. If they had a hold of it, they could plant nukes in the middle of the Pacific, giving them access to the U.S., Australia, New Zealand, South America, and Asia.

“We’ll figure something out,” said Tony. “For now, continue to make offers on the land.”

“What about the Lim bitch?” asked Black.

“Don’t worry about her,” chuckled Cosmo. “We’re gonna take that cunt for a long, hard ride.”

There was more shuffling and moving heard, then a door closed. Code stopped the tape and pulled it from the cassette player.

“Get it to the POTUS,” said Nine. “Let him know what’s happening here.”

“What do we do now?” asked Koana.

“Now, we find Mr. Black and have a nice long chat with him,” said Cam. “A chat in which he may not survive. Noa? Get with some of Team Big and make a few visits of your own. Find these families that he’s approaching and help them change their minds. Maybe the cousins can help.”

“Got it,” said Noa. He gathered the members of Team Big and led them to pick up the cousins. With their team and the ‘home’ team, hopefully, the residents would listen until Cam and Luke could get a hold of Black.

“Kailea?” said Koana. “Is Mr. Black back in his room yet? See if you can keep him there.” She hung up her phone, staring at Ethan.

“He’s there?”

“He’s there,” she said, nodding. “Go do your thing. I’ll wait here.”

Ethan laughed at her, shaking his head as he kissed her. Taking Mo, Trak, Nathan, and Razor with him, he drove into town and straight toward the inn.

When they stepped inside, Kailea nodded at them, jerking her head toward the stairs. She held up four fingers to

indicate his room, and they nodded. With his hand over the peephole, Ethan knocked.

“Who is it?” called the male voice.

“Joey, here for Mr. Marietta,” called Mo.

They all looked at him, and he shrugged. As the lock disengaged, Trak pushed to the front, his large Bowie knife in his hand. Black never had a chance. With the door slightly ajar, Mo and Ethan shoved it open, Black falling on his ass to the floor.

“Hey! Hey, what the hell are you doing?” he screamed. Trak knelt beside the man, placing the knife at his throat.

“If you so much as whisper, I will cut your head off.” Black nodded.

“Who have you contacted about buying their property?” asked Ethan. The man shook his head in fear.

“You got one shot at this, asshole. Then I’m going to let my friend have his way with you.”

“On the desk,” he said, shaking. Mo looked at the sheets of paper and nodded. There were names and addresses of residents all over the island.

“What do the Mariettas want with it all?” asked Ethan. Trak pressed the blade against his throat, and he gasped.

“Okay, okay! The Russians made a deal with them. Get the warheads and bring them to the island. They wanted at least half cleared of the population, then they’d take care of the rest. With the location of the island, they’d be able to place the warheads pointed at any major threat from this location, as well as those they already have in Russia.”

“And the biological weapon?” asked Ethan. Black stared at him in shock. “Yea, asshole. We knew.”

“They were going to have those placed in weapons as well. How did you get the ship?” he asked.

“We asked nicely,” smiled Razor.

“They’re going after the girl,” he said, desperately looking for a last breath of hope. Ethan knelt on his groin, Black gasping for air.

“You’d better speak fast if you ever want to piss again.”

“P-please,” he begged. Ethan lifted his knee slightly, allowing the man to take a breath. “They’re going to kidnap

the girl and use her for a trade for the ship. The problem is, you won't recognize her when you get her back."

"When?" asked Trak. He dug the tip of the knife into the man's skin. "When?"

"Tonight. Tonight, they're going to take her from you. They're going to send a note to her begging her to come to the beach to help one of her fucking family. She won't refuse. They'll take her then." He stared at the men, giving a pleading look. "Please, let me go. I won't say anything."

"You're right about that," said Trak.

Several moments later, they emerged downstairs again, Kailea giving them a strange look. Nathan slapped two hundred dollars on the counter.

"Cleaning bill," he smiled. "Thanks for the tip."

Mo walked out the back with Black hanging over his shoulder, wrapped in a sheet as Ethan brought the car around.

"Let's get this list to the others. The Mariettas are going to have a surprise tonight."

CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

“I can’t believe these families would sell,” said Koana, shaking her head at the list. “Many have been here as long as our family.”

“I wonder if they’re threatening them,” said Ani.

“It’s a possibility,” said Luke. “We’ll let Team Big and the cousins handle the list. We’ve texted it to all of them.”

“And what about the Mariettas saying that they were going to take me tonight? What do we do about that?” she asked, wringing her hands.

“Do you trust me, baby?” asked Ethan.

“You know I do,” she said, turning to stare up at his beautiful face.

“Then hear me out.”

Koana listened as the men laid out the plan. At first, she was terrified. Then she calmed, knowing that neither Ethan nor her uncle would allow anything to happen to her.

“We’ll be on the beach waiting for them to arrive and hiding in the cave. Others will be hiding in the trees and along

the trail in the brush,” said Luke. “I promise you that nothing will happen to you.”

“It will all be okay,” said the soft voice behind them. Koana turned to see Julia smiling at her. She looked like an angel, with her blonde hair lit up like a golden halo. “It will all be okay. Your ancestors say this is the right thing to do.”

“O-okay,” nodded Koana. “I trust my ancestors.”

As darkness began to fall, the team tried to behave as if nothing was going to happen. When the child of one of the cousins came running toward Koana and handed her a note, she hugged the little girl and told her to go home.

Leaving the note on the table, she excused herself for a moment and walked into the house. Ethan picked up the note.

I'm injured on the beach, Koana. Please come and help me, alone. Namali.

“Namali is only ten,” said Noa. “She wouldn't have been able to refuse her. Let's go.”

As quickly and safely as they could, they took the steps to the cave, where more than a dozen team members were already waiting. From their vantage, they watched as Koana stepped onto the beach.

“Namali! Namali, where are you? This isn’t funny,” she called.

“No, it isn’t funny, is it, you little whore,” said Tony. Koana stepped back, frightened, even though she knew who was behind her.

“Wh-where is she?”

“Oh, we didn’t want her. We wanted you,” said Tony, watching the young woman take a step back. “You can’t run. The boys won’t let you.” She turned quickly to see three bodyguards behind her.

“All you had to fucking do was sell us your land,” said Cosmo. “Now, you and your husband have created a nightmare for us. Do you know what the fucking Russians do to people who don’t follow through on their deals?”

“No,” said Koana softly. “No, I’ve never been foolish enough to try and work with the Russians on anything.”

“No, I don’t suppose you would. We’re going to make a small trade,” smiled Cosmo. “Having the wife of an RP man is almost as good as having the nukes. They’re going to have fun with you, and then they’ll use you to bring every RP man

down. Someone will finally bring those pricks to their knees, and the Russians will be the heroes of our community.”

“No,” she said, shaking her head. “No, you can’t do that.”

“Oh, but we can.” He took a short step forward in the sand, his wingtips not gripping very well. Koana took notice, her bare feet digging into the beach. “You see, my family should have owned this land three hundred years ago.”

She stared at him bewildered.

“The Mariettas are a very old Italian family. Very old and very resourceful. We stole a British vessel that was carrying priceless artifacts. We were sailing that ship here to buy every last inch of land, or if forced, we’d simply take it. When it was ours, we would own the trade routes of the Pacific. But we lost the ship, the treasure, all of it somewhere out there.

“Some of our people actually did make it to shore. It looked as if there weren’t a lot of people here, so they thought they could kill each one of you and take the land anyway. They were a bit surprised when hundreds came at them. We slaughtered as many as we could. Then they slaughtered us. Only one escaped to tell the story, and that story has been told

for generations so that one day, a Marietta would come back and seek vengeance.

“This was our second chance. We would get the land and become rich from the Russians. You nearly took that from us.”

“You’re mad. First of all, vengeance after three hundred years is madness, not vengeance. No one is alive from that time. No one. Second, the state of Hawaii won’t allow this to happen. It won’t matter who you think you have in your back pocket. Pearl Harbor is just over there on another island!”

“We’re well aware,” smiled Tony, “which is why the first nuke will be pointed at them.”

“That’s millions of people,” whispered Koana in shock.

“Time to go,” said Tony, attempting to take a step forward.

Koana dug her toes into the sand and took off toward the cliff face and the hidden cave. On the outside, it appeared to be just a rock. But with the stealth netting, she knew what and who was behind it.

“Where did she go?” yelled Cosmo. The netting was released, and the opening to the cave suddenly appeared in the darkness.

“There!” yelled Tony, suddenly seeing the shadowy opening in the cliffside. They shoved the bodyguards through first, their own slick shoes sliding all over the cave floor. Cosmo held up his phone, shining the flashlight feature into the cave. Immediately, he spotted the gemstones tucked into the wall.

“Holy fuck,” said one of the bodyguards.

“Shut up! Get the fucking girl!”

They worked their way further into the cave, the darkness not allowing for them to see beyond the hand in front of their face. Cosmo pushed his brother, Tony, further into the cave.

“This is our shit,” he whispered. “This is our family’s shit. That bitch knew our haul was here and was keeping it a secret.”

They heard a loud noise, then another, and stopped. Turning his phone’s flashlight on again, he scanned the cave,

then glanced down. Two bodyguards lie dead on the floor of the cave.

“They’re here,” whispered Cosmo.

“Don’t you think I fucking know that!” he spat. “Find that fucking cunt! She’s our ticket out of here.”

They heard the third bodyguard drop and knew they were in deep. As they continued in the darkness, a muffled silencer shot out the phone, leaving them without light. Both men stilled, then heard the whispering voices of ghosts.

“Go away, white man.”

“There is nothing here for you.”

“Fuck, it’s haunted!” yelled Cosmo.

“It’s not haunted, you idiot. It’s them. It’s those fucking RP assholes!”

With his brother literally hanging on his coattails, Tony moved further into the cave. When an image scurried in front of him, he reached out for her, feeling the soft hair slip through his fingers.

“That was her. Go that way!”

“We should stick together, Tony.”

“Don’t fucking wimp out on me now. Go that way,” he said in a low growl. He shoved his brother toward a narrow opening and went in the opposite direction, feeling his way along the wall. He heard another silencer and stopped.

“Tony! Tony, I’m hit!” screamed Cosmo. He couldn’t stop now. He was close. He knew that bitch was close, and he was going to make her pay. “Tony!”

Tony heard the sounds of water and realized he was turned around, headed back to the beach. But if the cave made a circle, she must have gone that way too. Slipping on the slick stones, he rushed toward the sound, his gun pointed straight out.

“Where are you?!”

“I’m here, Tony,” said Koana, standing on the beach. He fired his weapon several times, but the image just stood there.

“No. No, that’s not possible,” he whispered. He shot at the image again, but she just stood there, smiling at him.

“Your people murdered my people,” said Koana. “I am the living embodiment of all of my ancestors. Now, they’ll take all of you home.”

Her image disappeared, and in the surf behind her was the body of his brother.

“No!” he yelled, running toward the man. He flipped him over, his throat cut from ear to ear. “You fuckers! Show yourselves!”

“No problem,” said Ethan, appearing from the water in his black wetsuit. A dozen other men appeared alongside him as well, still more pouring from the cave and trees along the beach. Tony attempted to raise his weapon but didn’t count on the man behind him.

Alec gripped his hand, twisting it so hard he was certain the bones were protruding and might actually break off. Grinning, he gave a head jerk to Noah.

“I’ve been waiting to do that,” smiled the big man.

“You killed my brother,” cried Tony.

“You killed my people,” said Noa, stepping forward with Koana behind him. “You were going to kill my niece.”

“No, not me,” he smiled, trying to remain brave. “The Russians would have done that after they had some fun with her.”

“You won’t touch me or my land,” said Koana confidently. “Your family has destroyed enough on this island. The Mariettas won’t live to ever see this paradise again.” Turning, she kissed Ethan on the cheek and disappeared with Ani and Hazel at her side.

“So, what now?” he smirked. “You going to kill me too?”

“Oh, I’m definitely going to kill you,” said Ethan. “But I’m going to do it in my own special way.”

When Tony had been stripped of his clothing, Ethan took a knife to nearly every part of his body, then placed him in a life jacket tied to one of the small crafts owned by the cousins. They pulled his body out to sea and waited.

“Don’t do this!” he screamed. “Please don’t do this!”

“Sharks can’t hear you,” said Ethan. “Just hold still. All that splashing will make them come faster.”

It wasn’t long before they saw the telltale signs of a shark’s fin, then two. His body bobbed up and down as he screamed for help. They watched the orange life jacket go under for long moments, then popped back up like a cork. Then his body disappeared completely.

They waited for thirty minutes to ensure there was no sign of Tony Marietta. The only thing that remained was the shredded remnants of a once valuable life preserver.

CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

When the team got back up to the house, the others were waiting patiently. All except Koana, who was standing at the back of the property line with Noah and Julia.

“Is she alright?” asked Ethan. Ani nodded.

“Yes,” she smiled. “The ancestors have decided to speak with Julia. They realized that she was here to help Koana, not hurt her. Apparently, they have a lot to say about the Mariettas and what happened here.”

It was several long minutes before the two women walked slowly back to the group. They were both smiling, holding hands as Noah walked behind them.

“Are you okay?” asked Ethan. “What did your ancestors say?”

“Everything the Mariettas said was true. Their family stole the ship from the English and then robbed more ships on their way here. They were planning to bribe the natives but then realized they didn’t care about jewels and coins. Instead, they decided to kill them all.

“Unfortunately, while they were moored in the cove, a huge storm came up and sank the ship. The jewels in the cave were washed ashore, and the land just simply grew around them. They asked us not to touch them, and I’m going to honor that,” said Koana.

“What do we do about the chests?” asked Luke. She stared at him, a little confused as to why he wasn’t questioning any of this ‘speaking with ghosts’ business. Then she realized that none of this was abnormal to them.

“They said that May would know what to do,” smiled Julia. “They said to entrust them to you, and they would get to the right place.”

“Me?” said May with a shocked expression.

“Yes,” smiled Julia. “They were certain you would know what to do.”

“I-I’m not sure. As I said before, if we tell the government they were found here, they’ll start digging up the cove and attract every treasure hunter in the world. If we say they were found in the cave, it will still be a problem.”

“Do we have to tell them?” asked Koana. All eyes turned toward her. “I mean, do we have to tell them where

they were found. Can't we just send them back anonymously?"

Ethan smirked at his beautiful wife, then looked at May, who smiled at the young woman.

"I think you have the right idea. Hiro? Code? I need untraceable packages, no prints, shipped from an anonymous address. It will take me a while to divide this up by nation, but once that's done, we can send it." Cam nodded.

"Tell us what to do."

With the main tent set up as a workstation, crews worked in teams, identifying the obvious and things for May to confirm. Then they were set on tables for each respective country. While they busied themselves with the treasure, Noa, Koana, Poa, and Nikia visited every name that was on the list from Black.

They didn't tell everything, but they gave enough information to the families that discouraged them from selling their land. Noa made sure to tell them the story of the Marietta family but left out the part about how he knew. For most, it satisfied their curiosity and helped them to make a decision. No sale.

Of course, they didn't know that the Mariettas or Black would never come around again. They were gone from this earth, serving in the hell they deserved.

For more than a week, they sifted through the treasure, often distracted by some piece they came across, forcing May to give a lecture of its use and origin. She didn't mind at all. It was her love, her dream job. When they were done, there were thirty-one countries represented.

Some boxes only had a few items in them, others were overflowing, causing Hiro to create two boxes. With directions from May, he sent each box to the country's head of antiquities.

Using a dummy address and sending the packages from a fishing shack on the Pitcairn Islands, he knew they would never come to Hawaii. Of course, the forty-nine permanent residents of Pitcairn might have a few visitors in the future.

Koana watched as the men loaded the items into a truck, which would be taken to a private jet and dropped anonymously at a shipping station stateside. They would be leaving soon. But she still wasn't sure if Ethan would be leaving with them or if she would.

He walked toward her with an expression of anguish.

“I guess I know what you’re about to say,” she frowned.

“Please, Koana, please, baby, come with us. The land will be taken care of even if you leave. We can come back and check on it.”

“Ethan,” she said, shaking her head. “I just don’t know if I can. I love you, you know that, but leaving the only home I’ve ever known is a lot.”

“I know that what I’m asking is a lot,” he said, taking her hands in his own, “but you’re my wife, and I’m your husband. We belong together. I told you that my work, my work family is what has kept me alive.”

“Can’t we go back and forth?” she asked innocently. “Can’t you come here every month or so?”

“Koana, what you’re asking is so difficult. Sooner or later, you’ll get tired of waiting for me to visit, and you’ll decide not to come to me at all. If we’re together, we can travel back here together when it’s needed.”

“Ethan,” she said with tears, “I need time to think about this. Please.”

“That’s just it, Koana. Time’s up. We need to get back. We have a business to run and other family waiting for us. We’re leaving early tomorrow morning. The jets will be waiting for us at the airport.” He hugged her close to his chest, kissing her sweetly. Brushing back her hair, he smiled down at her. Tears rolled down his cheeks.

“Ethan,” she whispered.

He shook his head, kissed her again, and walked away. She stood in the field for the longest time, just watching as he disappeared around the side of the house.

“He’s hurting,” said Ani.

“I know that, and I’m the one that hurt him, but I didn’t mean to. I can’t leave here. I just can’t,” she said.

“Can’t. Or won’t. There’s a big difference, Koana. Your uncle and I felt the way you did, despite what everyone else thought. We knew that it would hurt to leave this place, but we had to. What we discovered was a world unlike anything else. This is home. It always will be. But you can have more than one home. You have to decide.” Ani kissed her niece’s cheek and walked away, leaving Koana alone once more.

Ethan woke as the sun was breaking over the horizon. Koana had not come to bed at all, and he knew that she'd made her decision. As the bags were loaded into the massive tour bus, he turned, praying that she was with him.

“Brother, we have to go,” said Cam. Ethan nodded, taking his seat on the bus. As the house disappeared from view, he looked over at Pork.

“You think I should stay?” he asked the man.

“No, brother. Don't pull that shit with me. Each man has to make his own choices. My situation was completely different. Koana needs to make some choices as well. I'm just getting to know my daughter, but I know that she's stubborn. She's also strong and loyal and loving.

“I'm coming back in a few weeks to spend some more time with her. Maybe you could come with me.” Ethan nodded at him, looking back out at the rising sun.

“Maybe.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

Koana stared out at the Pacific from beneath the banyan tree. She closed her eyes, praying that she could ‘get herself right,’ but it never came. Back inside the house, she found herself wandering. Everything smelled like Ethan. Everything.

Unable to stand it, she walked out back, sitting on the grass where there were once a hundred people. Laughing, eating, telling stories. Saving her. They had come and saved her and saved the land. She curled her knees to her chest, crying into her hands.

Hearing a loud noise, she looked up. It got louder and louder, and then she saw it. A helicopter was landing in her backyard.

“Ethan,” she whispered.

But it wasn’t Ethan. The doors opened, and an older man with a long graying beard stepped off. His sunglasses were perched on his nose as he helped an elderly woman off the helicopter. She was short with perfectly combed white hair. She wore cropped pants and a white sweater set with daisies on it.

“Well, hello, honey,” said the woman. “My name is Irene Robicheaux, but you can call me Mama, Irene, or Mama Irene. I’ll answer to any of them. That fine-looking young man is Ghost. He’s one of my boys.” Ghost just grinned at the older woman, first for calling him a young man, then for calling him one of her boys. It always made him feel good.

“Robicheaux? Are you here for your family?” Irene smiled.

“Well, yes. I guess I am.”

“I’m sorry, they’ve all left,” said Koana, choking back the tears. “I’m Koana. I’m Ani and Noa’s niece.”

“Yes, child, I know. And you’re Ethan’s wife,” nodded the older woman. “They’ve all left, but you’re still here.”

“I-I can’t leave this land,” she said with fresh tears.

“Child, of course you can. Believe me, I know a thing or two about being tied to the land. See, my husband’s family has owned our land for nearly three hundred years now. That’s a lot of memories, most of them good.

“But we choose whether we stay or go. If Matthew had decided to leave it all behind, I would have followed him

anywhere because he is the other half of my soul. I could not have survived one single night without him.”

“Miss...”

“Uh, uh, uh,” she said, wagging a finger. “Ain’t no ‘miss’ or ‘ma’am.’”

“Okay. Irene, I don’t know what to do. How can I leave my ancestral lands and home? Who would take care of it all?”

“Well, it’s my understandin’ you got a load of cousins livin’ here. Are you tellin’ me there ain’t one that could manage this? Are you sayin’ there ain’t one who loves this place as much as you?”

“I-I don’t know.”

“Listen to me, Koana. Love is hard enough to find, but to find it with a man like Ethan, that only happens once. A man that’s willing to risk his life for you and for all you love. That won’t come around again. A man willing to love you no matter what. To take a chance on you, that’s not replaceable, my love.

“I’ve watched all my boys and my girls fall in love, and it’s beautiful to see. Their whole face changes. Their

bodies become more possessive, in a good way. These men are something special, honey. They're unlike any men you've ever known. Nine's wife, Erin, she tells all the girls somethin' that I think is pure wisdom.

“These men, these men protect so fiercely, so devoutly it's all-consuming. And they love the same way. All-consuming. It's remarkable to watch and a blessing to be a part of it. If you want my advice, don't question anything. Just let yourself feel. These are special men, and if you don't mind me saying so, it will sound a bit conceited on my, on our part, but it takes special women to be with them.

“We. You are special, my precious child, and Ethan saw that right away. Are you honestly going to let that go?”

“I'm so confused,” she whispered.

“Life can be confusin', honey. But love ain't. Love slaps us in the face and makes us know that we're alive, and there's so much more worth livin' for. Do you love him or not?” She looked at the older woman, wiping her eyes.

“Yes. I love him so much. I'm in pain. My stomach is in knots, and I feel like I'm going to be sick.” Irene laughed, shaking her head.

“Child, that’s not love. That’s the baby.”

“Wh-what?”

“You’re pregnant, Koana. I’ve had fifteen. I outta know. You’re about two weeks along, but you’re definitely with child.”

Koana reached for her phone, dialing a number.

“Poa? I need you here right now. I have something to ask you.”

CHAPTER TWENTY-EIGHT

“Brother, you gotta get that sour look off your face,” said Luke, nudging Ethan’s shoulder as the bus made its way down the winding mountain roads.

“I thought she’d come, Luke. I honestly thought she understood what all this meant to me.”

“She will in time, Ethan. You’ve given her options on flying back and forth to check on the land together. She’ll think about it. Remember, she’s never been anywhere before. This is all she knows, and that has to be fucking scary.”

“I know I’m being a selfish ass,” said Ethan, “but I need this. I need RP so desperately. I need her too. I want her, but I feel like if all of you weren’t in my life, I’d just die.”

“Trust me, Ethan. We all feel the same way.”

Luke left Ethan to wallow a little longer in his misery. He stared out the window of the bus at passing trees and the ocean stretching toward home. It was like a knife to the gut, but he knew he needed to get back to Belle Fleur.

When the bus pulled onto the tarmac, the two jets were waiting to take everyone home. He dropped his bag near the

cargo hold and turned, hoping to see Koana. There was nothing except the wind, the trees, and black runway.

“Ethan? We gotta go, brother,” said Mo.

He nodded, stepping up and into the jet. As he passed his friends, they all smiled at him, and he wondered what the hell they were smiling at. He was dying inside, his gut ripped apart, his heart bleeding from the inside.

“Are you going to take your seat so we can get going?”

Ethan stared at the woman in the seat, his mouth opening and closing. Gripping her shoulders, he lifted her, hugging her as his teammates cheered.

“How? How are you here?” he asked.

“Well, Mama Irene came to see me,” she smiled. The entire bus broke out into laughter. “It’s true. A helicopter landed in the backyard, and she got out with a man named Ghost. He said he couldn’t hold her back, and she was acting crazy.”

“Oh, honey, we believe you,” smiled Luke. “That’s my grandmother.”

“Well, she had a lot of wonderful things to say, and I really listened to her. Besides, I’d like for you to be there

when the baby is born.”

“Wh-what?” he stammered.

“According to her, I’m pregnant,” she smiled. “I’d like for the father to be present in its life. I mean, if you still want to be married to me.”

“Oh, honey, there is no one I’d rather be married to. No one.”

Ethan held her beneath his arm for the entire flight. He held her as they spent their first night in his cottage. Ethan held her tightly to him for all the important things in their lives. The long walks at Belle Fleur, the trips to buy maternity clothes, the baby showers, and the doctor’s visits. But the one he had waited for was when he held her beneath his arm as Gabi announced to everyone that they had a baby girl.

“We got our girl,” smiled Ethan. “Of course, she’s never leaving the house, and she’s not allowed to date until she’s thirty-five, but we have our girl.” Koana laughed, kissing her husband.

“A girl. I think it’s time to change the tradition, Ethan. I think as long as the land stays in our family, it doesn’t matter who owns or runs it. We need to create a family cooperative.”

“I think that’s a wonderful idea, baby,” he kissed her again, then kissed the head of his newborn daughter.

“Ulani,” she smiled. “Little Ulani.”

EXCERPT from IRISH

It had been almost a year since he'd heard that voice. Actually, that wasn't true. It was nine months and seven days. Nine of the most agonizing months of his life.

He'd left his phone in the cottage as the team worked on training drills in the outer islands. When they got back, he was dirty, muddy, tired, and just wanted sleep.

So, he showered and went to bed, ignoring the incessant buzzing of his phone. The next morning, he poured himself some coffee and looked at his phone. Twelve missed phone calls and thirteen text messages.

Irish – I need to speak with you. Please call me.

Irish I know you're probably angry with me, but please.

Irish please, please call me.

Look, I know I screwed up, but Irish I'm begging you. Pick up.

I don't know how much longer I have. My phone is dying and I'm hiding.

Irish. I'm sorry.

“What the fuck?” he said to himself. He tried dialing the number back, but it only went to voicemail. Then, he tried calling the hospital where she went to work at in Seattle.

“Dr. Lucinda Harwell, please.”

“I’m sorry, but she left the hospital about a week ago and never came back. Do you have information as to her whereabouts?”

“No, but I’m a friend. She called me asking for help, but I don’t know where she is,” he said.

“Well, I know the police have been searching. Detective Walt Morgan is heading up the investigation with the Seattle police. Maybe check with him.”

“Walt Morgan,” he repeated. “Thank you.” Grabbing his gear, he ran out of the cottage toward one of the vehicles.

“Where the hell are you going?” asked Mo.

“I’m going to rescue a woman.”

Author's Note:

It might seem beyond possible for any man to complete more than one Special Forces training, but credit where credit is due, it has been done. David Goggins is a retired Navy SEAL, and is the only member of the U.S. Armed Forces to complete SEAL training (including two hell weeks), the U.S. Army Ranger School, and Air Force Tactical Air Controller. He also holds multiple records in extreme marathon races. His book, *Can't Hurt Me*, is a remarkable read, and I encourage you to read more about his amazing story.

SERIES AND FAMILY GUIDE

Key:

RS = Reaper Security

SP = Steel Patriots

MSB = My SEAL Boys

RP = REAPER-Patriots

(d) = deceased

Book	Character Name	Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse
<i>RS 1</i>	Joe "Nine" Dougall	Erin Richards	Joy Elizabeth "Ellie"	Jackson "Jax" Diaz
			Cameron	Kate Robicheaux
<i>RS 2</i>	Joseph "Trak" Redhawk	Lauren Owens	Sophia	Eric Bongard
			Suzette	Keith Robicheaux
			Nathan	Katrina Santos
			Joseph	Julia Anderson
<i>RS 3</i>	Billy Joe "Tailor" Bongard	Cholena "Lena" Blackwood	Eric	Sophia Ann Redhawk
<i>RS 4</i>	Dan "Wilson" Anderson	Sara MacMillan	Paige	Ryan Holden Robicheaux
			Julia	Joseph Redhawk
<i>RS 5</i>	Luke "Angel" Jordan	Mary Fitzhugh	Marc (Luke)	Ela Wolfkill
			Georgianna	Carl Robicheaux
			Wesley	Virginia Robicheaux
<i>RS 6</i>	Peter "Miller" Robicheaux	Kari LeBlanc	Frank Gaspar	Lane Quinn
<i>RS 7</i>	Rachelle Robicheaux	Frank "Mac" MacMillan	Danielle (Dani) Marie	Dev Parker
<i>RS 8</i>	Adele Robicheaux	Clay Duffy		
<i>RS 9</i>	Gabriel Robicheaux	Tory Gibson		

Book	Character Name	Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse
<i>RS 9</i>	John "Gibbie" Gibson	Dhara	Dalton	Calla Michaels
<i>RS 9</i>	Antoine Robicheaux	Ella Stanton	Ryan Holden Robicheaux	Paige Anderson
<i>RS 9</i>	Gaspar Robicheaux	Alexandra Minsky	Luke	Ajei Blackwood
			Carl	Georgianna Jordan
			Ben	Harper Miller
			Adam	Jane Wolfkill
<i>SP 19</i>			Violet	Striker Michaels
<i>RP 6</i>			Lucy	Alex "Sniff" Mullins

Book	Character Name	Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse
RS 10	William "Bull" Stone	Lily Bennett		
RS 11	Luc Robicheaux	Montana Divide		
RS 12	Raphael Robicheaux	Savannah O'Reilly	Ian Luke	Aspen Bodwick
			Katherine Gray "Kate"	Cameron Dougall
	Doug Graham	<i>Deceased partner – Grip</i> Current partner – Miguel Santos		
RS 13	Jasper "Jazz" Divide	Gray Vanzant	Virginia	Wes Jordan
RS 14	Baptiste Robicheaux	Rose Ellis	Elizabeth Irene "Liz"	Kiel Wolfkill
RS 14	Alec Robicheaux	Lissa Duncan	Keith	Susie Redhawk
RS 15	Stone Roberts	Bronwyn Ross		
RS 16	Suzette Robicheaux	Sylvester "Sly" DiMarco		
RS 16	Max Neill	Riley Corbett	CC	
RS 17	Titus Quinn	Olivia Baine	Lane	Frank Robicheaux
			Dominic	Leightyn Dooley
RS 18	Axel Doyle	Cait Brennan	Corey	
	Vince Martin	Ally Lawrence	Christian Martin	
RS 19	Phoenix Keogh	Raven Foster		
	Crow Foster			
RS 19	Wesley "Pigsty" O'Neal	Aasira "Sira" Al Aman		
RS 20	Ezekiel "Zeke" Wolfkill	Noelle Hart	Ezekiel ("Kiel")	Liz Divide
			Jane	Adam Robicheaux
RS 20	Elias Haggerty	Janie Granier		
RS 20	Russell "RJ" Jones	Celia Granier		

<i>RS</i>	Chad Taylor			
<i>RS</i>	Woody "Doc" Fine			
<i>RS</i>	(d) Tony Parks			
<i>RS</i>	(d) Alan Haley			
<i>RS</i>	Michael Bodwick	Miriam	Aspen	Ian Robicheaux
<i>RS</i>	Miguel Santos	Doug	Katrina	Nathan Redhawk
<i>RS</i>	Luke Robicheaux	Ajei Blackwood	Garrett	
<i>MSB 1</i>	Ian Shepard	Faith Gallagher	Kelsey Gallagher	Noa Lim
<i>MSB 2</i>	Noa Lim	Kelsey Gallagher		
<i>MSB 3</i>	Dave Carter	Ani Lim		

Book	Character Name	Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse
<i>MSB 4</i>	Lars Merrick	Jessica Fisher		
<i>MSB 5</i>	Trevor Banks	Ashley Dalton		
<i>MSB 5</i>	John Cruz	Camille Robicheaux		
<i>MSB 6</i>	Alec "Fitz" Fitzhenry	Zoe Myers		
<i>MSB 7</i>	Chris Paul	Elizabeth Broussard		
<i>MSB 8</i>	Luke O'Hara	Lucia Salvado		
<i>MSB 8</i>	Rory Baine	Piper Colley		
<i>MSB 8</i>	(d) Anthony Garcia			
<i>MSB</i>	Eric & Anna Tanner			
<i>SP 1</i>	Eric "Ghost" Stanton	Grace Easton	(d) Faith & Hope	
			Jack Tyran "JT"	
			Eric Ryan	
<i>SP 2</i>	Jack "Doc" Harris	Aubrey "Bree" Collins	Eva Irene	
<i>SP 3</i>	Wade "Whiskey" English	Katarina Krevnyv	Juliette Rose	
<i>SP 4</i>	Quincy "Zulu" Slater	Gabrielle London	Wade Eric	
			Tyler Gunner	
<i>SP 5</i>	Gunner Michaels	Darby Greer	Calla	Dalton Gibson
<i>SP 5</i>	Tyler "Tango" Green	Taylor Holland	Chase Maxwell	
<i>SP 7</i>	Diego "Razor" Salcedo	Isabella "Bella" Castro		
<i>SP 8</i>	Alex "Ace" Mills	Charlotte "CC Robot" Tabor	Alexander John "AJ"	
<i>SP 9</i>	Tyran "Eagle" O'Neal	Tinley Oakley	Tyran Eagle	
			Hawk Gunner	
			Benjamin Scott	

SP 9	Ryan "Hawk" O'Neal	Keegan Oakley		
SP 10	Scott "Skull" Crawford	Willa Ross (deceased) Avery O'Connor	Mathew Scott	
			Kevin Alexander	
SP 11	Benjamin "Blade" LeBlanc	Suzette Doiron	Benjamin Alfonse	
SP 12	Noah Anders	Tru Blanchard	William Rush	
SP 13	Tristan Evers	Emma Colvin	Hannah Ivana	
SP 14	Ivan Pechkin	Sophia Lord	William	
			Benjamin	
			Celeste	
			Cassidy	
			Carrie	

Book	Character Name	Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse
<i>SP 15</i>	Griffin "Griff" James	Amanda Nettles		
<i>SP 16</i>	Bryce Nolan	Ivy Brooks		
<i>SP 17</i>	Kingston Miles	Claire Evers		
<i>SP 18</i>	Grant Zimmerman	Everly "Evie" Johnson		
<i>SP</i>	Molly Walker	Asia	boy	
<i>SP</i>	George Robert Williamson	Mary		
<i>SP</i>	(d) Axel "Axe" Mains	(d) Decker "Ice" McManus		
<i>SP</i>	James Scarlutti			
<i>SP</i>	Chen Wu		Choi Wu	
<i>SP</i>	Ian Laughlin			
<i>SP</i>	Conor Laughlin			
<i>SP</i>	Vincent Scalia		(d) Isabella	
<i>SP 19</i>	Strikers Michaels	Violet Robicheaux		
<i>RP 1</i>	Dexter Lock	Marie Robicheaux		
<i>RP 2</i>	Jean Robicheaux	Rose "Ro" Evers		
<i>RP 3</i>	Jackson "Jax" Diaz	Joy "Ellie" Dougall		
<i>RP 4</i>	Hunter Michaels	Megan Scott		
<i>RP 5</i>	Carl Robicheaux	Penelope Georgianna "Georgie" Jordan		
<i>RP 6</i>	Alex "Sniff" Mullins	Lucy Robicheaux	Caroline Willa	
<i>RP 7</i>	Cameron "Cam" Dougall	Kate Robicheaux	Ian William	
<i>RP 8</i>	Keith Robicheaux	Suzette "Susie" Redhawk	Joseph Alec Keith (JAK)	
<i>RP 9</i>	Eric Bongard	Sophia Ann Redhawk	Billy Joseph	

<i>RP 10</i>	Joseph Redhawk	Julia Anderson	Joseph Billy (JB)	
			Tobias Franklin	
<i>RP 11</i>	Ryan Robicheaux (Holden)	Paige Anderson	Dan Antoine	
<i>RP 12</i>	Nathan Redhawk	Katrina Santos	Nathan Luke	
			Michael Douglas	
<i>RP 13</i>	Ben Robicheaux	Harper Miller		
<i>RP 14</i>	Sean Liffey	Shay Miller		
<i>RP 15</i>	Ezekiel 'Kiel' Wolfkill	Elizabeth 'Liz' Robicheaux	Everett Baptiste	
			Eastman Matthew	
			Ethan Ezekiel	

Book	Character Name	Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse
<i>RP 16</i>	Ian Robicheaux	Aspen Bodwick		
<i>RP 17</i>	Adam Robicheaux	Jane Wolfkill		
<i>RP 18</i>	Marc Jordan	Ela Wolfkill		
<i>RP 19</i>	Wes Jordan	Virginia Divide	Patrick Jasper	
			Christopher Luke	
			Sadie Allison	
<i>RP 20</i>	Aiden Wagner	Brit Elig		
<i>RP 21</i>	Devin Parker	Danielle 'Dani' MacMillan		
<i>RP 22</i>	Dalton Gibson	Calla Michaels		
<i>RP 23</i>	Frank Robicheaux	Lane Quinn		
	Jake Fornet	Claudette Robicheaux		
<i>RP 24</i>	Hirohito Tanaka	Winter Cole		
<i>RP 25</i>	Dominic 'Dom' Quinn	Leightyn Dooley	Conor Dooley Quinn	
<i>RP 26</i>	Bron Jones	Mila Lambton		
	Thomas Bradshaw	May Wong		
<i>RP 27</i>	Patrick Fitch	Carsen Benoit	Alistair Thomas	
<i>RP 28</i>	Charles Corbett 'CC' Neill	Eva Harris		
<i>RP 29</i>	Callan Battle	Juliette English		
<i>RP 30</i>	Duncan Adams	Lindsay Pollard		
<i>RP 31</i>	Remy Robicheaux	Charlotte Guthrie		
<i>RP 32</i>	Garrett Robicheaux	Celeste Pechkin		
<i>RP 33</i>	Robbie Robicheaux	Carrie Pechkin	Forrest Pierre	
<i>RP 34</i>	Cade Norgenson	Cassidy Pechkin		
<i>RP 35</i>	Bodhi Norgenson	Vivienne Green	Walker Sten	

RP 36	Magnus Bridges	Addie Patterson		
RP 37	Hex Vernon	Gwen N'hana	Sebastian Tadzee	
RP 38	Wade Slater	Hannah Evers	Patrick Garr	
RP 39	Sam Cooper	Mia Rogers		
RP 40	Tiger Slater	Hazel Bream		
RP 41	Jalen Carson	Stormy Rainwaters		
RP 42	Eric Ryan "Chief" Stanton	Rachel Davis	Ellie, Maddie, Emelia, Magnolia	
RP 43	Matthew Robicheaux	Irene Hebert	Gaspar, Pierre, Marie, Luc, Antoine, Claudette, Camille, Jean, Adele, Rachelle, Gabriel, Raphael, Baptiste, Suzette, Alec	

Book	Character Name	Spouse	Child	Child's Spouse
<i>RP 44</i>	Milo Abbott	Lia Goodwin		
<i>RP 45</i>	Nic "Torro" Torres	Melanie Fairfield		
<i>RP 46</i>	JT Stanton	Kennedy Rice		
<i>RP 47</i>	Chase Green	Maeve Korhonen		
<i>RP 48</i>	Will Pechkin	Brooke Ford		
<i>RP 49</i>	Benji Pechkin	Annie Lott		
<i>RP 50</i>	Will 'Bogey' Humphreys	Alice Evans		
<i>RP 51</i>	Tanner Sung	Micaela Vonn	(preg)	
<i>RP 52</i>	Moses 'Mo' Baird	Ophelia Baldwin		

OTHER BOOKS BY MARY KENNEDY YOU MIGHT ENJOY!

Series Name

(click to see the listing of individual books)

[Reaper Security](#)

[My SEAL Boys](#)

[Steel Patriots](#)

[REAPER-Patriots](#)

[Strange Gifts](#)

[Reaper Security](#)

[Erin's' Hero](#)

[Lauren's Warrior](#)

[Lena's' Mountain](#)

[Sara's' Chance](#)

[Mary's Angel](#)

[Kari's Gargoyle](#)

[Rachelle's Savior](#)

[Adele's Heart](#)

[Tory's' Secret](#)

[Finding Lily](#)

[Montana Rules](#)

[Savannah Rain](#)

[Gray Skies](#)

[My First Choice](#)

[Three Wishes](#)

[Second Chances](#)

[One Day at a Time](#)

[When You Least Expect It](#)

[Missing Hearts](#)

[Trail of Love](#)

My SEAL Boys

Ian

Noa

Carter

Lars

Trevor

Fitz

Chris

O'Hara

Steel Patriots

Ghost – Book One

Doc – Book Two

Whiskey – Book Three

Zulu – Book Four

Gunner – Book Five

Tango – Book Six

Razor – Book Seven

Ace – Book Eight

Hawk & Eagle – Book Nine

Skull – Book Ten

Blade – Book Eleven

Noah – Book Twelve

Tristan – Book Thirteen

Ivan – Book Fourteen

Griff – Book Fifteen

Bryce – Book Sixteen

King – Book Seventeen

Grant – Book Eighteen

Striker – Book Nineteen

REAPER-Patriots

Dex – Book One

Jean – Book Two

Jax – Book Three

Hunter – Book Four

Carl – Book Five

Sniff – Book Six

Cam – Book Seven

Keith – Book Eight

Eric – Book Nine

Joseph – Book Ten

Ryan – Book Eleven

Nathan – Book Twelve

Ben – Book Thirteen

Sean – Book Fourteen

Kiel – Book Fifteen

Ian – Book Sixteen

Adam – Book Seventeen

Marc – Book Eighteen

Wes – Book Nineteen

Aiden – Book Twenty

Parker – Book Twenty-one

Dalton – Book Twenty-two

Frank – Book Twenty-three

Hiro – Book Twenty-four

Dom – Book Twenty-five

Bron – Book Twenty-six

Fitch – Book Twenty-seven

CC – Book Twenty-eight

Callan – Book Twenty-nine

Duncan – Book Thirty

Remy – Book Thirty-one

Garrett – Book Thirty-two

Robbie – Book Thirty-three

[Cade – Book Thirty-four](#)

[Bodhi – Book Thirty-five](#)

[Magnus – Book Thirty-six](#)

[Hex – Book Thirty-seven](#)

[Wade – Book Thirty-eight](#)

[Sam – Book Thirty-nine](#)

[Tiger – Book Forty](#)

[Jalen – Book Forty-one](#)

[Chief – Book Forty-two](#)

[Matthew – Book Forty-three](#)

[Milo – Book Forty-four](#)

[Torro – Book Forty-five](#)

[JT – Book Forty-six](#)

[Chase – Book Forty-seven](#)

[Will – Book Forty-eight](#)

[Benji – Book Forty-nine](#)

[Bogey – Book Fifty](#)

[Tanner – Book Fifty-one](#)

[Mo – Book Fifty-two](#)

[RP Christmas: Do You Believe?](#)

[**Strange Gifts**](#)

[Dark Visions](#)

[Dark Medicine](#)

[Dark Flame](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Mary Kennedy is the mother of two adult children, has an amazing son-in-law, and is grandmother to two beautiful grandsons. She works full-time at a job she loves, and writing is her creative outlet. She lives in Texas and enjoys traveling, reading, and cooking. Her passion for assisting veterans and veteran causes comes from a strong military family background. Mary loves to hear from her readers and encourages them to join her mailing list, as she'll keep you up-to-date on new releases at <https://insatiableink.squarespace.com>. You can also join her Facebook page at Insatiable Ink.

Dear Readers,

I love hearing from you and encourage you to visit my website insatiableink.squarespace.com. Let me know your thoughts and ideas on new books or expanding on characters. It's also a safe space to give your own feelings, like those of the characters. I love reading about how you relate to the stories because as we all know, there's a little of each of them within us.

I look forward to hearing from you and hope you enjoy other books in my collections.

Explore... and enjoy!