Paradise Wild
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Chapter 1

April 9,1891

THE tall, slender, golden-haired young woman fidgetingIby the hall table fastened her startling green eyes onthe closed door at the left of the hall. She sighed. The sigh caused her younger cousin Lauren to look away from thewindow and ask, "For heaven's sake, Corinne, why are you so nervous?" Lauren Ashburn turned back to the win-dow and studied the chilly scene across the way, her brownhead tilted back. Boston Common looked so stark—rowupon row of ancient trees bending to the merciless wind tearing its way toward Beacon Street and this townhouse.

Even in April, Boston was not an easy place to live. The months of cold, harsh winds and the need to stayindoors much of the time had taken a toll on the cousins. Corinne was harder to please than usual, and even sweet-tempered Lauren found herself gloomy much of the time.

"It doesn't look as though spring is coming at all thisyear," Lauren sighed as she fingered the rich scarlet draperies.

Corinne glanced up, her golden brows drawing together over the marvelous emerald eyes. "How can you prattle about spring at a time like this?" she snapped. Her glance moved quickly to the closed door and then back to heryoung cousin.

Following her gaze, Lauren shrugged. "I would thinkyou'd be used to this by now. You've been through it twice in the last year alone."

Corinne's quick temper charged to the surface. "Ishouldn't expect you to understand!" she said bitterly. "You have years before suitors will come to speak to your father. Then well see how you like waiting while your future is decided by men—instead of by you."

Lauren's brown eyes filled. "I do understand, Cori. I'm sixteen, only three years younger than you."

Corinne instantly regretted her sharp words. Impulsive, she was always having to apologize for angry remarks.

"I'm sorry, Cousin. It's just that I'm so nervous thistime. Russell really is my last hope."

"Now why do you say that, Cori? You've had scoresof suitors for the last three years, all the most handsome and well-to-do men in Boston. Don't you know how beau-tiful you are? If Cousin Samuel says no to Russell, there will be plenty more for you to choose from."

"No, there wont be. There are very few men likeRussell."

Lauren smiled knowingly. "You mean there are veryfew men you can twirl around your little finger as you do Russell. Or the way you did Charles, and William beforethat."-

"Exactly. The others just won't do."

"Russell Drayton isn't quite as timid as the other twowere. I was really surprised when you chose him. But then, he*has* seemed to conform to your wishes."

"Russell and I have an understanding. He'll do just fine."

"I guess it's fortunate that you don't love him. At leastif your father refuses him, you won't be broken-hearted."

"I will never be broken-hearted," Corinne laughed. "ButRussell is going to exert himself, show he has some guts. He should be putting on quite a performance right now,"she said, nodding toward the closed study door. She frowned. "The interview shouldn't be taking this long."

"Why don't we wait in the parlor?" Lauren suggested. "This hall is too drafty."

"You go ahead. I couldn't sit stilL And I want to seeRussell the second he comes out."

Corinne rang the bell by the parlor door and the Bar-rows' butler appeared instantly from the back of the house."Brock, Miss Ashburn will have tea in the parlor."

"Yes, Miss Barrows," the dour Brock replied. "And Mr. Drayton? Will he be staying for dinner after the interview, miss?"

Corinne stiffened. It infuriated her that the householdstaff always knew everything. She had just that morningdecided that today would be appropriate for Russell to makehis plea, what with her father's congenial mood of the lastfew days.

"I will let you know, Brock," she replied sharply, dis-missing him.

At that moment the front door knocker sounded, startlingthe three. Brock moved to answer it, but Corinne stopped him, eager for any diversion. She opened the door andshivered as the chill wind swept past her into the hall, molding her blue muslin dress to her body.

The sharp, light-green eyes of a stranger met hers. Theman was small and slender, with bright red hair and longsideburns extending below his bowler hat, which he waswise enough to hold in place. He was a curious little ferret-like man with a beaked nose, wearing a tight-fitting browntweed suit.

"May I help you?" Corinne offered.

Ned Dougherty scrutinized the lovely blond girl care-fully with an eye for detail, a habit necessitated by hisprofession. His mind registered the dark-gold hair, the slightly arched brows, the large eyes of a brilliant, clear, greenish yellow, set perfectly over the modestly curved nose. Long eyelashes fanned high cheekbones. Her lipswere not too wide. Her smooth, ivory complexion and gently rounded chin blended beautifully with the lovelyface.

"May I help you?" she repeated, a little sharply.

Ned cleared his throat. Hers was a face he would not forget. Nor could anyone ignore the gleaming golden hairwith its coppery highlights.

"Is this the Samuel Barrows residence?"

"Yes."

Ned's sharp green eyes continued his examination, notingthe slim neck, the high, pointed breasts. The dress tapered to a tiny waist and he could guess at the slim hips and long legs. She seemed about five feet seven, rather tall for a girl.

"Sir, if you do not quickly state your business, I mustbid you good day." Corinne was growing impatient.

"Forgive me, miss, I am looking for a Samuel Barrowswho, many years ago, visited a group of islands in the Pacific known once as the Sandwich Islands, more recently as the Hawaiian Islands."

"You must have the wrong man."

"Are you quite sure, miss? It was a long time ago, nine-teen years. You could hardly have been in Mr. Barrowsemploy at that time, so you couldnt—"

"I beg your pardon," Corinne interrupted haughtily. "Mr. Barrows is my father."

"Forgive me again, Miss Barrows," Ned said in embar-rassment. This girl's beauty had a disturbing effect on him."I only assumed—"

"I know what you assumed. Now good day!"

Ned Dougherty held up his hand as she started to close the door. "Are you positive you know of all your father'stravels?"

"Yes!" she snapped, and slammed the door angrily. But then a distant memory floated into her mind and she quick-ly opened the door again.

"Wait!" she called, stopping the little man as he turnedaway. She smiled apologetically. "Now I must ask you toforgive me, sir. My father has been to the Hawaiian islands. He told me about it when I was a child. I'm afraid I had forgotten."

Ned Dougherty's eyes lit up. "This was nineteen yearsago?"

"Exactly," she admitted. "He was there when I was bom.Did you wish to see him?"

"No thank you, Miss Barrows. Good day to you."

"Wait! I don't understand," she called after him, but hewas already hurrying down the street.

"Well, botheration!" she cursed aloud. "What a rude lit-tle man!"

Corinne slammed the door shut on the cold evening. Turning, she sighed and faced the empty hall. She studied the many sofas and padded benches against the walls, the large unlit chandelier used for formal gatherings, mirrors, the pictures which were said to have come from Englandwith her ancestors. All these

riches and for what? Her father kept the purse strings closed tightly.

Corinne started for the closed door, fed up with waiting.

It opened suddenly, and Russell stormed out. Seeing hisangry countenance, she ventured reluctantly, "He said no?""He said no," Russell answered tightly. "He said abso-lutelyno!"

Corinne grabbed his arm. "I don't understand. Didn'tyou say what I told you to say?""Yes."

"And you stood up to him?""Yes, Corinne, yes!"Then why?" she pleaded in confusion. "He saw through me, he said," Russell replied despondently. "God, if he only knew!"

"Knew what? What are you talking about?""It doesn't matter, Corinne. He has had us followed for months. Nothing could make him believe I'm not the spineless fool he accused me of being.""Russell!"

"I don't want to talk about it now. I'll see you later atthe club."

He left the house without another word. Corinne stoodnumbly in the middle of the hall. She genuinely liked Rus-sell. He was by far the most handsome man she had everseen, even though he was a bit too thin and had a beardthat irritated her sensitive skin. But Russell was pliable,ready to bow to her wishes. And they were so well suited. He was tall enough for her own ungainly height, and theyenjoyed so many of the, same things. They especially en-joyed Corinne's one obsession, which was gambling. Thoughshe really didn't know that much about Russell, he mustbe wealthy or he wouldn't be able to afford gambling almostnightly. His wealth meant that she didn't have to worrythat he was after the money she would inherit when shemarried.

It wasn't fair. In the last year her father had changedfrom the loving, tolerant man she had always adored into an obstinant tyrant. He was thwarting her every move.

Corinne's temper, always quick, bubbled now into out-raged fury. She marched into her father's study and glaredat him across his large desk.

"What are you trying to do to me?" she demanded loudly, not caring who heard her.

"Now, Cori, honey," Samuel Barrows began in a conciliatory voice. "I knew you would be upset, but there'sno reason to be."

"No reason!" she countered. "No reason?" She startedto pace back and forth before his desk. "When you turnedWilliam down, I thought perhaps you had a good explana-tion. Then when you refused Charles' suit, I thought youwere being cautious. After all, Charles was only vice-presi-dent of a bank, and though his family was from soundstock and modestly wealthy, they couldn't compare to our family, or the fortune I will inherit." She faced him again. "But what could have made you say no to Russell?""He's not the man for you, Cori."

"How can you say that? He's the man Iwant to marry! You've taught me to go after what I want!"

"I should have taught you better judgement," Samuelreplied, lowering his light brown eyes. "I've given you toomuch freedom for a girl. It will have to be a strong man indeed who can control you."

Her emerald eyes sparkled. "But I don't want a strongman. I've lived all my life with a man like that—you! Our battle of wills has been challenging, but I want to live the rest of my life in peace."

"You mean you want everything the way you want it, no matter whether your judgement is sound or not?"

"I want control of my life! Is that too much to ask?" she demanded.

Samuel met her cold stare. "Girl, you have proved overthis last year that you're not wise enough to have that control yet."

Corinne started to retort, but quickly remembered Rus-sell saying that her father had had them followed. So heknew about her gambling. And she had taken such pains to be secretive about it, so that he would not guess where her generous monthly spending money went.

"I will admit that my judgement is not always sound, but it will improve in time," Corinne said reluctantly.

"I can only pray that time comes within the next two years," Samuel returned.

Corinne's anger sparked again. "Do you intend to keepme under your rule till then? Are you saying I can't marry until then?"

"No, blast it all!" Samuel finally lost his patience. "I'm trying to save you from yourself. You're so eager to getyour hands on your trust that you don't care who youmarry. For God's sake, Corinne, can't you wait just twomore years? Then you'll have your grandmother's money and can marry with or without my approval."

"By then I won't need to marry!" she cried in frustration and stormed from the room.

Samuel Barrows leaned back in his velour chair and sighed. No one could say that hot-headed girl wasn't his daughter. Stubborn, determined, impatient, and decidedly short-tempered, she was just like him. It was fortunate that Daneil Stayton had stipulated that her granddaughter couldn't marry without her father's consent until she reached twenty-one. Daneil knew the impulsiveness of youth. She had assumed that Corinne would mature enoughby twenty-one to make her own decisions. Samuel won-dered.

It was his own fault, he admitted that. He had allowed his only child independence, and at too early an age. He had given her freedom to develop, and had not restricted her just because she was a female. He had been warnedrepeatedly by his family that he would regret his decision one day, and now he did.

The best thing he could do for his daughter would beto choose her husband for her while she was still underhis control. He would see that she married a strong fel-low, not some spineless jackass who would let her continueher wild ways. But where could he find a man with a will stronger than Corinne's and find him within the next twoyears?

Chapter 2

HALFWAY around the world, in the Pacific Ocean, laythe group of islands recently named Hawaii. The awesome loveliness of these islands—considered by some historians to be the site of the Garden of Eden—put visitors in mind of calm, peace, and delightfully easy living. Since the islands' discovery by Captain Cook, many visitors had become permanent residents, unwilling to give up the bril-liant colors, the exotic plants and birds, and the delightfulocean hi order to return to their less hospitable homes.

Because of the great number of foreign settlers, all was not peaceful in Hawaii in 1891. The Hawaiian natives hadjust lost their beloved king, often called the Merry Mon-arch, and his sister reigned in uneasy office in the newlybuilt Iolana Palace in Honolulu. The palace, the first royalresidence in the world to be furnished with flush toiletsand lit entirely by electricity, was soon to be the scene of a confrontation between loyal monarchists and foreign set-tlers. In April of 1891, it was the felicitous nature of the Hawaiian natives that kept the peace on Oahu.

Twenty-seven-year-old Jared Burkett had been born on Oahu. He carried the mixed blood of Europe and Hawaii. And though his Hawaiian friends trusted and loved him and his European friends respected his pride in Hawaii, it couldnot be said of Jared that he possessed the gentle nature of his Hawaiian ancestors. Jared was not an easygoing man. His one weakness was his younger sister, Malia.

Thirty-one years before, Jared's father, Rodney, andRodney's brother, Edmond, had spent three years buildingtheir city home here on Oahu, the island with the greatestnumber of foreign settlers and boasting the most com-merce. Having built the house, Rodney decided to marry. The marriage caused a permanent rupture in his relationshipwith his brother. Edmond violently objected to Ranelle. Though she was an American and had grown up with American ways, she had Hawaiian ancestors. Edmond felt that his brother was marrying a woman of color. Even the daily sight of Hawaiians could not make him change hisharsh attitude.

Edmond Burkett relinquished all rights to the new house he had helped build, and moved into the city, closer to theoffice of the loan company the brothers had started. Be-cause of their disagreements, Rodney left the running ofthe company to Edmond and concentrated on other inter-ests, mainly land.

For the most part, foreigners were not allowed to buy land anywhere on Hawaii. But because of Ranelle and herdistant Hawaiian relations, Rodney was able to buy tracts of land on the north shore of Oahu. Here he started a small sugar plantation, not to compare with the larger plantations, but big enough to join the island's major industry.

With the profits from his sugar and the loan company, Rodney started a carpentry business. He dealt first in ships'repairs and later included the construction of houses. He made a small fortune. This fortune was lost, however, in1872, when business and agricultural interests were at alow ebb. The sugar plantation lost money and was even-tually abandoned. Only the loan company prospered dur-ing those bleak years.

During this time Rodney's marriage deteriorated. Hiswife's hopeless melancholia affected his business. AfterRanelle died, it took a long time for Rodney to pull him-self together and put the business back on its feet.

By the time Rodney Burkett died in a sailing accident, leaving all his possessions to his two children, his estate hadimproved.

His only son, Jared, now occupied the house on BeretaniaStreet. The area was now part of Honolulu, the city havingcaught up to it years ago. Jared's sister, Malia, younger byten years, lived most of each year at their beach house onthe north shore of the island, on the land that had once been a sugar plantation.

Jared Burkett had proved to one and all that he wascapable of taking his father's place. Rodney Burkett hadraised a son he could be proud of. Jared was a man whowould never succumb to a problem, no matter how diffi-cult it was. The community respected Jared, and feared him a little. He never backed down from a fight.

In the American community, Jared defended his Hawaiianheritage because of his pride in it. Among the Hawaiians,he was worthy to be called a friend.

After his mother's death, he had become withdrawn andmoody. That was to be expected, but it never went away.Bitterness grew in Jared, becoming a festering hate. This hate had eaten away at young Jared for sixteen years, sincethe day of his mother's death.

Today, so many years after that death, the solution forpurging himself of that hate once and for all had come to Jared by way of a letter.

Now, on the way to his uncle's office at the Savings and Loan Company, Jared read the letter for what was surely the tenth time.

Dear Mr. Burkett,

It gives me great pleasure to bring you good news sosoon after receiving your letter. You employed me tofind a Samuel Barrows, who nineteen years ago visitedyour faraway islands, and this I have done.

Following your instructions, I began the search in my city of Boston and found this man with little difficulty, since he is a very respected and prominent member ofBoston society. He resides on Beacon Street in the ex-clusive residential district in the Back Bay area of thecity. His wealth derives from many sources. His most well-known interest is his ship building firm, one of thelargest in the state of Massachusetts.

I have no doubt that this is the Samuel Barrows youwished to locate. If I can serve you further, I am at yourdisposal.

Your servant, Ned Dougherty

Jared put the letter in the pocket of his white tropicalsuit as the carriage halted on Fort Street. He looked up atthe old two-storied pink building, badly in need of paint.But it looked no worse than the other buildings lining thestreet in this old section of the city.

Edmond Burkett's office was on the second floor, and Jared climbed the stairs slowly, dreading the encounter be-fore him. There was no love lost between uncle and nephew. For as long as Jared could remember, his uncle had been astranger to his family. Jared had been seven years old be-fore he met Edmond Burkett, though they lived less than amile apart. But he knew the reason why Edmond wouldnot associate with his relatives on the island. It was Jared'smother.

Edmond had not been able to adjust to the mixed na-tionalities of the islands. A man of bitter prejudices, henever forgave Rodney for marrying a woman with Hawai-ian blood, even though very little of it still remained in her. His dislike for Ranelle extended to her children, and to Jared in particular because of the boy's pride in his heritage. Though Rodney and Edmond were reconciled after Ra-nelle's death, Edmond would still have nothing to do withher children. Jared and Malia returned Edmond's animosity.

Now, however, Jared was an equal partner with Edmondin the loan company, and was forced to associate with him. Each of them made an effort to put up a good front. Infact, Jared took particular pleasure in sometimes being overly friendly, knowing how this rankled his churlishuncle.

The secretary in Edmond's outer office smiled brightlywhen Jared came in. Jane Dearing was an

unmarriedyoung woman, recently arrived from New York. She had aspecial interest in Jared Burkett. Jared's rugged, dark hand-someness made heads turn. His gray-blue eyes contrastedstartlingly with his black hair. Jared was very tall, six feet two inches, with a firm, athletic body. Jane was envious of Dayna Callan, the woman he most frequently escorted about the city. So were a great many women. Dayna and Jared had been friends since childhood, and it was assumed that they would marry eventually. But the women of thecity were not ready to give up on Jared. Jane Dearingwasn't either.

"Mr. Burkett." Jane's blue eyes sparkled. "It's such a pleasure to see you."

Her interest was obvious and Jared smiled uncomfort-ably. "Is my uncle in, Miss Dearing?"

"Yes, but he is with Mr. Carlstead right now. The poorman came to see him about an extension on his loan. His tobacco crop wasn't very good this year, I'm afraid."

Jared frowned. Lloyd Carlstead was a good sort, aSwede with a large family of youngsters and a plump,kind-hearted wife. Their small farm barely supported them,but it was on prime land near the city, land Jared knewhis uncle would be interested in. Edmond probably wouldforeclose.

It was well-known that the Burketts did not see eye to eye on running the company. But Jared had relinquished the responsibility of management to Edmond, since his in-terests were elsewhere. And it did no good to argue for theindividual Edmond caused to go bankrupt, for he would always end the argument with, "Either devote your timefully to this company, sell out to me, or abide by my deci-sions!"

Soon, Lloyd Carlstead rushed out of Edmond's office, hishands clenched, his face beet-red. He passed Jared without even seeing him and ran down the outer stairs to the street. Jared gritted his teeth. The poor man was probably ruined, and all because he had had the poor judgement to come to Edmond Burkett for a loan.

But Jared could not fight someone else's battles today. He needed his uncle's cooperation now, and perhaps some of his money—though he would not ask for it. He hopedLloyd Carlstead would find help elsewhere.

"I'll just go on in, Miss Dearing," Jared said lightly. "Noneed to announce me."

"Certainly, Mr. Burkett. I'm sure your uncle will be de-lighted to see you."

Jared smiled at that. Miss Dearing really did try toohard. He really should take her out to dinner some night, let her find out just how hopeless it was to please him. Then she would turn tail and run. It would be the bestthing for her.

Jared strolled casually into his uncle's cool office and closed the door. With windows open wide on both sides of the large room and fans revolving continuously over-head, it really was a pleasant room. Edmond liked to dis-play his wealth, and he did that in his office. Surprisingly, the plush furniture and thick carpeting did not take awayfrom the cool effect.

"How's business, Uncle?" Jared began. Edmond's self-satisfied smirk was his answer.

"Good, good. And I hear you're not doing too badlyyourself," Edmond said expansively, and motioned Jaredto one of the chairs across from his desk. "The contractyou won for that new hotel in Waikiki—now, that was a pretty deal. I always encouraged Rodney to build hotels, but he wasn't up to the challenge, preferring to stick tohouses and small stores. You don't get your name remem-bered that

way."

"That wasn't exactly why I went after the hotel job," Jared replied, his gray-blue eyes unreadable. "It means alot of work for my men over an extended period of time."

"Of course. They'll get lazy if you don't keep thembusy."

"No," Jared said coldly. "I don't happen to have that problem."

"Then you're more fortunate than the rest of us," Ed-mond laughed derisively.

Jared wasn't about to argue. His uncle was set in hisbeliefs that all Hawaiians were lazy, good-for-nothings. Thatwas ridiculous, but you couldn't tell Edmond anything.

"What brings you here, Jared?" Edmond asked. "Any-thing important?"

The older man leaned back in his chair. The resemblancebetween Edmond and his father always amazed Jared. Ed- mond was forty-seven now, with dark blue eyes and sandybrown hair without a trace of gray. He was six feet tall.

"I'm taking a vacation, Uncle." Jared came out with it smoothly. "I thought you'd like to know."

"That's nothing new," Edmond said blandly. "You takeoff every year to the beach during the hottest summermonths, just like your father did. Can't say I blame you, though. If I owned land over there, I'd do the same thing. Damn hot on this side in June and July."

"You're welcome to visit Malia in the country, Uncle, if you find it too hot here. But I won't be there. I'm going to the mainland."

Edmond's interest was caught. "The States? Well that's different matter. Funny, though, when you froze your knuckles going to college in the mainland, you swore youwould never go back there."

Jared grimaced at the memory of those winters. He never did get used to the cold. "It will be summer there too, so it won't be bad." «

"I've been meaning to get over there myself," Edmondreflected. "God, it's been fifteen years since I'Ve been offthis rock, and that was only a trip to the big island to in-spect property offered as collateral. If I could just find an assistant competent enough to take over for me, I might be able to get off for a vacation too, but that seems impossible. Colby, the man I've got now, is about to be fired."

Jared didn't want to talk about company problems. Ifhis uncle only knew how difficult he was to work for, he'dknow why he had fired so many assistants.

"Actually, Uncle, my trip won't be just for pleasure. I've been thinking for quite a while about putting somemoney in a mainland enterprise. They have much more tooffer over there in the way of sound investment. Iron, tim-ber, and steel, bigger banks and shipyards than we have, among other things."

"But you can't keep an eye on your money over there," Edmond pointed out.

'True," Jared agreed. "But that wouldn't be necessaryif I invested in an established firm. I could just sit

backhere and reap the profits."

Edmond's blue eyes gleamed at the mention of profits."Where in the States were you planning on going?"

"The East coast—New York or Boston."

"Good choice," Edmond replied thoughtfully, tapping afinger lightly on his desk. "And how much will you want to take with you when you go?"

Jared waited a moment before answering. "Five hundred thousand."

Edmond sat up and nearly choked. "Good God, mantThat's nearly all the cash you have!"

"I know," Jared said with a light grin.

"Wouldn't half of that do?"

"I'm not going to lose money, Uncle," Jared said confi-dently. "I'm going to make it."

"But still—"

Jared held up his hand. "If you don't think it's wise forme to tie up all my cash, even though I should have amplereturn in a year, why don't you invest a little yourself?

Say...a hundred thousand? It would be safe, since Iwould guarantee it myself."

Edmond came to a quick decision. "Since you do guaran-tee it, I will give you half. But you must leave the sameamount here to cover it."

"Very well." Jared relented, smiling to himself.

That was more than he had counted on. Now if all the money was lost in what he planned to do, he would not bebroke, and he would have a year or more to repay his uncle. He knew that greed was why Edmond was helping him, but nonetheless, he was helping. If only he knew what he was helping to do!

"How soon will you need the cash?"

"I sail in five days, on Sunday."

"So soon?"

"I have everything in order, Uncle. All that remains is a quick trip out to Sunset Beach to say good-bye to Malia." Jared grinned mischievously. "You will keep an eye on herwhile I'm gone, won't you?"

Edmond's eyes widened slightly. "She'll be with all thoseold relations of yours. I doubt I'll be getting out that way."

"Well, you know how she likes to come to the city forthe winter season. Too many harsh storms on the north shore that time of year."

Edmond became flustered. "Look here, Jared. The stormsdon't come until October or November. Just

how long doyou plan to be in the mainland?"

"I can't honestly say. Three months, four—but you neverknow. Possibly six. You don't want me to jump into any-thing quickly, now do you? It will take time to investigate, to be sure our money is safe."

Edmond sighed. Jared knew damn well he didn't wantto be responsible for Malia. His little sister could be quitetrying at times and she needed a close watch now that shewas almost eighteen.

Jared smiled to himself. He would never trust her toEdmond's care, but it amused him to have his uncle thinkhe was responsible for the young girl. Of course, it wouldreally be Leonaka Naihe who would protect her. But whylet his uncle off the hook by telling him that? Jared enjoyed the consternation on his uncle's face.

Chapter 3

NANEKI Kapuakele heard the carriage pull off Bere-tania Street into the driveway, and she ran to the front of the house to peer out the window. It was only themiddle of the afternoon, too early for Jared to come home, yet there he was, stepping out of the carriage and comingup the flower-lined walkway.

How he reminded Naneki of her dead husband, Peni—tall and godlike, carrying himself like an ancient warrior. Peni Kapuakele might have been a great chief if he hadlived in the old days. He would have been right there be-side King Kamahamaha, helping to unite the islands.

Peni was dead. *Ua hele i ke ala-maaweiki*. He has gone on the narrow-stranded way. And Jared was alive. So likePeni, proud, arrogant, forceful. It did not matter that hewas not pure Hawaiian as Peni had been, that he had only a small speck of Hawaiian blood left in him. She was *hapa-haole* herself, half white, half Hawaiian. Jared's heart was Hawaiian, and his strength. And he was hers, taking the place of her lost Peni.

Naneki ran a hand through her thick black hah* and smoothed down her pink and white floral *muumuu*. Shewished she were wearing just a simple sarong, which wouldcling to her hips and reveal her long, graceful legs. That was all she would wear when she was in the country with Malia. But here in the city, Jared would not let her dressso scantily because of the many visitors who came to his house on Beretania Street.

When Jared opened the door, Naneki was there to greethim. She was a tall girl of gentle grace. She had only tolook up a few inches to meet his eyes.

"Hello, Passion Flower."

were alone and he was in good spirits. But this was not often, for this young man was much troubled.

"You home early, Ialeka." She called him by his Hawai-ian name as did most of his local friends.

"So I am." He moved into the large living room and threw his wide-brimmed straw hat on a nearby chair. "Would you fix me a rum punch?"

She hesitated, her curiosity aroused. "But why you home so early?"

He sat down on the end of the brown-and-gold sofa and leaned back with his hands hooked behind his head. "The drink first."

Naneki shrugged as if she didn't care, then hurried outof the room and was back in a minute with a tall glass oficed punch. She went to a long bar against the back walland added a liberal dose of rum, then handed it to him. He drank half, set it down, then pulled Naneki onto his lap.

She giggled and pressed her face to his neck, nibblingsoftly there. "So this why you come home, eh? You likemake love?"

Jared sighed contentedly and kneeded one plump breastthrough the thin cotton of her*muumuu*. He would miss Naneki while he was gone. She was the perfect mistress, undemanding, there when he needed her. She never com-plained, except when he left her in the country with hissister.

She was the adopted daughter of his cook, housekeeper, and distant relative, Akela Kamanu, that great Hawaiianwoman who had raised Malia since her birth. She had raised Naneki too, taking her in when she was abandoned by her Hawaiian mother because Naneki's father had been ahaole, white man. Naneki was Malia's closest friend, beingonly a year older and growing up in the same household, but she also served the Burkett family.

He would not have touched her if she were not a widow. She had been married young, but the marriage had lasted only three months. She had a daughter from that marriage, and little Noelani needed a father. Jared would have to see about finding Naneki another husband someday soon. Hewas being selfish in keeping her to himself.

He had considered marrying her and raising Noelani ashis own. The little two-year-old already called <u>him</u> papa.

But Naneki had loved Peni Kapuakele too much. Peni would always be there, even though he was dead. And Jared would never marry a woman who had had a firstlove. He knew what that could do to a marriage. He knewwhat it had done to his parents' marriage.

Jared kissed Naneki's lips tenderly, then with more de-termination. He rose with her in his arms and carried herupstairs to her room. There he set her down and she pulled her long flowing muumuu, her only garment, over her headand tossed it over the wooden bed frame at the bottom ofher bed. She lay down and stretched invitingly, her blackeyes half shadowed with drooping lids, her full lips slightly parted.

Jared quickly discarded his own clothes and joined her on the narrow bed. While his lips claimed hers again, heran a hand over the smooth brown skin he knew so well, over the full, large breasts, then down her narrow waist. She was built so firmly, had played in the ocean for so many years, that he did not need to worry about hurting her with his strong hands. She was a match for him. Andshe welcomed him now, opening her legs so that he could plunge into her,

She received all of his long shaft easily. Jared held backuntil she reached her pleasure before he gave in to his own. When he was spent, he collapsed on her, resting his headon her shoulder.

"You need bath now," she said softly as she traced herfingers over his sweaty back.

Jared only grunted and rolled over to let her up. Theroom was intolerably hot. The afternoon sun blazed

through the open window, and there was very little breeze. He should have taken her to one of the empty rooms on the other side of the house, one that caught the morning sun and was cooler in the afternoon.

Naneki never asked why he wouldn't bring her to hisown room, which was across from hers. He was glad hedidn't have to defend his desire for complete privacy there. He did not want to be faced with asking a woman to leavehis bed after he had finished with her, but his need forsolitude soon would force himto do so. It was much easier for him to simply slip away afterwards.

While Naneki left to fun his bath, Jared wondered if hisdesire for privacy had anything to do with those terribledreams that sometimes made him cry out in the night. Itwas likely. He didn't want to share those vivid memorieswith anyone.

He guessed that the women he had known didn't con-sider him a determined lover. He came to them only when he needed them, and he never attached himself to any onewoman. He was careful in his choices, having nothing to do with virgins, and staying away from whorehouses for health reasons. Widows were his first choice, and then the promis-cuous daughters of acquaintances who asked for what theygot. Nothing infuriated Jared more than a tease, or gave him more pleasure than showing one that she couldn't triflewith *Jared Burkett. He considered himself fortunate thatno particular woman had a hold on him. He knew whatlove could do to a man, how destructive it could be.

He would probably marry Dayna Callan one day—theyhad never spoken of it, but Jared assumed she was waitingfor him. They were friends now, not lovers, and Jared was hoping he might find a woman with more passion than Dayna seemed to have. At twenty-five, she was lovely, quiet, and unassuming. She had never been in love. Jared was sure of this and it was why he considered Dayna for hiswife.

Leonaka, Jared, and Dayna had been a constant three-some as children growing up on the north shore together. The two friends always knew how to bring Jared out ofhis dark moods. But to marry Dayna? Ah, would he evermake up his mind? It would be like marrying a saint, andhe wasn't quite sure he could stand that. He had nevereven embraced her in anything but friendship. How couldhe bring himself to make love to her? But she was probablyjust what he needed. With Dayna, there would be no strifein his life other than that of his own making.

Naneki came back into the room. "Water ready, big bossman."

She was still in a playful mood, so he asked, "Will youjoin me?"

She nodded and started to pull him up from the bed, butlet him go before he sat up completely. "Why else youcome home so early, Ialeka? I never see you this time ofday before unless we in country."

Jaxed got up and whacked her on the behind. "Afterwe bathe we have some packing to do."

She brightened. "We going home?"

"You are. You came to Honolulu for some shopping and you stayed three months. How will you explain that when you get home?"

"Akela knows. She happy I take care of you."

Jared grunted. "Malia doesn't know."

"Malia is my friend. She not think bad of me," Nanekisaid with a slight grin.

"Regardless, I don't want her to know." Jared frowned. "You understand that, Naneki?"

She nodded, but she warned him again, "You alwaysspoil Malia. You no let her grow up." When Jared's eyes turned a steely gray she added quickly, "But I understand.Come."

Jared's mood had changed. "There's no more time toplay, Naneki. We will leave first thing in the morning. I have to be back in Honolulu by Friday. I'm leaving Sundayfor the mainland."

"Like when you went college?"

"No, this is business."

"How long? You will miss your summer months in Sun-set?"

"Yes. But I will try to be back by Christmas."

Naneki tried to hide her disappointment. "That is verylong time away."

Jared came to her and kissed her lightly. "While I'mgone you should start looking for a new husband. Noelani needs a father."

She grinned. "Whenyou marry? I no seeyou running tochurch."

"One of these days, I will."

"With Miss Callan. I like her, I no mind share you with her."

Jared sighed in exasperation and pulled her along withhim to the bath. "Just remember what I said. Start looking for a husband."

Chapter 4

NED Dougherty's office was on the south side of Bos-ton. Hardly an office, it was just a small room above a tavern. There were a cluttered desk, two chairs, and file cabinets crammed into the small space. As Jared sat across from the red-haired man, he began having second thoughtsabout being there. Whatever he had expected to find, itcertainly wasn't this.

Ned's appraising look took in Jared's expensive suit,his aura of strength, and he noted a bit of ruthlessness inthe sharp blue-gray eyes. This was a man who got whathe wanted, and Ned anticipated profiting from whateverhe wanted.

"I can honestly say, Mr. Burkett, that I didn't think Iwould hear from you again. And I certainly didn't expectto meet you. Your business must be pretty important to bring you here all the way from Hawaii."

Jared decided to be frank. If this man could accomplish what he wanted, then he didn't mind paying an outlandishfee for it.

"What I plan to do in Boston is very important to me," Jared said as he glanced about the office. "But I'm not quitesure you're up to it, Mr. Dougherty."

"Don't let the size and location of my office fool you,"Ned replied defensively. "The larger investigating firms have bigger expenses and charge their clients more. I get more clients."

"Do you work alone?"

"I get help when I need it." Ned leaned back and smiled."I can see by that wary look that you have doubts aboutme. Let me assure you that I have never disappointed aclient. Whether I am investigating a firm, finding a missingperson, or trailing a wayward wife, I do get results. I'veeven helped solve a few murders."

Jared was not impressed. "I need not only information, Mr. Dougherty, but publicity as well."

"I have a cousin and a few friends who work for thenewspapers."

"I will need to be well-known in this city within a very short time—in about a month."

"No problem, Mr. Burkett."

"Very well, then, I will take a chance on you, Mr.Dougherty. But I wouldn't like to be disappointed."

The threat was obvious and Ned felt a slight chill racedown his back. He shrugged it off.

"I'm curious to know how you found me, Mr. Burkett. Have you been to Boston before?"

Jared began to relax. "No. I got your name from a col-lege friend in the States. He told an amusing story aroundschool about his grandfather hiring you to follow his grand-mother, suspecting her, at seventy-two, of having an affair."

Ned laughed, relieving the tension. "I remember that oldman quite well. It was the most ridiculous case I everworked on."

"I imagine so. But I never forgot your name," Jared admitted. "I knew even then that I would have need of you one day."

"Well then, Mr. Burkett, I'm sure we will accomplish what you want done, if you'll just tell me what it is."

Jared's eyes held a cold gray glint. "I want informationon Samuel Barrows, especially about his business interests, the extent of his wealth, and how much reserve he has. Iwant to know everything about the man, his associates, and his family. I want to know his future plans, how heworks, his weaknesses, and his habits."

Ned nodded. "It will probably take about two weeks toget what you want. Since gathering information is prettyroutine, I don't foresee any problems."

"Fine. Now, about the publicity. You will start on thatimmediately. As I said before, I want to be well-knownabout town. I want to be talked about in the highest finan-cial circles, especially in Samuel Barrows' circle."

The little detective picked up a notebook and pen andleaned over his desk. "I'll need facts about you, then."

Jared grinned. "Jared Burk, millionaire from the West Coast, here to invest money. That's all you need to know."

"I don't understand."

Jared rose from his chair. "You don't have to understand. The name and facts I just gave you are false. I don't want my real identity known. But I do intend to invest somemoney if the circumstances are right. You might recom- mend a good lawyer."

Ned's curiosity was aroused. "You want to be a man ofmystery, then?"

"Exactly."

"Very well." Ned came around his desk to shake hands. "I'll get the name of a lawyer to you in a few days. Wherecan I reach you?"

"I checked into the Plaza this morning as Jared Burk."

The ride back to the hotel was pleasant. Jared had the driver take a short tour of the city first. The weather was a brisk sixty-five degrees on this early June day, warm for Bostonians, but chilly compared to Hawaii. Jared hopedhe would not have to stay here too long, especially into the colder months.

The carriage entered the Back Bay area. When Jaredsaw the Beacon Street sign, his whole body went stiff. Which one of these tall townhouses belonged to SamuelBarrows? Whichever one it was, Jared would be invited to that house soon. He would make Samuel Barrows' ac-quaintance. And then somehow, in some way, he would break the man, ruin him. Killing was too quick. Jared wanted him to live a broken man, to know what hadhappened, and why.

Jared remembered the first time he had heard the nameSamuel Barrows spoken from his mother's lips. He had beenseven years old. Life was good. He lived in the countrywith his mother, while his father tended business in Hono-lulu many miles away, making frequent visits to his family.

Jared and Leonaka were just beginning to learn respon-sibility, being allowed to help plant sugar cane. But theywere quick to slip away to the beach and meet Dayna. The beach was their playground, surfboards their toys. Oneday when Jared stole away to the beach by himself hefound his mother there, walking hand in hand with a tallman he had never seen before. That night he asked hismother who the strange haole was, and she told him. SamuelBarrows, an old friend from Boston, where his mothercame from.

A week later his father came home and for the first time in his life Jared heard his parents fighting. They were in the enclosed patio at the back of the house and were un-aware that Jared was in the back yard, only a few feet away.

"Who in damnation is this man John Pierce saw you em-bracing?" Rodney Burkett had begun.

"John?"

"Yes, our neighbor! He.came all the way to Honolulujust to tell me what he saw—you and another man behaving in an unseemly manner on the beach!"

"There is no reason for you to be upset," Ranelle an-swered in a quiet voice. "It was just Samuel Barrows, andwe embraced only to say good-bye.". "Barrows? The man you were supposed to marry? The man who married an heiress instead, because his familyneeded money?"

"Yes, I told you about him."

"What in God's name was he doing here?"

There was a long pause. "He—he came for me. He saidhe still loved me."

Something shattered against a wall, a glass or a vase."He still loves you! What about his rich wife? Did sheconveniently die?"

"Rodney, I told you there is no reason to get upset." Ranelle started crying. "He's gone now, gone back to Bos-ton."

"You didn't answer my question, Ranelle. Is he a freeman now?"

"No, he's still married. But he would have left her if Iwere free, regardless of the disgrace. There are no children in that marriage, and his family is solvent again. But hedidn't know that I had married, that I have a son."

Quietly, in a torn voice, Rodney asked, "Did he ask youto leave me?"

"Rodney, stop it!" Ranelle pleaded. "There's no point init. Samuel's gone—he won't ever come again."

"Did he?"

"Yes, he wanted me to go with him. He said he would take Jared, too. But you can see I'm still here. I told him no!" Ranelle began screaming hysterically. "He is eightyears too late! Too late!"

Jared ran down to the beach then, to get away from the sound of his mother crying. He had never heard her crybefore, never heard his father's voice raised so angrily or with such pain.

Ranelle Burkett was never the same after that. She hadalways been a gentle and loving mother, devoting her lifeto her son and husband. Now she was distant, withholding her love. She no longer smiled or laughed. She began to drink heavily, and frequently cried silent, hopeless tears.

For two years Jared lived in a state of confusion. Hedidn't understand why his mother didn't love him anymore. He didn't understand why his parents fought all the time. And then Ranelle was expecting a baby. Rodney had firstbeen delighted, but then things between them got even worse. Ranelle turned from melancholy to bitterness. Shedidn't want the new baby. Rodney stayed away from the house, but the arguments didn't stop. Now Ranelle alsofought with Akela, who warned against her heavy drinking. Jared stayed away from his home as much as possible.

When Malia was born, Ranelle wanted nothing to do with her. She gave the baby over to Akela, took to herbottle again, and was hardly ever sober. Jared finally cameto understand why his mother had changed. She was stillin love with Samuel Barrows. He had overheard manyfights between his parents, but one in

particular explainedmuch.

It occurred early one morning, just after Malia's birth, before Ranelle had a chance to find her rum. Jared wasstill in bed, but his room was next to his parents' and theirloud voices woke him.

"For God's sake, go to him then!" Rodney was shouting."You're no good to me anymore, you're no good to yourchildren. You haven't been a wife or mother since that bastard Barrows came here. Yes, you gave me another child, but only because I forced myself on you."

"Please leave me alone, Rodney," Ranelle replied. "Ican't help the way I feel."

His father's voice was filled with pain. "Why, Ranelte? Just tell me why? Our first eight years were good. We werehappy. How could we have been so happy if you still lovedhim?"

"I had given him up. I thought there would never be achance for us, don't you see? I made myself forget him. Ishould have waited for him. He had always intended toleave his wife after a few years, but I didn't know that. I should have waited."

"Did you ever love me, Ranelle?"

"Oh, Rodney." Ranelle started to cry. "I never wantedto hurt you. I did love you. But Samuel was my first love,and I caa't help loving him still."

"Then go to him," Rodney said brokenly. "I will give youa divorce."

Ranelle laughed, but it was not a happy sound. "It's toolate! He wrote me after he returned to Boston. His dearwife had a baby while he was gone, six months after he left. Now hell never leave her."

"Ranelle, Ranelle, forget him. Can't you do that? Youdid it once before. Forget him again."

"How can I when I know this time that he still wantsme? He proved that by coming here to find me. He loves me and I love him!"

"You must do something, Ranelle. We can't go on like this. I can't work anymore. And it's affecting Jared. He'swithdrawn, he's become moody. You have got to stop drinking and start acting like a wife and mother again."

",Leave me alone, Rodney."

"Ranelle, please."

"Just go away. I don't want to talk anymore."

There was silence. But now Jared knew why his life had been turned upside down.

And when Malia was one year old, Ranelle Burkett died.

It was a stormy night, the night Jared still had nightmaresabout. His father was in Honolulu, and Akela had takenMalia and two-year-old Naneki to visit relatives in Kahukufor a few days. The eleven-year-old Jared had become veryprotective of his mother, and would not leave her alone in the house. Just the two of them were there that night

Jared heard the patio door leading to the beach open and close, and he got out of bed to see if Akela had re-turned. When he found no one in the house he ran to his

mother's room but found it empty, a half-filled bottle ofrum lying in the middle of the bed.

He panicked, for his mother never left the house atnight. He raced outside and down to the beach, screamingMotherover and over again. There was no answer. He wasted time searching along the shore before he saw herin the water. She was wading quickly away from the land.

Ranelle Burkett couldn't swim. All those years with the ocean at her back door, yet she'd never learned to swim. The surf was high because of the approaching storm, and Jared dove into five-foot waves to reach her, but it was asif the hand of God just swept her away. The moonless night was too dark. He couldn't see. The tears blinding his eyeshindered him, too. But he stayed in the ocean all night, looking, hoping, praying.

Dawn brought the storm, but also enough light to see by. And Jared found his mother, half a mile down thebeach, washed up on the cold, wet sand. She was dead.

It was many hours before they were found, Jared sittingin the sand staring out to sea, his mother's head cradledin his lap. He couldn't keep the truth a secret, that shehad killed herself, for it was well-known that she couldn'tswim, that she never went into the water even to wade.

It was many years before Jared stopped blaming himselffor not being able to save her. She would only have triedagain, he finally realized. She had wanted to die. And Samuel Barrows had driven her to her death. By coming into her life when it was too late, he had pushed her intothe sea. He was responsible for her misery and her death, and Jared would see to it that he paid.

Chapter 5

THE townhouse on Beacon Street was brightly lit and filled with fresh-cut summer flowers from the Barrows' garden. Maids in stiff black uniforms and white aprons circulated drinks among the early guests. This was to be aformal party, and guests would mingle in the large reception hall until dinner was announced.

Upstairs in Corinne's bedroom, Florence worked on herelaborate coiffure while Corinne's cousin Lauren pacednervously across the room behind them, her slippers withtheir tiny heels clattering noisily as she moved back andforth. This was Lauren's second formal party, and she wasanxious about the impression she would make.

"Are you sure this gown is suitable?" she asked for thethird time.

"Yellow becomes you, Cousin. After all, you don't wantto wear anything darker at your age," Corinne said as shewatched Lauren through her mirror.

"But your gown is so daring, Cori, with only those thinsequined straps to hold it up. And rose silk is so beautiful. Mother wouldn't let me have a gown like that. I'm sure Ilook old-fashioned."

"Oh, stop fretting. I am a bit older than you, remember,"Corinne remarked impatiently. "But I suppose I forget whatit was like to be sixteen. You really will be the prettiest girl at the party, so stop worrying."

Lauren smiled. "Maybe if you don't come I'll be the prettiest."

"Don't be silly. And looks aren't everything. You knowmost men won't look at me twice because I'm too tallfor them. Small, delicate women like you are all the rage."

Lauren blushed and changed the subject. "I wonder why

Uncle Samuel didn't have this party on July Fourth, just afew days ago. And why didn't he give us more warning?"

"I don't know, but I don't care, either," Corinne smiled." A party is a party."

"I suppose so. But this one was planned awfully fast. Mother had a fit because her dress wasn't finished in timeand she had to wear an old one. What was the hurry, doyou know?"

"There is some man Father wants his friends to meet. He decided to do it this way with a party, to please me. Wehaven't been getting along too well lately."

Florence gave a*humph* to that as she slid ruby pins intoCorinne's hair. Florence Merrill had been with Corinne since she was a child, and she knew what was going on. The maid fastened the last pin in place, then left the room. Corinne fussed through her large jewel case.

"Will Russell be coming?" Lauren asked.

"Of course."

"Still no luck in getting your father's permission to marryhim?"

"No. I haven't given up yet, but I'm beginning to thinkit's hopeless. Father won't even discuss it anymore. I justmight have to find someone else pretty soon if Father doesn't show some signs of coming round."

"Have you anyone in mind?"

"No. It's going to be very difficult to find the man myfather will approve of. He wants me to have a husbandof strong will—'A man you can't boss so easily,' were hisexact words. But that kind of man would defeat my wholepurpose."

"I still say you should wait for love," Lauren sighed.

"No, my dear," Corinne said, her stiff lip showing herdetermination. "Marriage will be my life, so I must have control of it. I can always find love on the side."

"Corinne!"

"Well, it's true. In fact, I thoroughly intend to have dis-creet love affairs. I feel there's nothing wrong with that since I know full well that every married man does the same."

"Notevery man."

"But most of them. So why shouldn't I?"

Lauren shook her head sadly. "You have such a cold outlook on life, Corinne."

"No, I'm realistic. I know what to expect from a mar-riage, and I know the way I want it to be. And what I don'twant is a man who will try to assert his will over mine."

"Would that really be so bad?" Lauren asked. She justcouldn't understand her cousin's need to rule in her mar-riage.

"For me it would, yes. Now help me with this necklace,-will you?"

Lauren came over to fasten a tear-drop choker of rubies and gold about Corinne's neck. A matching bracelet was added, and Corinne chose a small ruby ring instead of herlarge one. She didn't like to overdo it. The older matrons all wore many eye-catching rings at once. Corinne liked towear only one at a time, though she had many to choosefrom. She decided against ruby earrings. The glittering pins that held her long dark gold hair in place were enough.

"Who will be here tonight?" Lauren asked, nervous againnow that they were ready to go downstairs.

"Just the usual crowd, though Edward and John Man-ning will be here with their father," Corinne said absently. "And Adrian Rankin."

Lauren smiled. These handsome young men were partof Corinne's crowd of intellectuals and artists. "What aboutthis man your father is giving the party for? Is he young?"

"The party is for me," Corinne reminded her. "Fatherjust decided to combine business with pleasure. But about Mr. Burk, I have no idea. But he probably isn't young."

Lauren's face changed to a look of-excitement. "Did yousay Burk?"

"Yes, I think Father said Jared Burk."

"Why, that's the man everyone is talking about. Haven't you heard about him?"

"No, I haven't been attending the daily social functionslately."

If Lauren only knew why I haven't, she thought. Corinnehardly ever went out in the day anymore. She spent herdays sleeping because she sneaked out each night to meetRussell and a few other friends at their favorite gambling house. Her father probably knew, but he hadn't come rightout and forbidden her to gamble, not even when the lastclub she attended asked him to pay off her debts.

Her luck had changed recently. Why, just last week shehad won a considerable amount. But it was nothing com-pared to what she would win if she could just play in a no-limits game. Corinne's greatest desire was not to have toworry about I.O.U's that might reach her father, to beable to risk a thousand, two thousand, even fifty thousand on the turn of a card. But that day wouldn't come until shemarried, or until she reached twenty-one. And she was too impatient to wait.

"I overheard our fathers talking about Mr. Burk," Laurenwas saying. "And my mother's friends have

been gossiping about nothing else."

Corinne's interest was aroused. "What is so intriguing about this Mr. Burk?"

"That's just it. No one knows anything about him exceptthat he's terribly rich. They don't even know where hecomes from. People say he's from somewhere out West, but nobody knows for sure."

"Is that all?" Corinne was disappointed. "Just that he'srich and from somewhere out West?"

"Well, it's been rumored that he's here to invest a fewof his millions."

"That would explain why my father is interested in him. What other rumors have you heard?"

"Only that he throws money around as though he hadit to burn. It must be nice to be that rich."

"I wouldn't know," Corinne remarked bitterly. Someday she would have money to burn, but it wasn't fair that shehad to wait.

They left Corinne's bedroom and stopped at the top ofthe stairs to view the brightly lit hall below. The room wasfilled with richly dressed people of all ages. Most haddrinks in their hands, and had formed small groups. Asusual, the matrons had taken to the padded benches against the walls to watch the younger people and to gossip with- out being overheard.

The attractive tall stranger in white evening attire stood out. "Do you think that's him?" Lauren asked.

"I don't know," Corinne admitted. "I can't see Ms face.""Well, who do you know who is that tall?"

"I guess you're right. Who is he talking to?"

Lauren moved off to the left. "It's Cynthia Hamill," she called softly, returning to Corinne's side. "You should seeher face. She's positively glowing."

"You know Cynthia," Corinne said drily. "She's at her most charming whenever she meets a new man."

Lauren replied with distaste, "If you ask me, she's a bittoo flighty. And she flirts outrageously."

"There's nothing wrong with that, as long as you knowwhat you're doing. It's fun. After all, it doesn't go anyfurther than a few innocent kisses."

"Really, Corinne!"

Corinne smiled. She didn't really like Cynthia, either.

"Give yourself another year or two, Cousin, and you'llsee there's nothing wrong with a little flirting."

But Lauren wasn't listening anymore. "Look! He's turn-ing around." And then she added breathlessly, "Good heav-ens! Have you ever seen such a good-looking man?"

Corinne was equally surprised, not by the stranger's striking handsomeness, but by his youth. "If you like that rugged, outdoor type, I suppose not. He's younger than I, imagined he would be."

"Yes. Young and rich and gorgeous!"

"Lauren, honestly! He's just another man."

Lauren couldn't take her eyes off the stranger. "Lookhow dark he is. He must have spent most of his life undera hot sun to get that dark."

"Not necessarily. Maybe he's a foreigner."

"A rancher, probably. They have lots of cattle ranchesout West. Or maybe he's a ship's captain, or even—even a pirate! He does look like a pirate, doesn't he?"

Corinne was getting annoyed. The stranger wasn't her type. She had found that all men with superb, powerfulbodies generally had strong wills to match. You couldn't dominate such a man.

"Why don't you go ask him, Lauren. Then you can stopguessing and—"

Corinne stopped abruptly and caught her breath. The stranger was looking directly up at her. His stare was mag-netic, and Corinne felt a chill race down her back. Hiseyes penetrated hers as if he were reading her thoughts, and for a moment she couldn't move, couldn't breathe.

She finally managed to turn away. What on earth was the matter with her? She signaled to Lauren that it was time to join the party.

Jared watched with keen observation as the two youngwomen moved languidly down the stairs in the manner of agrand entrance. The smaller, brown-haired girl with thepink complexion was pretty, but too young. Obviously shy, she kept her eyes downcast. The dark blonde was exquisite, though, an outstanding beauty. She seemed quite self-as-sured. Tall and stately, she was superbly proportioned, more perfect than a finely chiseled statue. Had he everseen such ethereal beauty before? But he had to doubt such perfection, and wondered if" corsets were responsible forthe ideal figure.

There was something extremely compelling about this girl, and it wasn't only her beauty. There was haughtinessabout her, an arrogance unusual in a woman. It would be achallenge to make this one purr!

Could she possibly be Corinne Barrows? He frowned.Ned Dougherty's report had said that she was extremelybeautiful. The more he looked at this young woman, themore he thought how well she would fit in his arms. Jaredfervently hoped she was not Miss Barrows, for that youngwoman was as much his enemy as her father was.

Corinne noted the changing expressions on the stranger's face as he watched her approach. She had seen appreciation his eyes, even desire, but something else as well. It was as if he liked what he saw, but didn't want to. This amused Corinne. Was he married?

"It's good you could come, Cynthia," Corinne smiled asshe and Lauren reached the couple. "This party was sosudden I was afraid you might have had other plans and couldn't make it."

"I almost didn't make it," Cynthia replied. "BurthenFather told me who the guest of honor was going to be and,Well—I just had to meet him."

Cynthia was a small woman with a baby-doll prettiness. Corinne imagined that she would have fit perfectly in the Old South. But Cynthia was also very vain and did nothing to hide her vanity.

"And have you met him?"

Cynthia laughed, a tinkling sound that grated on Co-

rinne's nerves. "You're teasing, of course. Really, Corinne, I don't know why you didn't tell me he was such a hand-some and charming gentleman."

"Is this by any chance the gentleman, we're discussing?" Corinne coolly nodded to Jared.

"You know it is."

"Well, you see, I haven't yet met Mr. Burk."

She was stunned by the icy gray eyes. He seemed to dis-like her, yet he had never even seen her before. He quicklymasked his feelings and, with a fixed smile, bowed to her.

"I don't think introductions are necessary," Jared Burk said in a deep voice. "We know each other's names."

"That is hardly proper, Mr. Burk."

"Since when are you proper, Corinne?" Cynthia laughed, getting a stabbing look in return. Cynthia recovered quick-ly. "You don't know Corinne's cousin, Mr. Burk. This is Lauren Ashburn."

"A pleasure, Miss Ashburn." Jared smiled at her, but she was too tongue-tied to answer and just stared at him.

A maid passed with a tray of drinks and Corinne tookone. It wasn't like her to feel so ill at ease, but Jared Burkkept staring at her. Though his eyes held only interest now, she couldn't help but remember the cold look he had given her before. She was still stunned by it, and piqued that he had deprived her of a proper introduction.

"Are you aware of the rumors making the rounds aboutyou, Mr. Burk?" Corinne asked him pointedly.

"If there are rumors, they are undoubtedly exaggerated,"he replied smoothly.

"The good ones or the bad ones?" When he did not an-swer immediately, Corinne grinned slyly. "Have I embar-rassed you, Mr. Burk?"

Cynthia was annoyed by Corinne's obvious attack, sens-ing Jared's discomfort. "Corinne, what's gotten into you?"

"I'm just trying to get at a few facts," Corinne replied innocently. "I only just heard about Mr. Burk today, butundoubtedly what I heard is only rumor and speculation."

"I assure you there is no great mystery about me, MissBarrows," Jared said in a congenial tone.

"Then you won't mind answering a few questions?" Co-rinne ventured, no longer keeping the sharpness from hervoice. "After all, you are a guest in my house, yet I knownothing about you."

"Not at all—if you will be equally frank," he countered

Cynthia moved between them before more was said. "Ihaven't seen Russell yet. Isnt he coming?"

"Yes, he's coming."

"Russell Draytoh is Corinne's unofficial fiance'," Cynthiaoffered for Jared's benefit, then beamed at Corinne. "Mr.Burk isn't married yet, either."

"Are you one of those confirmed bachelors, Mr. Burk?"Corinne questioned. "Or have you come to Boston in searchof a wif e—among other things?"

"I'm here on business, Miss Barrows."

"Not looking for a wife? That's too bad, isn't it, Cynthia? Why, we have some of the most refined, intelligent, sophis-ticated women in the world here in Boston."

"If I didn't know better, I would swear you just de-scribed yourself, Corinne," Cynthia said. "Haven't you obligations to attend to—like seeing to the rest of yourguests? We would not want to detain you."

"Yes, of course. We will talk again, I'm sure, Mr. Burk. I see Russell and I really must go and greet him," Corinnesaid smoothly. She couldn't resist adding, "You know, Cyn-thia, you really shouldn't be so obvious. You might make Mr. Burk nervous. He might not be used to aggressivewomen like you and me."

Corinne left Cynthia blushing and heard her say, "I amnot! My God, shecan be rude when she chooses."

Corinne smiled and moved to the front of the hall. Shegreeted Russell with exaggerated pleasure and kissed him lingeringly before everyone, which embarrassed him con-siderably.

"Was that exhibition necessary?" he whispered as they walked arm in arm to join the other guests.

"It was for my father's benefit, though I doubt he was around to see it."

"He saw it, all right," Russell said tightly, looking di-rectly at Samuel Barrows' disapproving stare.

"So there you are, Father," Corinne greeted him. "Wherehave you been hiding? I didn't see you earlier."

Samuel's arm slipped possessively around his daughter'swaist "There was some trouble at the shipyard. Nothingserious, but it did require my attention. I didn't think itwould take so long, though."

"Well, at least you're back before dinner," Corinneteased lightly. "I wouldn't have forgiven you if I had had to act as both host and hostess."

"You would have managed superbly."

"I know, but you would never have heard the end of it," she smiled.

Samuel nodded stiffly to Russell, then ignored him. "Have you met Jared Burk yet, Cori?"

"Yes, though I can't say I like him."

"Oh? Did he say something to upset you?"

"No, it's just a feeling. I can't explain it, but the manseems—well, dangerous."

"Come now, Cori," Samuel laughed. "He's interesting, but I wouldn't say dangerous."

"Why have you taken such a liking to him, Father? You can't know very much about him."

"I don't, to tell the truth. But I do have it on good au-thority that he's here to invest a sizeable sum of money. His lawyer has been all over town making inquiries."

"So? What has that to do with you?"

"Will you excuse us, Mr. Drayton?" Samuel said curtly. "This conversation has become rather personal."

"Father, really!" Corinne complained.

"That's quite all right," Russell said. "I could use a drink, anyway."

Corinne fumed as Russell walked away. "That was un-called for, Father."

"I suppose so, but I'm not going to pretend I like RussellDrayton."

"Obviously, but he's going to marry*me*, not you!" Co-rinne snapped furiously. "You don't have to like him—just approve of him."

"I can't do that either, nor will I discuss it anymore. Now about Mr. Burk—"

"To hell with Mr. Burk!" Corinne cut him off in fury andstalked away to find Russell.

The party progressed successfully without much atten-tion from Corinne. Dinner, served in the formal diningroom, was superb. There was roast chicken in a glazedorange sauce, and three varieties of beef, as well as a vari-ety of vegetables and sauces.

Corinne, annoyed with her father, ignored him through-out the meal. Mr. Burk, however, she couldn't ignore. Sheoften found him staring curiously at her, and despite herfirst reaction to him, her own gaze was drawn to himagain and again. She began to feel guilty about her earlier behavior. After all, she really had no excuse for being so rude to him. She could have misinterpreted that look hegave her. And the more she thought about it, the moreshe was convinced that she must have been mistaken. It could have been any number of things unrelated to her that caused the venom in his eyes for that one moment.

After dinner the guests gathered in the parlor to be en-tertained by a well-known singer, with Lauren accompanying at the piano. A few of Samuel Barrows' friends and Jared Burk were not present, however, having joined Sam-uel in his study. Corinne couldn't help wondering what her father was up to.

Later, after all the guests except Russell had departed, Corinne, saw a chance to speak with her father again. Shesaw Russell to the door, endured his amorous embrace, then promised to meet him the next night at the club. The party preparations had kept her busy for most of the weekand she was eager to try her luck again.

Now with the hall quiet once again, Corinne crossedslowly to the closed door of her father's study. The lightcoming from beneath the door showed her he was still there. She supposed she owed him an apology. She wassorry she missed seeing Mr. Burk again before he left, for she owed him an apology too. She felt like a smallchild again, with all the misbehaving she had done in oneevening.

Just as Corinne reached for the doorknob, the dooropened and her father and Jared Burk emerged from theroom. Corinne was quite surprised, but glad to see she had not missed Burk after all.

"Still up, Cori?" Samuel observed. "Good, you can seeMr. Burk out."

"That is unnecessary," Jared said.

Corinne shrugged aside his objection as her father wentback into his study. "Come along, Mr. Burk. I had hopedfor a few minutes alone with you. I'll just get your things from the cloak room."

She returned in a moment with a satin-lined evening cloak and a tall silk hat. "These must be yours," she said, rubbing her fingers over the soft satin. "Very nice."

He smiled at her as he threw the heavy cloak over his wide shoulders. "We are alone, Miss Barrows. What didyou have in mind?"

His tone of voice implied a great deal, but she let it pass and kept her temper.

"I just wanted to let you know how sorry I am for my behavior earlier. There was no excuse for asking you ques-tions that were none of my business."

"You did seem to attack me with a purpose in mind," herecalled. "Perhaps if I knew why?"

She laughed and blushed at the same time. "I suppose itdid seem that way."

"And the reason?"

"I'm afraid I took offence at the way you looked at me when I first joined you this evening—as if you wanted to throttle me. I don't usually get that kind of reaction frommen."

Jared frowned. "If I gave that impression, then it is Iwho must apologize to you. I had other things on my mind at the time."

"Yes, after I thought about it, I realized that must have been the reason."

"We've gotten off to a bad start, Miss Barrows," Jaredsaid as he walked slowly to the entrance door. "Perhaps weshould start again. Tomorrow, over lunch? That is, if your Mr. Drayton won't mind."

He said it in the way of a challenge, and Corinnecouldn't resist that. "Lunch would be nice. You can call forme around noon."

"At noon, then."

He paused for a moment and stared at her, and Corinnefelt goose bumps spread over her arms. She quickly rubbedthem.

"Good evening, Miss Barrows."

She nodded. "Mr. Burk."

He was gone and she sighed in relief. Something about that man disturbed her, but she didn't know what. Sheshook off the feeling and went back to her father's study. She found him still at his desk, going over papers.

"You're not supposed to work after a party, Father," shescolded as she came into the room.

"I'm not working, my dear," Samuel replied, putting thepapers down. "Actually, I was looking over your grand-mother's will."

"Whatever for?" Corinne frowned. "This hasn't any-thing to do with Mr. Burk, does it?"

"In a way, yes. He asked about the owners of the ship-building firm. I was just checking to be sure I gave him the correct facts without giving him all of them."

"Just what are you talking about?"

"Sit down, Cori. As you know, my father founded the shipyard, but it was on its last legs when I married yourmother. Your mother's money helped, but it was yourGrandmother Daneil who saved the shipyard. She becamea full partner, but left the running of the yard to me. Later, when we expanded, Elliot invested, and now he and I runit together."

"What has this to do with Mr. Burk? You're not thinking of letting him invest in the firm, are you?"

"Yes," Samuel said frankly. "Elliot and I have been con-sidering enlarging the yard for many years. We just can't meet demand as it is."

"Then use your own money," she suggested. "Why bring someone else into it?"

"By taking another partner, we will increase profits, ourcustomers will get quicker results, but it will cost us noth-ing."

"And where does this put Mr. Burk?"

"He will be a silent partner, not an active one. After all,the man isn't planning on settling here in Boston, not asfar as I know. He will own shares in the firm which will double his investment in a few years, but he will have no control and very little voting power. Elliot and I own equal shares, but you are the major stockholder, since your grand-mother left you all her shares."

"Why not get an investor that you know, then? One of your old cronies. Why Mr. Burk?"

"Because I'm sure he doesn't plan to stay here. He won't be underfoot, constantly inquiring about his interests. Anothere is no way Mr. Burk could ever get control of the firm, just in case he has that in mind."

"He could marry me," Corinne teased. "That would puthim in control."

Samuel grinned. "You like him, then? He's a very intriguing fellow."

"I was only speaking hypothetically, Father," Corinneanswered quickly, appalled.

She could just see herself married to a man like that. He would rule with an iron hand, worse than her father did.

"Well, even if you did marry Mr. Burk, he could nothave control of your shares unless I decided he was trustworthy. And I doubt that I would decide in his favor until the day I died."

"I thought when I reached twenty-one that I would be in control. Are you saying I won't be?" 'I

"That's why I was looking over your grandmother's will. The money will be yours when you become of age or mar-ry, but control of your shares is still left to me, until I feelyou are ready to take over. And if you are married then, I will have to have confidence in your husband, also."

"Why? I don't understand why grandmother gave youthat power. She didn't even like you."

"I know," Samuel chuckled. "She knew I married your mother for her money, which was and still is a commonpractice. Not that I didn't care for Mary, mind you. ButDaneil knew that I would look after your best interests, and that's what she wanted to ensure."

"Why didn't you ever tell me about this before?" Corinne asked.

"Because it doesn't really affect you, Cori," he answeredeasily. "You're not planning on participating in the running of the firm, are you?"

"Of course not." J

"So you see, it makes no difference. I maintain control

of the firm, but the profits from your shares still go to youIfas they always have."

"I haven't seen any of these profits!" Corinne remarkedbitterly.

"They have gone into your trust, more than doubling itsince your grandmother's death. They will come directly toyou when you are of age." *

"Or when I marry?""Yes."

"You know, if you could just give me some of that mon-ey now, Father, I wouldn't be in such a hurry to marry,"Corinne suggested.

"And have you lose it all? No, my girl. I just hope when you finally do get your money, you show some sense inwhat you do with it. The two hundred you get monthlynow comes from your trust, but what do you have to show for it?"

"I spend money on clothes," she said defensively. "Andjewels."

"You charge those tome You throw your own moneyaway."

"This conversation has become boring. Good night, Fa-ther." Corinne rose stiffly and stalked from the

room.

Chapter 6

JARED Burk called at the Barrows' townhouse promptlyat noon, but was kept waiting for thirty minutes. Co-rinne didn't do it on purpose, as she sometimes did withher other callers. She had actually overslept, forgetting totell Florence to wake her early.

When she finally came downstairs to meet him, Jared's eyes showed that he didn't mind the wait. She wore a sim-ple dress without frills, elegant because of the rich silkpoplin material. Bottle-green, it was a few shades darker than her eyes. The high collar was ribboned in a darker green, with an ornate diamond broach. A large diamondand emerald ring was her only other jewelry.

After a few words of greeting and the customary com-pliments on Jared's part, they left in Jared's hired carriage. He allowed her the choice of restaurants, since he was not acquainted with the better establishments, and she chose asmall cafe that she often enjoyed. The food was excellent and the atmosphere friendly.

Jared ordered lunch for them both, making a choice Co-rinne silently approved of, and a light wine was served im-mediately. After taking a few sips, Corinne relaxed a bitand observed her escort boldly.

He was smartly dressed in a dark blue suit, opened to reveal a light blue silk vest with mother-of-pearl buttons. His rugged good looks, his expensive clothes, his entire ap-pearance commanded attention. His face was smoothlyshaved, and she still wondered how he had acquired such adeep tan. Corinne felt the envy of the other women in theroom, and this pleased her vanity.

"Is something wrong, Miss Barrows?" Jared finally asked, after he had allowed her scrutiny to continue for severalmoments.

She blushed slightly. "I didn't mean to stare. I've justnever met anyone as darkly tanned as you are. It must be terribly hot where you come from."

"You get used to it," he replied noncommittally, and quickly changed the subject. "I must say I expected a chaperone to join us today."

Corinne laughed. "Whatever for? We live in a new age, Mr. Burk. Chaperones are old-fashioned."

"Not everyone feels that way."

"You, for instance?"

"Yes," he admitted. "Frankly, I'm surprised your fatherdoesn't insist on a chaperone for you."

"My father is quite tolerant where I am concerned. Hehas always given me complete freedom, so I have learned to be cautious. I avoid dangerous situations. Have I some-thing to fear from you, Mr. Burk?" she asked coyly, thor-oughly'amused by his archaic ideas.

He grinned before answering. "That depends on whatyour fears are."

"Meaning?"

"Some women fear what others don't."

Lunch was served. Though Jared never gave her ques-tions direct answers, he asked her many. He quizzed her about Boston, and she proudly related some of its history.

She relaxed and enjoyed his company. He could becharming and witty, and when he laughed, his eyes were more blue than gray. But afterwards, on the ride home, shewas taken by surprise when he began questioning her again, and in a personal vein.

"I find it unusual that your fiance' didn't object to ourmeeting today."

"He didn't know about it," she admitted. "But hewouldn't have said anything if he had."

"You intend to tell him?"

"Our lunch was perfectly harmless, Mr. Burk. And be-sides, I am not answerable to Russell."

"But you are engaged to marry him?"

"Not officially—not until my father gives his approval, that is."

"Then Mr. Drayton hasn't asked for you yet?"

Corinne became uncomfortable. "Really, Mr. Burk. Thatis none of your business."

The carriage stopped on Beacon Street, but Jared didn'tmove to open the door. "You're quite right, of course. I just find it strange that a man who plans to marry you would allow you to see other men."

"Allow?" Corinne felt her temper rising. "No one allows me anything. I do whatever I please, Mr. Burk. Russellwouldn't presume to put restrictions on our relationship.""You're very independent, aren't you?" he commented.

"Yes, I am," she said proudly. "I value the freedom Ihave gained."

"But you are willing to give it up when you marry. You must love Mr. Drayton very much."

"Of course I love him," she lied, knowing how callousit would sound if she admitted the truth. "But Russell and I have a very agreeable relationship, Mr. Burk. I won't be giving up my independence when I marry him."

"Then he is a very ... unusual fellow."

"Yes, he is—quite different from most men."

"You mean he's weak, don't you?" he asked contemptu-ously.

"Certainly not!" she replied indignantly, wondering whyshe had allowed this inquisition to go on so long.

"Then he loves you enough to give you whatever youwant, including the independence you value so much?"

"I think, Mr. Burk, that your boldness has gone farenough. I have told you much more than you have a rightto know."

He grinned. "I apologize, Miss Barrows. But I have never met anyone quite like you. I find your ideas fascinating."

"You are teasing me now, and I don't like it," she saidicily. "I know you don't approve. Your type never does."

"My type?" he raised a brow in amusement "Have youput me into a category, Miss Barrows?"

She ignored the question. "I enjoyed lunch, Mr. Burk. Thank you for inviting me."

Corinne reached for the door handle herself, but Jaredstopped her by placing his hand over hers. A strong currentseemed to pass between them. The strength in his fingers seemed to drain her own.

She was shaken. She looked at him questioningly. "I—Iwish to go in now," she said weakly.

His gray-blue eyes probed her face as if he were trying to read her thoughts. "I know. But I want to see you again."

"Why?"

"I find I like you very much, Miss Barrows."

"I'm afraid I can't return the compliment," she saidfrankly.

"I have offended you and I'm sorry. But I really wouldlike to see you again. Tonight for dinner? And the theater,perhaps?"

"No, Mr. Burk. After last night's party, I have decided to spend a quiet evening at home tonight."

"Then tomorrow?"

"I hardly see the point. We really have nothing in com-mon. And Russell might not understand."

"I thought you weren't answerable to Mr. Drayton?"

"I'm not."

"Then you will see me again?"

"I will have to think about it, Mr. Burk." This time shedid not accept the bait. "Good day."

He opened the door for her lien, and Corrinne rushedout of the carriage without waiting for Mm to help her. Nordid she wait for him to follow and escort her to her door, but ran quickly up the steps and into the safety of her homewithout looking back.

Her heart pounded frantically as she leaned against thedoor. She didn't know what had frightened her so about those last few moments in the carriage. Jared Burk hadstopped her temporarily from leaving, but that was not the reason. Was it Jared Burk himself? More likely it was his touch, for she had never felt so drained of will and strengthas she did when his strong fingers closed over hers. She was stunned by her own reaction, for nothing like that had ever happened to her before.

What was wrong with her? He was just another man, thekind of man she avoided. She had sensed a dangerous quality about him when she first met him and she had beenright. He had made her lose control of herself, if only for a moment, and that was extremely dangerous.

Jared had started to escort Corinne to her door, but be-fore he even stepped from the carriage, she was inside theimposing townhouse and the door was closed. He sat backdown and then noticed the green silk purse on the oppositeseat. He picked up the purse, thinking to return it, but abruptly changed his mind and signaled the driver to return to his hotel.

Jared leaned back and stared thoughtfully at the silkpurse, picturing it attached to that slender wrist. He frowned as he wondered what had caused Corinne to runinto her house the way she did, as if she were frightened of him. She had good reason to be, but she couldn't pos-sibly know that. Oh, he had baited her, antagonized hereven, in order to judge her character. And it had worked.

He had the haughty Corinne Barrows halfway figuredout. He knew she took offense easily. She was spoiled, and was allowed much too much freedom. Someday that would get her into trouble, but that didn't concern him. She was a cool one, sure of her beauty and the effect it had on men.

No decisions had been reached yet, but Jared had onlya few options left out of all those he had considered. Hehad all the facts he needed about Samuel Barrows, and some surprising ones about his daughter. All that remained was to decide what to do with the information he had.

He was hoping that his investment in Barrows' shipyardwould yield him a certain amount of control in the firm, enough to block major decisions and ultimately destroy the firm. It was Barrows' major source of income. His otherinterests amounted to nothing in comparison. Of course, Jared's money would also be lost when the shipyard wentunder, but nothing mattered except ruining Samuel Barrows. That shipyard meant everything to him. He had devotedmost of his life to it. He had turned away the woman wholoved him in order to save it. Now Barrows would lose allhe had worked for.

Out of mild curiosity, Jared opened the purse he held. He removed a silk handkerchief with lace edging, a few dollars, a compact of light powder. He opened the lid from a small vial of perfume and smelled the delicate fragrance Corinne had worn.

One item startled him—a tiny knife with a short, sharp blade, encrusted with jewels, no less! He couldn't imaginethe sophisticated Corinne ever using it.

The last thing he took from the purse was a slip of paperwith an address on it. The paper was crumpled as if ithad been read many times. Jared had learned this addressfrom Ned Dougherty.

Sure, he had doubted Dougherty's assertion that CorinneBarrows went to this place two or three times a week in themiddle of the night. But wasn't he looking at the proof right now, the address of a private gambling house in Cambridgeacross the Charles River? And not just a gambling house,but a place where gentlemen brought their lady loves for little dalliance on the second floor. A little luck with thecards, a little lust upstairs.

Jared's opinion of Corinne Barrows decreased even more.Regrets? He would have absolutely none now, if he wereeventually forced to use her to accomplish his plans.

Chapter 7

CORINNE glanced at the clock on the mantle and im-patiently began to tap her foot. One o'clock in the morning. She hated to be rushed.

"Florence, please hurry," Corinne said petulantly. "Rus-sell will be down the street any moment now."

"If your hair wasn't so silky, it would be easier to put up," Florence replied, unperturbed. "And it won't hurtRussell Drayton to wait a spell. He shouldn't be out thereanyway," she added disapprovingly.

"Now don't start on me tonight," Corinne returned. "I'min no mood."

"You're never in a mood to listen to reason," Florence reminded her, though she never tired of trying. "Sneakingout in the middle of the night! One of these days you'regoing to regret these little adventures, you mark my word. A lady just doesn't do these things."

Corinne grinned mischievously. "Would you like to comewith me to see I don't get into trouble? I'm sure Russellwon't mind."

Florence actually looked shocked. Though she was only fifteen years older than Corinne, her morals were those of a much older generation.

"I can just see me in that fancy gambling house. Why, my mother, God rest her soul, would come back to hauntme. And your mother's probably been turning in her grave for quite a while, knowing what you're about."

"Now don't you try and make me feel guilty, because itwon't work, do you hear?" Corinne snapped. "Lord, is it acrime to put a little excitement in my life? Gambling isfun, Florence. It's thrilling," she tried to explain. "And it'snot as if I didn't know what I was doing. I've learned how to play the games, and I'm really quite good."

"You know you're doing wrong or you wouldn't besneaking out of the house, and by the servants' entrance, noless. Nor would you be wearing that special cloak to dis-guise yourself." She gave an indignant snort. "Cheap pau-per's wool, as if you couldn't afford better."

Corinne looked at the dowdy cloak lying across the footof her bed. "No one will recognize me in it."

"You're going to disgrace this family yet, Corinne Bar-rows. A scandal, mind you, and one you'll never live down, because it will be the first to touch the Barrows name."

"I'll never bring scandal to this family!"

"And just how—"

"You didn't let me finish," Corinne interrupted. "Whydo you think I pick clubs so far away? Because I won't beknown there. In all the time I've been going; I've seen only two people I recognized at the clubs."

"You see!"

"But they won't spread rumors about me, because they have their own secrets to hide."

"Your father found out, didn't he?" Florence reminded her. "Lord knows why he didn't put his foot down then andthere. I thought for sure that would be the end of it."

"Well, he didn't. I suppose he thinks I'll outgrow it. And I will stop, just as soon as I can play in that one no-limitgame I've been dreaming about for so long."

"You're obsessed, Cori. You've got to stop soon. Gam-bling can be a disease for some. They just can't ever quit."

"That won't happen to me," Corinne said with confidence.

With the last pin in place, forming a severely tight coif-fure, and dressed in lavender velvet with long sleeves and a high collar, Corinne was ready to go. She withdrew her money from a locked drawer, then looked about for herpurse. When she couldn't find it, she frowned. Her expen-sive little knife was in that purse, and she always liked tocarry it with her, especially at night.

"Have you seen the green silk purse I had with me today, Florence?"

"No."

"Then I must have left it in the carriage today. I'm sure I had it when we left the cafe."

"You haven't said very much about what happenedtoday," Florence remarked.

"Because there was nothing to tell. I had a very boringtime."

"Oh?"

"Don't 'oh' me," Corinne said irritably, hearing thedoubt in Florence's voice. "Just get me another purse. I'mlate enough as it is."

Soon, concealed to her satisfaction, Corinne tiptoedthrough the house as she had countless other nights, andslipped out the servants' entrance. And there, waiting ablock down the street, was faithful Russell, ready for to-night's escapade.

Smoke gathered above the room like a heavy blanket, from the many cigars, cigarettes, and pipes of the gentle-men present. The smoke could not escape the room, for thewindows were tightly closed and heavily curtained. To thepasserby, the house looked like any other, but to the occupants inside, it was a hotbed of excitement. Fortunescould be won or lost here, and love affairs could continue the strictest of privacy.

Corinne had never investigated the upper regions of the house. She sometimes wondered what it was like up there, but she had never found out. Russell had tried to get her to go up with him a few times—for

a private drink, he would coax. But she was no fool. She knew what he wanted. But he just didn't have the power to make her want it too.

It made Corinne sick one night when a girl's screams were heard from upstairs, yet no one downstairs moved. No one had gone to the poor girl's rescue.

Why, anything could happen on the second floor, evenmurder, for the two parts of the house were completely separate. It was a rule that no two couples could leave the gambling hall at the same time. That way, if a couplewished to slip upstairs for a few hours before going home, no one could witness it.

Corinne could see the sense in that rule, but it irkedher, for she could just imagine the men in the gamblingroom speculating, when she left, on whether or not shewent upstairs with her escort. It was a constant embarrass-ment to her.

Nine round tables filled the brightly lit room. The housedid not supply dealers at each table, but the house did verywell by collecting money from each player before each newgame was played. Different games of chance were playedat different tables. Corinne often preferred faro, a game in which each player took turns being the banker, or black-jack, the deal passing with each new twenty-one. She had learned to judge the odds well in the latter, and was ecstatic whenever she was dealt a blackjack, the desired ace and face card which paid double and gave her the deal. But though she did well in blackjack, she liked the poker tablesbest of all. With a little trickery, she could bluff herself a winning hand.

Corinne loved to bluff in poker. She wore elegant, yetprim gowns for the express purpose of keeping her figurefrom distracting from her face. Her expressions fooled many a player. Once they caught onto her, though, shewould change tactics and fool them again. Even Russellcould not tell when she was bluffing.

Tonight Corinne felt lucky. She had already won three hands out of the first five. The others at her table, threegentlemen and a brashly dressed young woman, did notshow exceptional skill. Russell went to play blackjack oncehe was assured that the men at Corinne's table were inter- ested in cards, and not in her.

"Draw poker," the dealer called, and dealt five cards to each player.

The other gentleman next to Corinne opened, and aftershe examined her cards and found a straight possible, she called. One other player called, and when it was Corinne's turn to draw, she took one card to fill her straight. It was not the card she wanted, but a slight raising of her eyelidssaid it was. The opener checked to her one card draw and Corinne bet the limit, then sat back and waited. The other player did not hesitate to fold, but the opener took a few minutes to make up his mind before he, too, dropped out.

Corinne threw in her cards and raked in the chips. Shewon quite a bit during the next hour, though with goodcards rather than bluffing. She was enjoying herself im-mensely until Jared Burk sat down at her table.

She was stunned to see him sitting there across from her, dressed in black evening attire, grinning sardonically. Co-rinne was mortified that he had found her here, after shehad told him she would be spending a quiet evening athome. What must he think? Was that why he was grin-ing?

"Maybe my luck will change now, with new blood in the game," said one of the players.

"Perhaps," Jared replied smoothly. "But it is hard to en-tice lady luck away from a—lady."

Corinne felt her cheeks flaming. She had detected thesarcasm in his voice.

"Five card stud," Corinne called in a stiff voice that wasnot lost on Jared. She dealt the cards quickly, putting an end to conversation.

From that moment on, Corinne lost. Every bit of herwinnings and the money she had brought with her was trans- ferred across the table as the hours passed. Corinne becamefurious with herself. No matter how hard she tried, she just couldn't concentrate on the game. She didn't look atJared, but she could feel Ms eyes mocking her. It in-furiated her so that she could hardly see the cards she held, and had to be repeatedly reminded when it was her turn to bet or call. What must he think?

The final straw was looking at three kings in her hand, knowing she could finally beat Jared, and not having thechips left to bet with. She would not give Jared Burk thesatisfaction of seeing her sign an I.O.U. to finish the hand.

'This hand is not worth betting anyway," she lied, with a smile to cover her frustration. "I think I've had enoughfor tonight."

Feigning boredom, Corinne left the table and crossed to the long bar built against a wall. She ordered a straightwhiskey. She wasn't used to hard liquor, but why not? There was a first time for everything.

She had nothing better to do than sit there and getdrunk. Russell was winning and would not want to leaveyet

"So this is how you spend a quiet evening at home, MissBarrows?"

She turned to find Jared beside her, leaning smuglyagainst the bar, his winnings in his hat. He swung the hatslowly to and fro.

"It's not evening, Mr. Burk," she said caustically, hertemper surfacing. "It's almost morning."

"So it is."

She glared at him, but he was not deterred. "I see you'reangry with me," he said. "I'm not surprised, though. Mostwomen are poor losers.""And most men!"

"True. We have that in common, don't we? For I'm avery bad loser myself."

She knew that he did not mean only at cards. Shetook a swallow of her drink, then nearly gagged as the fiery liquid seared her throat.

"So now you will drown your sorrows?" he taunted her. "I thought you had more spirit, Corinne."

She frowned. "I did not give you leave to use my firstname, Mr. Burk."

"Isn't it time we stopped being so formal?-""I think not," she replied haughtily. Jared smiled. He looked away from her for a momentand his eyes fell on Russell. The man was obviously an utter fool, Jared thought contemptuously. He should havemore sense than to bring his intended bride to an establish-ment like this. And then to leave her to her own devices! Why, anyone could whisk her out of here, and Russell Dray- ton wouldn't know of it for some time.

"Would you like me to escort you home?" When Corinneglanced at him suspiciously, he added, "Since your fianceis otherwise occupied."

"No thank you," Corinne said coldly. "I don't mind wait-ing for Russell."

"Perhaps you would like a small loan, then," he offered. "So you can continue to play? I did so enjoy your companyat the table."

"You mean you enjoyed winning my money!" she repliedbitterly.

He shrugged, then grinned, his eyes dancing. "That, too.""I never borrow money when I come here, Mr. Burk. "She lied convincingly, but kept her eyes averted. "I set my limits and stick to them."

"Very commendable," he said drily. "Is that why you'rewearing no jewels tonight? Afraid you might be tempted togamble them away?"

She couldn't help smiling at his perception. Did the manknow everything?

"I did get a bit carried away the first time I came to anestablishment like this," she admitted. "I lost a valuablediamond broach on the turn of a card. Since then I haveleft my jewels at home."

"You talk as if you come here often,"

She was stung by the condemnation in his voice. "I do," she replied defiantly. "I can afford to."

"But can you afford to have it known?"

Corinne frowned. "Is that a threat, Mr. Burk? Are youimplying that you will make it known?"

"I wouldn't dream of tarnishing your good name," Jaredassured her.

"But you feel that I am doing so by coming here?" Whenhe shrugged, she continued angrily. "No one knows mehere, Mr. Burk. And if someone did, they would say nothing out of respect for my father."

"But you take that risk?"

"I come here to gamble. I gamble in that respect as well. Besides, it's really none of your business, is it?"

Jared acquiesced with a slight nod. "I will say no more.But I still offer you a ride home." When she started torefuse him again, he added, "Once I leave, Miss Barrows, you will be swarmed by gentlemen wanting to make theacquaintance of a beautiful woman whom they will presume alone. There is no need to put yourself through that"

"I can take care of myself," she said, her proud noserising in the air.

"Forgive me. I only assumed you wouldn't want that kindof attention. Perhaps I was wrong."

He was utterly infuriating.

"I don't relish being bothered, Mr. Burk. I just feel Ishould wait for Russell."

"Why?" he asked pointedly. "He's not even aware that you are waiting." Then he conceded graciously, "ThoughI'm sure he would come to you if he were aware of it"She knew he didn't mean it

"Is it my presence that is stopping you from acceptingmy offer?" Jared suggested in a soft tone. "You're notafraid to be alone with me again, are you?"

"Certainly not!"

"Well, then?"

Corinne looked at her empty glass. She had convincedherself earlier that she had nothing to fear from this man,so why was she hesitating?

"Very well," she smiled agreeably. "If you will just give me a f ewminutes to tell Russell that I'm leaving."

"Is that really necessary?"

"Why, Mr. Burk," Corinne teased lightly. "You wouldn'twant my fianc6 to think I had deserted him?" She leaned closer and whispered, "He might think I've gone upstairs, and then cause quite a scene looking for me."

Corinne laughed softly at the startled look on Jared'sface before she moved to Russell's table. Let Jared Burkthink whatever he wanted, she didn't care for his opinionanyway. And it had been such a pleasure to shock him, tosee that arrogant look leave his face for a moment! She feltmuch better now.

She waited patiently for Russell to finish his hand beforeshe attracted his attention. He was reluctant to leave his table, but he came to her anyway.

"Russell, dear, I didn't want to interrupt you and take you away from your game, but it would be remiss of menot to tell you that I'm leaving."

"Leaving? Why?"

"I lost my money rather quickly."

Russell looked back at his own winnings. "I can't leaveyet, Corinne. My luck's been too good tonight. If you needsome more money—"

"No, Russell, you know I never borrow from you. Be-sides, I am rather tired. And you needn't leave your game.Mr. Burk has kindly offered to take me home."

"Burk is here?" Russell frowned, and looked about theroom, spotting Jared waiting at the bar. "I don't like thatman, Corinne. He seems too much the adventurous type to me, or more like a mercenary."

"Don't be ridiculous, Russell," Corinne scoffed. "He maygive the impression that he's ruthless, but he's perfectly harmless. And he is going to be a partner of mine very soon. Father feels we need his money, so I can't very well be rude to him, now can I?"

Russell looked back at his winnings once again, an avari-cious gleam in his dark gray eyes. "I suppose not. But do becareful, Corinne."

"What do you mean?"

"I know how you flirt when the mood suits you. Iwouldn't trifle with Burk if I were you."

She ignored his warning. "It's strictly a business rela-tionship, Russell, no more."

The enclosed carriage Corinne found herself in was notquite so large as the one Jared had used to take her tolunch in, nor was it as comfortable. Corinne nearly sworealoud when a bump in the road almost unseated her.

"I must apologize for this conveyance." Jared spoke from the dark interior. "But it was the best I could find onshort notice. To tell you the truth, I wasn't too sure the driver would wait as I had paid him to do."

"You should consider hiring your own driver," Corinnesuggested impulsively. "That is, if you plan to be heremuch longer."

"I don't," he replied.

"So you plan to invest your money and run?"

"If you wish to put it that bluntly, yes," Jared answeredwithout hesitating.

"And have you made a decision about our firm yet? Orif you'd rather not say, I'll understand."

Jared smiled, though Corinne could not see it in the dark. "Would I be making a sound investment if I did?"

"Certainly." Pride slipped into her voice. "I've madea fortune over the years myself, so I've been told."

"Don't you know?"

"My money is in a trust, Mr. Burk, that my grandmotherarranged for me. It contains the money she left me, plus all the shares she owned in the shipyard. But my father hascontrol of it until I marry."

"With his approval?"

"Yes.",

"I take it you don't care for those terms?" Jared asked casually. "I mean, considering how fond you are of beingindependent?"

"I don't mind having to get my father's approval .to marry," Corinne replied. "What I mind is having to waitfor my money in the meantime. I mean, there is all thatmoney just sitting there, and my father doesn't give meenough to meet my needs."

"I find that hard to believe."

"My spending money would be sufficient for mostwomen, but it isn't for me."

"Because of your gambling?"

Corinne gasped. He was so perceptive it was frightening.

"I just want control of my own money, Mr. Burk. Wouldn't you?"

"Yes, but when you marry, you still won't have controL Your husband will."

Corinne laughed softly. "No, he won't."

"I don't understand."

"It's quite simple, Mr. Burk. You see, that's one of the agreements Russell and I have. He understands that I can't tolerate restraint. When I marry, I will be free."

"I see."

And Jared finally did see. In Russell Drayton, she had found herself the perfect husband. Perfect for her.

"If it only takes getting married to get what you want, why haven't you done so yet?" Jared asked curiously, hop-ing Corinne would continue to talk on this personal level without getting suspicious. "Is Mr. Drayton afraid to con-front your imposing father?"

Corinne could see Jared's face only when the carriagepassed a street lamp and light filtered in. She couldn't seehis expression at that moment, but he did not sound as ifhe were baiting her.

"The truth is, Mr. Burk, Russell has seen my fatherabout me, but my father refused him."

"I'm sorry."

"Don't be. My father will come around."

"He doesn't strike me as a man who changes his mind easily," Jared remarked.

Jared had touched on a sore subject. And he was right. Samuel Barrows hardly ever changed his mind. He had put very few restrictions on Corinne's life, but when he did, there was nothing that could make him reverse his decision. This would be different, though, Corinne told herself. Hejust*had* to give in this time.

"When he sees how set I am on this marriage, he willrelent," she said with more confidence than she felt.

"Then perhaps I will be invited to the wedding?"

"If you are still here," Corinne said lightly.

"By the way, you left your purse behind today, or rather, yesterday. Had I known I would see you again so soon,I would have brought it along."

"I was afraid I had lost it for good." Corinne was relieved."I will send someone around to pick it up at your hoteltomorrow, if that will be convenient?"

"It won't be necessary at all. I will return it when Ipick you up for dinner tonight."

"I haven't said I will dine with you, Mr. Burk," Corinnereplied saucily.

Jared grinned slyly. "Isn't that the least you can do, after I left a perfectly good winning streak back there just to bring you home?"

Corinne laughed, actually enjoying the banter. "Youmake yourself sound like a martyr. I didn't ask for yourservices, you know. In fact, you were quite persistent."

"I suppose I'm just chivalrous at heart, unable to resista lady in distress."

"Is that what I was?"

"Weren't you?" he countered.

"Very well, I will have dinner with you tonight—if you tell me how you happened to be at the club. It's not exactly apublic spot."

"My lawyer told me about it," Jared replied easily. "In fact, if he hadn't been along, I probably would not havegotten in."

"You mean he was with you, and you just left him?"

The carriage came to a stop just then. "I'll go back forhim."

Corinne smiled. "You really have gone out of yourway just to bring me home, haven't you?"

"I enjoyed it," he said casually, and opened the door. He made sure he got out first to help her down.

Corinne felt strangely happy all of a sudden. He hadgone to so much trouble for her.

He held her elbow until they reached the front door of her house. Dawn was just creeping over the horizon, butCorinne felt wide awake.

"I'm going to kiss you, Corinne Barrows," Jared saidsuddenly.

Before she could react, he had pulled her into his arms. It was a gentle yet forceful kiss, and Corinne didn't havethe will to resist for more than a moment. He did not press her tightly against him as Russell often tried to do, but just held her firmly enough so she couldn't escape.

He released her. "Before you bite my head off fortaking such a liberty, you have to know that nothing couldhave stopped me just then. Not you, nor my own will.I felt compelled to kiss you and couldn't resist doing so."

Corinne smiled. "You disappoint me—Jared. I wouldn't have expected you to apologize."

She left him like that, completely surprised and pleased by her response...

Chapter 8

Corinne sauntered into the parlor. "So there you are,Father. What are you doing, sitting here in the dark?"

Samuel was slouched in a large, comfortable chair with a brandy in one hand. "The fire gives enough light, and it's more peaceful this way," he replied, turning a speculative gaze on his daughter. "You're all dressed up? Have you plans for this evening?"

Corinne went to stand by the fireplace, lifting her skirtsa little to warm her legs. September nights were getting much too chilly. She made a mental note to wear some-thing warmer later that night.

"Jared is taking me to a recital. He should be hereshortly."

"Jared, is it?" Samuel raised a brow. "I didn't knowyour relationship with Mr. Burk had become so intimate."

"Don't be silly," Corinne admonished. "It's just that Ifeel foolish calling him Mr. Burk after he has been my escort more than a dozen times in the last two months." She did not include the many times he had taken her tothe gambling club. "We've enjoyed dinners, luncheons, thetheater. He even took me to the Compton's ball, whichyou were too busy to attend, and we've gone upstate forthe races."

"My, my," Samuel mused, pretending he didn't knowhis daughter's every move. He knew all about her dateswith Burk. "What has happened to Mr. Drayton? Is he nolonger in the picture?"

Corinne stiffened. "Russell had to go to New York inthe middle of summer."

"Business—or pleasure?"

"Neither," Corinne snapped. "His mother's people Evethere. His grandfather is ill and the doctors warn that hemight not recover. Russell says he's really quite old. Any-way, it was only proper that he go."

"And so you have turned to Mr. Burk in his absence?" Samuel asked pointedly.

"You really can be exasperating at times, Father,"Corinne retorted. "Russell will be back any time now, andhe will be my husband eventually. I simply see no reasonto confine myself while he's gone."

Samuel frowned. "You're not leading Jared Burk on justbecause you need an escort, are you, Cori? He's not a man to trifle with."

"I've been told that before," she laughed. "But no,Father. Jared knows how I feel about Russell, that I intendto marry him. We enjoy each other's company, that's all.He really has turned out to be quite likeable."

"You thought differently when you first met him," Samuelreminded her.

"First impressions aren't always accurate. I was wrongabout him. I admit it."

"Is there a chance that's not all you're wrong about, Cori?" he ventured.

"What do you mean?"

"Are you sure Burk considers your relationship as inno-cent as you say it is?" Samuel asked in a serious tone

Corinne shrugged off his concern. "Of course he does.Oh, I may flirt and banter with Jared, but that adds spiceto our encounters. Life would be utterly boring without little flirtation. He knows I don't mean anything by it."

"He knows you so well, eh? Can you say the same? Haveyou learned anything about him during all these innocent outings? Where exactly does he come from? Who are hispeople? You don't know if he comes from good stock, doyou?"

"I have asked him, but he always evades my questions,"Corinne replied, then grinned. "I do believe he likes his role as mystery man."

"Aren't you curious, though?"

"Not especially, but you certainly seem to be," Corinnesaid. "Why haven't you asked him where he comes from?"

"I did."

"And?"

"And he evades answering me as well. He said it wasn'timportant, that it didn't concern our negotiations. And hewas right."

"Well, if he invests with you, then you will find theanswers when he leaves Boston. He will have to give you forwarding address if he intends to collect his profits."

"Well, then I should know any day now."

"Why?"

"He made his investment with our firm last week,"Samuel answered, amused by his daughter's surprise. "Didn'the mention it?"

"No, he didn't. He didn't say a thing to me about it," Corinne said, suddenly quite annoyed. "Why didn't you tellme sooner?"

"I haven't seen very much of you lately, my dear. EitherI'm working, or you're nowhere to be found."

"So he's a partner then?" Corinne said, more to herselfthan to her father. She couldn't understand why Jaredhadn't said anything to her about it.

"Yes, he's a partner, all right," Samuel returned with a chuckle. "He invested much more than we anticipated, almost a half million."

Corinne let out a slow whistle. "You didn't need that much for the expansion, did you?"

"No, but Mr. Burk insisted. It was the only deal hewould agree to."

"And that gave him more shares than you intended he have, didn't it?"

"Yes. He now owns as many shares as Cousin Elliot and I own. If he wanted to, he could counter our votes. Whichwould leaveyour vote as the deciding one."

"But you control my vote."

"Yes, I do," Samuel smiled.

Corinne gasped at the sly look in her father's eyes. "Youdidn't tell Mm that, did you?"

Samuel shook his head slowly, savoring his business judgement "He will find out at the first board meeting—if he is here to attend it."

"You deceived him, then!"

"Hardly. I just wisely withheld a few facts. Do you think I didn't know he has been paying court to you? If he hadn'tpaid so much attention to you, then I wouldn't have feltthe need to conceal those facts. As it is, I have to considerall possibilities, and one is that he may have hopes oftaking over the firm. If not, then why such a large invest-ment?"

"That is ridiculous," Corinne replied doubtfully. "Whatdoes he know of shipyards?"

"Must I remind you that we know nothing about him, Cori? If he hadn't been so secretive, then perhaps I wouldn't have either. But regardless, if it was his intention control the firm by manipulating you, then he's in fora big surprise and it's only what he deserves. And if hehad no such plans, then it won't matter one way or theother."

"Jared is not as devious as you imply," she said angrily."No, he's probably not. But it doesn't hurt to be cau-tious. And time will tell."

"Yes, time will prove that your imagination has runrampant," she rejoined.

"You're very defensive of him," Samuel observed. "Youhaven't by chance been fooling yourself about your in-volvement with him, have you, Cori? He's a very attractive man, the kind women fall in love with easily."

"You would like that, wouldn't you?" Corinne accusedhim, her eyes suddenly darkening to deepest emerald. "He'sjust the type of man you would approve of!"

"Well, I doubt he would let you run wild the way Ihave," Samuel chuckled.

"You can get thoughts of matchmaking out of your headright now!" Corinne snapped hotly. "I'm going to marryRussell!"

"Not as long as I have anything to say about it!" Samuelraised his voice Jo match hers.

Corinne glared at him. He would never give in, shecould see that now. She would just have to find someoneelse. But not Jared Burk, definitely not him. Oh, he wascharming enough, handsome and rich enough, and whenhe kissed her, as he had many times, she felt a thrill all through her body. Without any

effort he sucked her willaway, and for just that reason he would not do for a hus-band.

"Very well, Father," Corinne said coolly. "When Russell returns, I'll tell him I won't see him anymore."

"Good. Then you're going to consider Burk?" he asked, unable to hide the hopeful gleam in his eyes.

"How can you even ask that after you practically accused him of trying to take over our shipyard?"

"I said no such thing. I said it was only a possibility, and not a very likely one."

She glared at him. "You would let him marry me, though, wouldn't you?"

"I think he would make a good husband, yes," Samuelsaid truthfully.

,"Well, I don't. And he will be leaving soon anyway," shesaid, killing her father's hope.

"Where is he? Didn't you say he would be here shortly?"

Corinne looked at the clock on the mantle and frowned. "He's late."

Samuel chuckled. "Well, that's a change. For once some-one has kept you waiting."

"Well, it will be the last time!" she replied stiffly, and started pacing the floor. "I won't be seeing him again aftertonight"

"Just because he's late?"

"No, because I can't very well find my future husbandif Jared Burk is monopolizing my time."

"You're very cold, daughter," Samuel said disapprovingly,"I pity the man you do finally marry."

Chapter 9

JARED was thirty minutes late, which put Corinne inan even worse mood than her conversation with her father had done. She greeted him coldly, and said very little to him the entire evening, except to confirm hispromise to pick her up again after midnight. Jared did not question her silence, assuming she was pouting because of his tardiness. Corinne let him think so. She would explain later, before he brought her home from the club.

Corinne was not really angry with Jared, but with herfather for his unreasonable stubbornness. All that timewasted on Russell. And now time would be wasted infinding another man to suit her needs. But to wait another two years for her money was even more unthinkable.

That problem was not enough, for Jared posed another. She did not look forward to telling him that she wouldn'tsee him again, and explaining why. She hated having to break off a relationship, to suffer the hurt looks and plead-ings as she had with William and Charles. She was not so cold-hearted that the scenes did not affect her, but she wastoo strong-willed to let them sway her.

With Jared she did not feel quite so much guilt, for she had not instigated their relationship, as she had the others. He was the one who insisted she see him again and again. Granted, she used him as an escort, but he used her for a diversion during his stay in Boston. So he would have no right to be upset when she talked to him later.

Corinne built up more resentment against Jared after theyreached the club that night. Each time he brought herhere, he insisted she play at his table so he could keep aneye on her. And each time she played with him, she lost tohim. It was infuriating.

Tonight was no different. They had been at the club for three hours. It was not crowded, for this was a week nightand many of the earlier gamblers had gone home long ago. Only three tables were still occupied. Corinne was about ready to quit. Again, Jared had won all her money.

"This will be my last hand," Corinne announced.

"I think mine, too," said the sandy-haired man on Co-rinne's left.

"We might as well all quit,, then," responded the onlyother player besides Jared.

Jared nodded in agreement and Corinne dealt drawpoker. She had just enough chips to finish this hand, aslong as there were no raises. She prayed this last time forthat one hand that would give her a sure win. This wouldbe the last time she would come here with Jared, the last chance she had to beat him—just once, only once was allshe asked for.

She spread her cards slowly, and held her breath as thequeen, jack, nine and eight of clubs appeared one at atime to tantalize her. She squeezed off the last card slowly, but her heart fell when she saw the three of diamonds. However, there was still the draw, and though she wouldhave to fill an inside straight for the best hand of astraight flush, a regular flush was also possible and not ahand to scoff at.

Jared opened the betting, and Corinne and one otherplayer called. The other player took three cards; Jaredasked for two, leading her to believe he was drawing tothree of a kind. She took her one card and was almostafraid to look at it. Jared bet again, the limit for theirtable, fifty dollars, and Corinne gently lifted her draw cardfrom the table and put it in her hand. She did not bat aneye as she stared at the ten of clubs. A queen high straightflush, just two cards under a royal, the best hand possible!She couldn't believe it. It was the best hand she had ever held, yet she had no money to bet it! She didn't even have enough to call, since Jared had bet the limit. She won-dered furiously if he had done it on purpose, knowing she couldn't call.

"It's up to you, Corinne," Jared said.

She looked at him icily, and then addressed the otherplayers with a most beguiling smile. "Would you mind ifI left the table for a moment before we finish this hand?

I know it's not usually allowed, but this is the last hand and I would like to see it through."

"Go right ahead," said the man who had folded.

"Don't matter to me, either," said the other man, andthrew in. his cards. "I'm not going to call anyway."

Corinne glared at Jared, daring him to object. "Doyoumind?"

"I hardly think it's necessary to see the owner aboutmore money, Corinne, when this is the last hand. Why don'tyou just throw in too and we'll call it a night?"

"I would rather finish," she said stiffly. "Or are youafraid I might finally beat you?"

He shrugged and leaned back in his chair. "Very well, Iwill wait. But don't be too long."

She left the table, but returned after only a few minutesin bitter disappointment. The owner had refused to give herany more credit.

"Well?" Jared questioned upon seeing her forlorn ex-pression.

She looked at him speculatively. "Would you take myI.O.U.? You know I'm good for it"

Jared waited a few moments before answering. "If that's the case, why dont we raise the limit? As you say, you're good for it, and it's just the two of us now."

The other two players had gone. They were alone, and now she felt the old thrill of the game that she hadn't felt since she started playing with Jared. She was going to beathim, and for high stakes.

"Five thousand?" she suggested.

She noted his look of surprise and grinned. That wasmore money than she could afford to pay without goingto her father. But she wouldn't have to do that, for shewas going to win this hand, and win it big.

Jared nodded, and withdrew pen and paper from his pocket. "You haven't called my bet, Corinne."

She took the paper and wrote an I.O.U. to cover hisbet and her raise. "And five thousand," she said confidently, never more sure of a winning hand.

Jared reached into his pocket again and took out a wadof bills and peeled off some. "There's your five." He pausedand counted off more money. "And five more."

Corinne was delighted. She reached for the paper tomatch his bet and raise him again, but Jared stopped her.

"I won't accept another I.O.U., Corinne."

"Why not?"

"Because I know where you will have to go to honor the debt, and I don't think he will be too pleased."

"My father will never know, Jared, because I don't in-tend to lose."

"This is a game of chance, Corinne," he warned her ina level tone. "Only one hand is unbeatable, and the oddsare you don't have it."

"Are you afraid I might have beat the odds?" she chal-lenged him.

"You're that sure of your hand?"

"I am."

"That's too bad, then, since you can't afford to call," hesaid offhandedly.

Her temper exploded. "Why did you raise me, then, if you didn't intend to let me cover it?"

He completely ignored her outrage. "You are the onewho left the pot open to another raise by raising me. Youalso suggested a five thousand limit. I agreed to no more,"he reminded her casually.

"I meant per bet!"

"Well, I didn't."

"You're contemptible, Jared Burk," she said hotly. "It'sjust as well that I decided not to see you again after to-night."

"You do take defeat graciously, don't you?" he said withheavy irony.

"That has nothing to do with it!" she snapped, her ex-pression furious. "I was going to tell you on the way home. It's nothing against you—at least, it wasn't until now! But you have just proved yourself beneath me. I wouldn'tsee you again if you begged me to!"

He shocked her by smiling. "By God, woman, you ac-tually expect me to, don't you? I don't think I've ever metanyone quite as vain as you are."

Corinne turned bright red, but stiffened her back and rose with dignity. "So now you insult me. Well, I don'thave to listen to any more."

She started to leave, but Jared reached across the table and grabbed her wrist. "Sit down, Corinne."

"I will not!"

"Sit down!" he commanded in a voice she had neverheard him use before.

She did so, but first jerked her arm free. Then she waited, her eyes like fiery emeralds as she glared at him.

Jared leaned back in his own chair and reached into yetanother pocket and pulled out several small pieces of white paper. He tossed them across the table at Corinneand met her murderous stare.

"Since neither of us has any intention of seeing the other after tonight, you can honor these now."

She picked up the notes and was aghast to recognize herI.O.U.S to the club for two thousand dollars, now payableto Jared Burk. Her eyes turned on him accusingly.

"How did you get these?"

"I bought them."

"Why?"

"That doesn't matter. What matters is I am collecting onthem now, including the one you signed only a few minutes ago. Seven thousand, lady."

He said lady with such contempt that she flinched. "Ifmy debt was paid in full here, why wouldn't they give me more credit tonight?"

"Because when I bought your notes, I told them youwere not a good risk," he said smoothly, as if he did that sort of thing daily. "It was not hard to persuade them, since you had not come to claim the notes yourself."

"How dare you?"

"I thought I was doing you a service, since they wouldhave gone to your father soon for payment I will settlewith you, not your father."

"And just how do you expect me to pay you tonight, when you know damn well I don't have any more cash onme?" >

"But you do have something to sell."

"So my father was right!" Corinne gasped. "You're aftercontrol of the shipyard. And to think I actually defendedyou!"

Jared frowned. "Your father said that?"

"He most certainly did. He told me this evening thatyou might try to manipulate me to get control of the firm, and he was right."

"Is that why you decided not to see me again?"

"Yes," she lied, taking that excuse rather than tryingto explain the other.

"Well, your father was wrong, Corinne." Jared lied also,in a surprisingly soft tone. "And you do yourself an in-justice to believe it."

"What do you mean?" she asked suspiciously.

"I did not intend to buy your vote. That's not what Iwant from you."

"What, then? I have nothing of value on me."

Jared's eyes were inscrutable. "You have yourself, and one hour of your time upstairs."

Corinne couldn't help but laugh. "You cant be serious." When he said nothing she jumped to her feet, her temperbubbling with indignation. "I have never been so insulted!"

"You don't feel you're worth seven thousand dollars?"he asked calmly.

"My worth is not in question!" she hissed, holding ontothe table to stop her hands from trembling. "You are despicable to even suggest such a mode of payment!"

"It is the only alternative you have."

"I will get your money tomorrow, every cent of it! Youwill just have to wait until then."

"I don't intend to wait that long."

"Nor do I intend to agree to your terms!" she snapped defiantly. "And there is nothing you can do about it, now is there, Mr. Burk?"

There was a malevolent gleam in his eyes that shouldhave warned her. "On the contrary. I will collect payment in full, whether you are agreeable or not."

"You wouldn't dare," she said tightly. The others in theroom would protect her if need be.

"Is that a challenge?"

Corinne faltered when she met his determined look."No, it's not."

My God, he would attempt to collect, she thought fear-fully. Of course, someone would stop him, but it would cause such a seene that she couldn't hope to keep it secret. Rumors about it would run rampant through the city.

"Why do you hesitate, Corinne? In effect, you will receive seven thousand dollars for just an hour of your time.I don't imagine many women could command such aprice." His lips curled ever so slightly. "Or do you object being paid for what you usually give away free?"

She gasped. Could he really think that badly of her? Well,she didn't give a damn for his opinion. She wasn't goingto give in to his demands, one way or the other. But shedid need to get out of this situation without causing anembarrassing scene.

"You haven't made it worth my while," she said in adeceptively pouting tone. "Nor have you given me a sport-ing chance." She looked down at the pot in the center of the table, and then at the cards on the table before her, and smiled enticingly. "Now if you would make my debt twelve thousand, and allow me to call your raise, then I might agree to your terms."

"Might?"

Her smile widened, for she knew she couldn't lose. "Iwill agree."

He leaned forward. "So there is no misunderstanding thistime, let me make my terms clear. If I win this hand, you will go upstairs with me for one hour. And that is not anhour of conversation I am talking about, Corinne, but anhour in bed. Is that clear?"

She drew herself up. "You don't have to be so vulgar, Mr. Burk. I understood what you had in mind."

"Then you agree?"

"Yes, do you?"

He nodded, and she grinned triumphantly. She turned hercards over with a flourish and waited with

anticipation for his look of defeat. But it didn't come. Instead he grinned back at her and shook his head.

"Not good enough, Corinne."

She stared in disbelief at the cards he turned up. A highstraight flush in diamonds, beating her by one card. It wasimpossible.

When she met his eyes, her own sparkled murderously. "You cheated!"

"How could you prove it?" he asked as he pocketed themoney and the notes.

"You did, didn't you? When I left the table you changedyour cards!" she accused him furiously.

"I repeat, how could you prove it, Corinne?""I don't have to prove it—/*know it!*""That makes little difference. The cards say I won andnow you will pay up.""Not on your life!"

Corinne grabbed her purse and ran from the room. The dark hall outside the gambling room was empty. Thestairs leading up to the second floor were convenientlyright next to the entrance door, so that nongamblers couldjust slip upstairs without being seen. Corinne had neverbeen as aware of those stairs as she was right now. Sheshuddered as she passed them, hearing a woman's high-pitched laughter from somewhere above.

Should she hide up there and let Jared search fruitlessly for her out in the street? That was where he would assumeshe had gone. But she couldn't bring herself to go up thosestairs. If she could convince Jared's driver to take herhome, then she would leave him at the club. That was bet-ter.

Corinne opened the entrance door, only to have itslammed shut in front of her, Jared's large hand pressingagainst it. His arm stretched over her shoulder, and sheturned to him.

"I will scream, Jared. I will! You can't stop me from leaving herel"

"Yes, I can," he said coldly, "until you've paid yourdebt."

"I wouldn't go upstairs with you if my life depended onit. I want you to move!"

She tried to shove him away from the door, but shecouldn't budge him. He let her try for only a moment be-fore he picked her up and started up the stairs.

"No!" Corinne screamed. "No, I won't!"

"You no longer have a choice," he said as they reached the top. "Now which room would you prefer, my dear?"he taunted. "One you've occupied before? Or would that make you uncomfortable?"

Corinne's stomach churned with fear. The long corridor before her was very dark, wallpapered in deep royal blue, with only a single lamp at the opposite end giving thetiniest speck of light,

"I have never been up here before," Corinne whispered, hearing the terror in her own voice. "You have got to be-lieve me, Jared."

He laughed cruelly and moved down the corridor to the first open door. "But you don't expect me to, do you?"

"What have I done to make you think otherwise?" shedemanded.

He entered a room decorated entirely in green, from the carpet to the furniture to the sheets on the large bed. Every-thing was green.

Jared shut the door, but didn't set her down yet. Hiseyes glowed in the dim light as he looked down at her."Our room matches your eyes," he mocked.

"You've teased me for more than two months now," hecontinued. "You had to pay the consequences sometime. I don't usually wait this long."

"I never teased you!"

He raised a dark brow. "Do you deny flirting outrageous-ly with me? Do you deny returning my kisses willingly?"

"I may flirt a little, but I mean nothing by it," she saiddefensively. "I thought you understood that. And I didn'task you to kiss me, did I?"

"But you didn't try to stop me, did you? A real manwon't settle for just kisses, lady," Jared said contemptuously-

"Most will!"

"Not this man," he told her coldly. "Not when you'veled me to expect more."

He set her down and turned to lock the door. While hisback was to her, she quickly opened her purse and took outthe small knife he had long ago returned to her. It would be the first time she had ever used it other than in practice. She just prayed she could remember all that Johnny Bixler had taught her when she was only a child of ten.

Jared turned around sharply as he heard her slide theknife from its sheath. He laughed heartily at the pictureshe presented. She was dressed in gold velvet with pearlbuttons and lace trimmings. Her dark gold hair was ar-ranged on top of her head with gold velvet ribbons, a fewcurls escaping on her temples. She held a purse in one handand the knife in the other.

"Just what do you plan to do with that pretty toy?" heasked, chuckling.

"I'm going to use it if I have to. If you come near me,I will."

"Didn't anyone tell you that you can get hurt playing with knives?"

"I happen to know how to use this one. If anyone getshurt, it will be you," she said with more confidence thanshe felt. "Now unlock that door."

He ignored her demand and stood, his feet planted apart, before the door. "I wondered why you carried a weaponin your purse. Do you often feel the need to protect your-self? Or is it just me you refuse to give in to?"

She glared at him. "So you looked in my purse before you returned it? A gentleman wouldn't have done

that."

"Well, we both know I'm not one, don't we?" he replied and began removing his coat.

"What are you doing?" she demanded."I'm preparing to transact our business," he answeredlightly. "After all, you bet only an hour of your time and that time is wasting away."

"Damn you, haven't you heard anything I've said? You'renot going to touch me. I would sooner make love with the devil than with you!"

"The devil and I are on good terms," Jared said coolly."I'm sure he won't mind." "I hate you, Jared Burk!"

"That hardly makes any difference. Now be a good girland stop acting as though you've never done this before. If you cooperate, you will enjoy it as much as I will."

Before she could reply, Jared threw his coat in her face,taking her by surprise. He had her wrist in his grip beforeshe could yank the coat away. He jerked her up againsthis hard chest, bending her arm behind her back and ap-plying pressure until they both heard the knife hit the floor. He stared into her frightened eyes for several moments be- fore he brought his mouth down over hers savagely.

Corinne had never been embraced so tightly before. Herbody was molded to his. Even with the pain in her shoulder, for he had not released her arm, her body tingled withfeeling, revelled in it.

Jared released her arm and stepped back. "You want meas much as I want you. Why are you pretending other-wise?"

His words were like a slap and Corinne turned crimson. He was right. She hadn't even struggled to fight his kiss, she had returned it wholeheartedly. What was the matter with her?

She wrung her hands. God, she had to make him believeher! "I can't, Jared. I'm not what you seem to think I am.I have never been with a man before—I swear I haven't! Imay do some wild things, but that's not one of them."

"You're lying, Corinne. You're no more virginal than I am."

"Don't you care if I'm telling the truth?" she cried. "Are you so bent on having me that you won't listen? My God, you're my father's partner—*my* partner. Do you think we can ever work together after this?"

"This has nothing to do with the business. You're payingyour debt, Corinne. That's all."

"Damn your blackhearted soul!" she stormed. "Lowe younothing!" She had forgotten her fear.

"That's what this is all about, isn't it, Corinne?" Hegrinned sardonically. "You're just mad because you thinkI cheated you."

"You did! But regardless of that, I'm not about to give myself to any man until I marry."

"Then you shouldn't have agreed to it downstairs," he replied, and reached for the buttons on her dress.

Corinne slapped his hand away furiously and bent to retrieve her knife, but Jared kicked it out of her

reach. Helifted her up and tossed her on the bed, not too gently.

Corinne started screaming, but Jared fell on her andcovered her mouth with his hand.

"Don't get me angry," he said in a deadly voice. "I canbe very cruel when I'm angry." He used his free hand torip her dress open. "It won't do you any good to cry rape, because no one here is going to give a damn. The opinion of the house is, if a lady comes here, then she's no lady. I'm of the same opinion, so don't try my patience anymore. Is that clear?"

As Jared uncovered the firm mounds of her breasts, some of the coldness left his voice. "You really are beauti-ful," he murmured. "I've never seen such soft, white skin."

He bent his head to her breasts and kissed each peak inturn. He lingered there for a long while before he lookedup into her wide, tear-filled eyes.

"I won't hurt you, Corinne, as long as you don't fightme," he said almost-tenderly. "I promise you that."

He moved his hand from her mouth and bent to kissher. He kissed her deeply, ravishing her mouth with histongue, but she did not respond at all. He shrugged indif-ferently.

"If you want to be stubborn, that's up to you, Corinne. It won't stop me."

Corinne wouldn't answer. She was so ashamed shewanted only to die. She couldn't stop him. He would hurther if she tried, he had said so. And he would rape heranyway, so why should she suffer more than she had to?

She prayed for him to finish quickly. When he lifted herto remove the rest of her clothes, she didn't resist. Whenhe spoke to her tenderly, she didn't hear. When his strong, powerful hands caressed her gently, she felt nothing but hershame.

Tears fell silently down the corners of her tightly closed eyes. When a sharp, ripping pain made her jerk, she bit herlips to keep from crying out. He had promised not to hurther, but she knew he would. Florence had not let her growup entirely ignorant. Now Jared Burk had taken her inno-cence, the innocence she had always expected to give her husband. He had forced it from her with brute strength. Corinne had never known such hate as she felt now forJared.

Jared's exhausted body became very heavy, and Corinneguessed it was over.

"You have been paid in full, Mr. Burk," she said tone-lessly. "If you will kindly remove yourself from my person,I would like to leave."

"You're certainly a cold bitch," he grunted, then left thebed to dress.

"I was told that once already this evening. I don't need you to tell me again."

"What you need is someone to warm you up. I pity the man you marry if he has to put up with that kind of per-formance in bed."

"Hewon't," Corinne replied tightly, and sat up on theedge of the bed, swaying a little. "What if I get pregnant?"

He shrugged. "Odds are you won't, since this won't hap-pen again. But it is your risk, not mine. It comes with be-' ing a woman."

Jared finished putting his clothes on and casually steppedaround the bed to retrieve her torn dress. Corinne heardhis sharp intake of breath and turned to look at him. She followed his gaze to the center of the bed and the stain ofblood that looked black on the green sheets.

"What's the matter, Mr. Burk?" she asked bitterly. "Youseem surprised. Didn't you know that virgins bleed?"

His eyes met hers and they were a bright gray, without a trace of blue. He stared at her for a long time.

Finally he marched to the door, her clothes gripped tightly in his hands. He turned and glared at her acrossthe room.

"You stay here until I return," he ordered harshly. "Doyou hear me?"

"Where are you going?"

"Just stay here, Corinne," he answered. "I will be back before noon."

"Noon!" she gasped. "It's almost dawn now. You know I have to be home by dawn or I will be missed!"

"I will take care of that."

"How?"

But he was gone. And he had taken her clothes. Whatevil was he up to now?

Chapter 10

With two blankets wrapped about his legs and aheavy cloak about his shoulders, Jared waited im-patiently in his carriage outside the old brownstone town-house on Beacon Street. It was just dawn, and the chillfrom the autumn night still invaded his bones. It would be hours yet before the sun would dispel the infernal cold.

It would also be a while yet before it would be appro-priate for him to call on Samuel Barrows. The older manwould still be asleep in his warm bed, unaware of his daughter's whereabouts. Jared had enough to tell him that would arouse his ire without making things worse by wak-ing him up.

Damn! Nothing had gone right since yesterday. And hehad thought he had everything worked out perfectly. With Corinne's debts from the club in his possession, and their agreeable relationship, it would have been a simple matter to sway her to his side. After all, she was not on goodterms with her father right now, not since he opposed hermarriage to Drayton. She would easily have voted hershares in the shipyard with his, if just for spite. Or so Jared assumed.

But she blew his plans to hell by casually informing himthat she wouldn't see him again. And after he had

wasted two months dancing attendance on her! And if his failure with her were not enough, Samuel Barrows suspected his plans for the shipyard.

Now Jared was feeling guilty—guilty and furious. Thebitch had deserved what she got. She had no business pre-tending to be an experienced woman. A virgin—a dam-naWe virgin! She had tried to tell him, but he wouldn't be-lieve her, which made it even worse.

Jared couldn't stand waiting anymore. If he had topull Barrows out of bed, that was too bad. But a few moreminutes of these recriminations and he would say to hell with it all. There was one more course of action—the lastone—but he certainly didn't relish it. It was either that orgive up and go home. At this point, he was just about ready to go.

Brock opened the door to Jared's knock after only ashort wait. Jared had gotten used to this sour-faced butler, but he had never before seen him quite so put out.

"Really, sir." Brock was indignant "Are you aware ofthe hour?"

"Of course I am," Jared answered impatiently. "Iwouldn't be here if it were not an urgent matter."

"But Miss Corinne never rises this early," Brock replied, casting a look behind him at the stairs. "And her maid letsno one disturb her."

Jared wondered if the butler assumed she had only justcome home. She had said her servants were aware of her escapades. You couldn't hide anything from servants forvery long.

"I don't wish to disturb Miss Barrows," Jared said withsome amusement. "It's her father I wish to see."

"Well, sir, that is different. Highly irregular at this hour, but Mr. Barrows does happen to be up and dressing at thismoment. If you would care to wait in the study, I will in- form him of your presence."

Ten minutes later, a welcome cup of coffee in his hands, Jared rose to greet Samuel Barrows as he entered his study.

"I understand there is some urgency," Samuel stated ashe took his place behind his large desk. "I can't imagine what it could be unless you've decided to terminate yourstay in Boston. Have you come to finish our business before you leave, Mr. Burk?"

"This has nothing to do with business," Jared replied, wondering how he should begin.

"Just what is so important, then?"

"I've come about your daughter." Jared jumped rightinto the heart of it. "To get your approval of our forth-coming marriage."

Samuel stared incredulously at Jared for several mo-ments before he blustered, "Good God, young man! I don'tknow how you do things where you come from, but herewe usually discuss these matters at a civil hour."

"You will understand shortly why I couldn't wait, Mr.Barrows. But first, I want to know if you will give us yourblessing."

"Please, Mr. Burk. Not so fast." Samuel held up hishand to slow things down. "I was under the impressionthat Corinne wasn't exactly attracted to you. No offense meant, but perhaps you're not aware that she prefers menshe can dominate. Was I wrong about you? Does mydaughter find you easy to—er—deal with?"

"No."

"Well, why would she agree to marry you?"

"I haven't asked her yet."

Samuel couldn't help laughing. "But you think she willsay yes when you do?"

"She will, with the proper persuasion. And I can be very persuasive."

"I'm sure you can be, but Corinne is not easily per-suaded. She knows what she wants out of life and she has the stubborn will to see it through. And you're not exactly what she has been looking for."

"Perhaps not," Jared shrugged. "But I am the man sheis going to marry."

"You sound as if you are telling me, not asking me," Samuel observed with a raised brow.

"I am. I would rather have your approval, but it won'tmake that much difference."

Samuel chuckled, his brown eyes alight with pleasure. "I like a man with determination, Mr. Burk. You must love my daughter a great deal."

Jared scowled. He had hoped to avoid this aspect ofthings.

"To be frank, Mr. Barrows, love hasn't entered into it. Your daughter is extremely beautiful, as you know, and desirable as a woman, but she is going to make a difficult wife. I don't need to tell you how radical her thinking is, for I'm sure you know that already. She considers marriageher ticket to freedom. She gives no thought to the responsi-bilities involved. But with guidance, she will learn."

Now Samuel's paternal instincts were aroused. He stoodup stiffly, placed his hands flat on his desk, and leaned for-ward with an angry gleam in his brown eyes.

"Let me get this straight, Mr. Burk. You don't love my daughter and, in your opinion, she won't make you a goodwife. So why in damnation are you here telling me you'regoing to marry her?"

Jared did not hesitate. "It's a matter of honor, sir."

"Honor? Just what the hell are you talking about?" Samuel blustered, thoroughly confused.

"Before I explain, let me ask you this. Are you awareof your daughter's predilection for gambling? Do you knowthat she leaves your home late almost every night to fre-quent an unsavory establishment across the Charles?"

"I know everything my daughter does, including that youhave been her escort on these late night ventures ever sincethat weak-kneed Drayton left town."

"If you knew, why didn't you put a stop to it?" Jareddemanded.

"The only way I could have done so would have been to lock her in her room. The girl is headstrong and will dowhatshe wants, not what I tell her to do. I felt she wouldlose interest soon. I still think she will."

"But in the meantime, you don't mind that she is seenin that place?"

"Of course I mind. But I can't stop her from going there."

"You really should have, Mr. Barrows," Jared said omi-nously. "That place is not just a gambling house. Any pa-tron who goes there knows what the second floor of thehouse is used for. Do you?"

"Yes." Samuel looked away, embarrassed. "Yes, yes, I know. But Corinne is a good girl. I don't worry on thatscore."

"Perhapsyou knew how innocent she was," Jared re-marked sardonically. "But I didn't. In my opinion,* no de-cent woman would go to such a place."

"Here, here!"

"Let me finish. That is not the only reason I... assumed certain things about her. In case you didn't know, yourdaughter is an outrageous tease. She gives the distinct im-pression that she is worldly in all matters. Do you under-stand what I am saying, Mr. Barrows? Because of herflirtatious manner and the infamy of the gambling house she frequents, I did not believe her innocent, not even whenshe swore to me that she was."

Samuel's face turned a bright red. "Just what have youdone to my daughter?"

Jared felt every muscle in his body come alive. He hadput himself in a dangerous position. But he was going to tell the truth.

"I won Corinne in a hand of poker, in a game involvingonly the two of us. The terms were established before-hand. She was determined to finish the hand, but she didn'thave the money to do so. So she wagered herself."

"I don't believe it!" Samuel stormed.

"She was positive she would win, Mr. Barrows. Other-wise I'm sure she wouldn't have agreed to the terms. But she did agree—and she lost. And then she refused to honorher wager. But I'm afraid I didn't feel quite gallant enough to accept her refusal."

"What are you saying, Burk? If you—"

"I raped your daughter," Jared cut him off coldly. "Iregret it, but it doesn't alter the fact—I raped her. If I hadhad the slightest belief in her innocence, then it certainlywouldn't have happened. But she did wager herself. Icould not believe a virgin would take that risk."

Samuel sat down heavily in his chair, "I don't knowwhat to say to you, Burk. I should have you thrown in jail, but the trouble is, I understand how this could have hap-pened. My God, was my daughter really fool enough togamble herself in a game of chance?"

"Yes."

"And now, because she was indeed a virgin, you feelobliged to marry her?"

"I will not take full blame for what happened. But be-cause of her innocence, I do regret it. I feel like a completeidiot for having judged her so incorrectly. But what's done is done. She has paid for her mistake. Now I feel honor-bound to pay for mine. I will do right by her, Mr. Barrows. In fact, I insist on it."

"This must have happened last night?"

"Yes. She isn't hurt, sir." Jared anticipated him. "She's

not too pleased with me, however. In fact, I left her in afine temper."

"You left her? Where?"

"She's still across the river, in a cozy bedroom, probably sleeping right now."

"Not if I know my daughter. She'll come storming in hereany moment, demanding your head on a platter."

"I don't think so. I didn't leave her much choice in the matter of her staying or leaving. I have her clothes withme."

Samuel took a deep breath. He couldn't hold Jaredentirely to blame for this. Corinne had brought it on her-self. Who knew her better than he did? And he had warned her not to trifle with Burk.

He cleared his throat. "I will say truthfully, Mr. Burk, that I wish to God none of this had happened. But it has, and at least you have offered to do the right thing by mydaughter."

"Then you will approve the marriage?"

"I will, if Corinne agrees to it. But if she doesn't, and quite frankly, I doubt she will, then you will not be obligedto make further restitution."

"That is very charitable of you, under the circumstances. But she will agree," Jared said confidently.

Samuel scowled. "If you think to use force to get her tomarry you, you can abandon that plan right now. I willnot allow Corinne to be abused again."

"I had not even considered that, Mr. Barrows," Jared replied smoothly. "I give you my word. I will not mistreat Corinne in any way."

"I hope I can trust you to keep your word," Samuelreturned with a stern look.

"You can."

"Very well, then, you have my permission to proposemarriage to her. But when you speak to her, I would ap-preciate it if you wouldn't mention that I approve the mar-riage. In fact, it would be better if she didn't know that I am aware of what has happened. I don't want to causeher any further shame."

"I understand," Jared said uncomfortably. "But I'mafraid I need one of her dresses from here. The one shewas wearing was—damaged. She will know I have beenhere."

Samuel almost flew into a rage again. "No problem, Mr.Burk," he said tightly. "Get the dress you have with you fixed. Find a seamstress and have it repaired, it's that sim-ple. I will see that my butler forgets you have called."

Chapter 11

CORINNE was asleep when Jared returned. He wantednothing more than to get some sleep himself, but hecouldn't yet He had to get things settled with Corinnefirst.

He laid her clothes out on the foot of the bed and stoodlooking down at her. Her dark-gold hair had come un-bound and lay spread out over the pillow in soft waves. It was so long and luxuriant, like spun silk.

She really was so damnably beautiful. If only she weren'tBarrows' daughter. . . . But she was, and Jared couldn'tallow himself to forget that. To Jared, she was only a meansto an end. And once that end was accomplished, he wouldnever see this wild, green-eyed beauty again.

"Corinne, get up," Jared said softly, and shook hershoulder. "We have to talk."

"Go away," she mumbled, and turned her head into thepillow.

"Come on, now," he coaxed good-naturedly. "It's al-most ten o'clock."

She glared at him, sleep vanishing instantly now. "You!So you came back after all?"

He grinned. "You didn't think I would just leave youhere, did you?"

"Yes," she said bitterly, pulling the sheet up tightly to' cover herself. "I wouldn't put anything pastyou!"

"I went to get your dress repaired. And I needed timeto think, to make decisions."

"About what?"

"About last night. Corinne—"

"I don't want to talk about it!" she cut him off furiously."I just want to forget it!"

"It's not that simple."

"Isn't it? If you will just get out of my life, I will forgetyou quite easily."

"I would like to forget, too, but I can't," Jared replied."What I did was unforgiveable."

"Are you trying to say you're sorry?" Corinne askedcaustically.

"Yes."

"Dont you think it's a bit late for regrets, Mr. Burk? The damage is done."

"It's not too late for me to make amends."

"Are you a magician?" she asked in a sarcastic tone. "Can you give me back my innocence?"

"No, but I can see to it that you don't suffer further be-cause of what I did to you."

"Suffer further? What are you talking about?" she de-manded. "The only suffering I'm enduring is being in thesame room with you!"

"I wish you would calm down, Corinne, so we can talkseriously."

"Why should I?" she snapped,

"Because you are as much to blame for what happenedas I am," he said sharply, then lowered his tone beforecontinuing. "I was wrong, Corinne, but I was angry with you for leading me on. You had no business acting the wayyou did if you were a virgin."

She turned away, unable to look him in the eye. Sheknew she was partly to blame—*she knew it*. But it didn'tstop the rage she felt at being used so callously.

"You didn't have to treat me like a whore," she said in a small voice.

Jared sat down on the side of the bed, strangely moved by her pitiful statement. He reached out and turned herface to his.

"I am so sorry, Corinne. I swear I never meant to cause you so much pain." His eyes searched hers deeply. "If I had known you were innocent, I wouldn't have touched you. You do believe that, don't you?"

"I don't know," she said weakly. Tears formed, makingher eyes shimmering pools of green. "I don't know whatto believe about you any more."

"I can't blame you for not trusting me now. But I swearI will never hurt you again, Corinne."

"Just go away, Jared." She pushed at him. "I don't wantto talk anymore."

Her words shook him more than he let on. They werethe very words his mother had said to his father so long ago. The sharp reminder shocked him deeply.

"Youwill talk to me, Corinne. You have to, for yourown sake." He added, "A child might have been

conceived last night. Will you take that risk all alone?"

"Just what are you getting at, Jared?" Corinne demanded wearily. "Just tell me, and get it over with."

"I want you to marry me."

There was a moment of complete silence.

"Do you?" She laughed without humor. "Do you really?Tell me why?"

"I am serious, Corinne."

"I asked you why, Jared," she said coldly. "You don'tlove me. Are you sacrificing yourself because you feelguilty?"

"I don't feel I am sacrificing anything. I am only tryingto solve the problem I have created," he replied, keepinghis tone calm.

"Well, I don't see any problem. What's done is done. I'm not going to go and kill myself because of last night. I'll survive, you can be sure of that."

"And if there is a child?"

"If that happens, I will give it away," she said harshly,intending her words to cut him, "I certainly wouldn't keep ja child of yours."

Jared gritted his teeth. She certainly hated him.

"I am not offering you only marriage, Corinne, but alsowhat you want out of life. I know that you love RussellDrayton, but I also know that your father won't let youmarry him. But if you marry me now, you will not only protect yourself in case of a possible pregnancy, but youwill have what you want. After a reasonable time, you can divorce me and have Drayton."

Corinne started to explain that there could be no divorce in her family. It wasn't acceptable. But her curiosity wasaroused. "What did you mean, I would have what I wantout of life?"

"You want freedom, don't you?" he reminded her. "Youwant independence?"

"Are you saying that if I married you, you wouldn't tryto control me? You wouldn't set down any rules, or try to estrict me in anyway?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying," Jared replied, knowingthat he had finally swayed her.

"And my money? Would you try to regulate it?"

"I don't need your money, Corinne. You can do what-ever you want with it."

She couldn't believe he was willing to give her exactlywhat she wanted. It was too good to be true. Why was hebeing so cooperative?

"How can I trust you?" she asked skeptically.

"I will sign an agreement in writing, if you wish," heoffered.

"Before marriage?"

"Yes."

She looked away from him. "What you propose is verytempting, Jared," Corinne admitted after a while. "But Iwonder if you will still want to marry me after you hearmy last condition."

"I'm listening." Jared grinned slightly, sure that he hadwon.

"Last night was very humiliating for me. I found mak-ing love thoroughly repugnant. If I agreed to marry you,I would be your wife only for appearances' sake."

"You're saying your bed will be off limits?"

"Yes."

The muscles in Jared's jaw twitched. Why did he mind?He could never grow to love her anyway. Why was hehurt?

"You didn't give yourself a chance last night, Corinne.Making love can be very enjoyable for both partners, whenboth participate."

"I don't intend to let you prove that, Jared," she returnedstubbornly.

"Very well," he said. "As long as you don't object tomy finding satisfaction elsewhere."

Corinne laughed, to Jared's further chagrin. "I would besurprised if you didn't. No, I have no objection."

Jesus, she really didn't give a damn about him, did she?

Jared kept his expression controlled. "There will have tobe one night, though, the wedding night—to consummate the marriage."

Corinne considered that. One more night like last night. How could she? But here was everything she wanted, andnot two years away. She would be able to stand just onenight.

"I agree," she said finally. "You're getting an awfullypoor bargain, Jared. Do you think it's worth it?"

Jared relaxed completely. Not once did she mention her shares in the shipyard. He didn't know how he would have handled that if she had brought it up.

"My part of the bargain is not so bad, Corinne. I willbe making amends to clear my conscience. Yes, it's worthit. And besides, it won't be for all that long. Once you geta divorce, we will go our separate ways."

Corinne's eyes danced with laughter. He thought he knew why she was happy, but he didn't know the realreason.

There will be no divorce, Jared Burk, thought Corinne. This bargain will be till death do us part. But she

wouldn'ttell him that just now. God, what magnificent revengel

Chapter 12

THE were posted and the wedding dateset for October 10, a Sunday less than four weeksaway. Invitations were dispatched immediately, and Co-rinne started fittings for her wedding gown. Her days were filled with making preparations and shopping for hertrousseau. The four weeks passed quickly.

She didn't see much of Jared during this time, and hadlittle opportunity to talk to him. He sent over the writtenagreement he had promised her, and that removed all trace of doubt.

Her father didn't know about the paper that guaranteedher independence. If he had, he would never have let hermarry Jared. Corinne sometimes wondered why her fatherhad agreed to the marriage so easily, without questioning her about her change of mind concerning Jared. But shegave the matter little thought.

During the final hectic week before the wedding, onlyone thing happened to disturb Corinne. Russell returned toBoston. He already knew that Jared had replaced him, so she didn't have to break that to him. But he did demandexplanations.

It was the middle of the afternoon when Corinne was informed that Russell was waiting for her in the parlordownstairs. She had been trying on her finished wedding gown, delivered just that morning, and had been in a bub-bling mood, for the gown was exquisite. Now her spiritswere dampened.

Seeing Corinne's expression, Florence asked, "Did youthink you wouldn't have to face the poor man?"

"No, but I had hoped I would be Mrs. Jared Burk first,"Corinne replied. "Now quickly, help me change."

"It would be even worse if you didn't see him until afterthe wedding," Florence said as she began unhooking theback of the gown. "The man expected to marry you. Hedeserves to know why you choose another instead."

"I know. But at least if I were already safely married, Russell couldn't try to talk me out of it."

Florence shook her head. "You treat a man's feelings solightly, Cori."

"Russell knows I didn't love him," she said defensively.

"Buthe lovedyou."

"Whose side are you on, Florence?" Corinne demanded petulantly.

"Yours, my girl. I've known you since you were born.My mother was your nurse, and then I took care of you after she died. You've been like a daughter to me."

"Oh, stop it," Corinne giggled. "You're not old enoughto be my mother."

"I'm close enough. And when I can't speak my mind toyou, then it's time I left."

"Don't be silly."

"Well, you have to listen to someone, Cori. And whoelse will tell you what you're doing is wrong? I never caredfor Russell Drayton, but you used him. That was terrible. Now you're using Mr. Burk to get what you want, and you don't love him any more than you loved Drayton."

"Jared is aware of that. Our marriage will be one ofconvenience."

"Convenience only for you. Heavens, Cori. You told me you won't even be sharing the same bedroom. What is hegoing to get out of this marriage?"

"He owes me!" Corinne snapped, forgetting that Florence didn't know about Jfared's mistreatment of her.

"Owes you? Owes you what? What haven't you told me, Corinne Barrows?" Florence asked sternly.

"Nothing." Corinne nervously laughed it off. "Nothing, really."

She couldn't tell Florence. She was too ashamed of her own part in it. Worse, no one would understand how she could agree to marry the man who had raped her. No, shecouldn't explain.

When she came downstairs, she found Russell in a furi-ous mood, made worse by his having been kept waiting.

"I was beginning to think you were afraid to face me!"Russell nearly shouted as she came into the room.

Corinne ignored the accusation and inquired softly, "Did your grandfather recover, Russell?"

"He died."

"I'm sorry."

"I'm sure you are," Russell replied cuttingly. "Just asI'm sure' you're sorry you didn't let me know you haddropped me for someone else the moment my back was turned!"

"Don't be bitter, Russell. You know my father wouldn't have let us marry."

"You said you would convince him!" he reminded her, his blue eyes dark with anger.

"I tried, but he just wouldn't change his mind."

"You know I would have waited until you no longerneeded his permission," Russell said, a little less harshlynow.

"And you know I had no intention of waiting that long." Corinne's annoyance was building. "Be reasonable, Russell.I never pretended to love you. I made that clear. I was honest with you from the beginning. It just didn't work outthe way we wanted."

"Do you love Burk?"

"No. I have the same agreement with him as I had withyou. The only difference is that my father didn't refuseJared. And if it's any consolation, Russell, Jared and I willbe married in name only."

Russell crooked a brow. "That wasn't one of our agree-ments."

"No, it wasn't."

"Why would a man like Burk accept such preposterousterms?"

"Idon't think they're preposterous." Corinne brushedaway the question indignantly.

"What does Burk get out of this?"

"A wife for appearances' sake only," Corinne lied."Which is what he wants."

"And that's all?"

"Yes."

Russell sneered. "So he's using you just as you are him.He'll have his fun with the ladies, but needn't worry about being pressured into marriage, since he will have a legalwife. How very tidy. The man really is a cad, isn't he?"

"I suppose that's what he has in mind," Corinne re-marked with some irritation. She hadn't considered Jared'splans.

"Then will you still see me, after you're married?"

Corinne frowned. "I don't know, Russell."

He hurried over to her and grabbed her shoulders. "Don't shut me out completely, Corinne."

"If you're still hoping I will fall in love with you, don't. I doubt I will ever lose my heart, Russell. I would have todepend on someone else then, to trust them. I much prefer relying on myself. I can count on me."

"I can't give up hope, Corinne, not yet." He pulled hercloser and sought her lips for a long kiss. "Don't ask meto."

Corinne hated the pleading in his voice, the hurt look. Itwas the weak men who could not give up gracefully.

"I suppose we could remain friends," she suggestedbriskly. "But I really can't see you again until after I'm married."

"Very well, Corinne. Whatever you say," he eagerlyagreed.

It was so like Russell to bend to her every wish. It was really too bad her father had refused him. At least she liked Russell. She couldn't say as much for Jared Burk.

Chapter13

OCTOBER 10 dawned with a misty rain that built to athunderous storm by mid-afternoon. From her bed-room window, Corinne looked miserably out on the rain-drenched street. Streams of water ran along the gutters. The park across the street was flooded.

Corinne glanced over her shoulder at Florence andasked dismally, "Isn't it suppose to be bad luck to have itrain on your wedding day?"

Florence was searching through the dressing table for Corinne's pearl-studded hair pins. She turned and made adisapproving sound.

"Now, that's only superstitious nonsense. And besides, itsounds to me like it's letting up. The sun may shine yet be-fore four o'clock."

Corinne looked once more at the dreary park scene. "Itwon't," she sighed, and turned away from the window. "Andmy hair will probably be ruined going to and from the car-riage. Not to mention my gown."

"Maybe we should go to the church early and dress youthere," Florence suggested.

"Yes, maybe," Corinne replied automatically, herthoughts already drifting to other matters. From the moment she had awakened that morning she had been as-sailed by doubts. Suddenly she turned wide, fearful eyes onher maid. "Oh, Florence, what have I gotten myself into?"

"Don't you look at me as if I had answers," Florencesaid austerely. "You should have thought of that sooner, my girl."

"I don't know this man I'm marrying," Corinne went on. "My God, I still don't even know where he comes from!"

"Does it matter?"

"Nor do I know where we will live. We can't very wellstay in his hotel."

"I'm sure he has made some kind of plans, Cori," Flor-ence tried to reassure her.

"He'd better not. Not without my approval!" she snapped childishly. "And if he thinks I am going to leave Boston togo live wherever it is he comes from, well—"

"I don't know why you didn't talk these things out withthe man. What have you been thinking of?"

"It didn't occur to me until now," Corinne admitted, and then cried in a burst of panic. "Oh, Florence, I won't marry him! I can't!"

"That would be a scandal—one to set all of Boston onfire. Corinne Barrows doesn't show up at the church!" ,"But—"

"No buts." Florence cut her off, though gently. "You'rejust nervous, Cori. It happens to all brides. This marriage is what you wanted. And you're getting a fine, handsome devil for a husband." "Devil is right."

"Tsk! From what I've seen of Jared Burk, he's nothingbut a pussycat. He's a charmer, that one."

"Well, I've seen another side to him, Florence. He's liketwo completely different men.""What are you talking about?"

"Nothing," Corinne answered quickly. "It must benerves. Maybe I'm just worried about tonight and what willhappen after the reception."

"Ah, that will go smoothly," Florence chuckled. "Youknow what it's all about because I told you so myself, since your poor mother wasn't around to do so. Not thatshe would have, with her upbringing. Lord, but you're notlike your mother at all."

"I remember so little about her," Corinne reflected, feel-ing herself slowly relaxing. "Only that she and Father never really got along."

"Well, their marriage was one of convenience too, just like yours will be."

"I know," Corinne said and glanced at the clock. "Wehad better be going if I'm going to dress at the church. Illtell Father while you get my things ready. And don't forget my grandmother's pearl necklace. It will go so well with allthat white lace on my gown."

"I know, I know," Florence smiled. "Are you feelingbetter now?"

"Yes. I don't know what got into me, but I'm fine now.Let's get this wedding over with."

Parked at the end of the street, a few houses away from the church, was an old-fashioned coach with two spiritedmares harnessed to it. The coach was empty and facingaway from the church, but a heavily cloaked driver sat upon the box, turning to look back at the church every timehe heard a carriage pull up near it.

Thunder sounded often, and lightning lit the darklyclouded sky. The rain came down in sheets, but the driverdidn't seek the dry interior of the coach.

He waited, waited for one particular carriage and theoccupant who would step down from it. A brand new riflewas held tightly in his hands, concealed beneath his cloak.

Jared was in a foul mood. He rode to the church with Willis Sherman, the lawyer Dougherty had recommended to him. Sherman would be his best man, and sat across from him in the carriage. Jared hid his agitation from Sher-man.

What in damnation was he doing marrying Barrows'daughter! Every time he looked at her he was reminded of her father and how much he hated him. But it wouldn't be for long, he told himself. As soon as he used Corinne's shares to destroy the firm, she would divorce him. But howlong would that take? And was it worth marrying her for?

So much time had already been invested. He had lefthome five months ago. But at least no one at home wouldknow that he had married and divorced during his trip tothe mainland. He wished it were over, that he were on hisway home right now.

The carriage stopped and Jared waited for the ushers tobring umbrellas before he stepped outside. A fine day fora wedding, he thought grimly. Suddenly, thunder crackedlike a shot from a gun and it was several seconds before Jared realized it had indeed been a shot. And he soonspotted a hole in the carriage where the bullet had struckonly inches from him. Jared watched as a coach took off quickly down the street.

"Strange-sounding thunder," Willis Sherman remarked ashe followed Jared to the church.

"Yes, it was," Jared replied, saying nothing more.

His instinct was to follow the disappearing coach. But Corinne would never tolerate being stood up at the altar. He was stunned, not so much because he could have beenkilled, but because he couldn't figure why someone wouldtry to shoot him. He had no enemies here in Boston. Itdidn't make any sense. For that reason, he concluded that the shot had not been meant for him. It was probably a madman run amuck.

"Come on, before we get soaked," Willis urged. "It'scoming down hard and these umbrellas aren't any help."

Jared nodded and hurried up the steps to the church. Hedismissed the shooting. Right now, he had to get married.

A few minutes later, Samuel and Corinne Barrows slowlyfollowed Lauren, the maid of honor, down the aisle. Jaredstood waiting at the altar with an impatient look about him that made Corinne all the more nervous.

He was superbly fitted in black pants and a white formaljacket with black velvet lapels. He was extremely hand-some. Corinne couldn't help feeling a little proud because of it. Lauren was happy, and also envious. And Cynthia had refused to come to the wedding. She had had such highhopes about Jared, and wouldn't even talk to Corinne. Russell hadn't come, either. But many others from her crowd of friends and her father's friends were there to wishher well. The guests were richly and colorfully dressed.

Her father pressed her arm reassuringly, but his presencedidn't help her panic. Her hands were sweating. Her heartpounded so furiously she could hear it above the musicand the roaring rain outside.

When Jared took her hand, she knew he could feelthe cold clamminess of it. He would know how frightened she was. When he smiled at her she blushed hot pink be-neath her veil. She couldn't know that he was admiring herdespite himself. In the lace-covered white silk gown and hem-length matching veil, she was lovelier than anyone he had ever seen. What a peculiar twist of nature, Jared con-sidered, that anyone as heartless as Corinne Barrows shouldlook so much like an angel. Her dark-gold hair was piled high and pinned with pearls, then covered by the veil. She carried New England fall flowers, the deep red and orange chrysanthemums accenting her lovely hair perfectly. Jared shook himself from his reverie as the minister began. Thegaunt old man in white rob^es began the traditional weddingservice, but Jared paid scant attention, and Corinne barelyheard what was said. She had just realized that she wasutterly alone, and likely to stay that way. After today, herfather would not play a large part in her life, and Jared hadpromised not to interfere in her life at all. He had signed apaper agreeing to that. She had in effect made him state that he didn't give a damn about her. And he didn't. Shewould have only herself to depend on from today on.

"I now pronounce you man and wife."

Corrine gasped. She couldn't run away now. It was over. She had said yes without even knowing it. She stood para-lyzed as Jared lifted her veil and touched her eold lipswith his.

"Smile, Mrs. Burk," he whispered as he took her armto escort her down the aisle. "This is supposed to be ahappy occasion."

She fixed a smile on her lips for the benefit of the guests, and was soon lost in a whirl of congratulations. She waspassed from one man to another for the traditional bride'skiss. Eventually Jared maneuvered her through the crowd and out of the church. They dashed to the waiting carriagethat would take them to the photographer's studio andthen the reception at her home.

Riding in the carriage, avoiding Jared's eyes, Corinnekept repeating to herself, it's done, it's done. She had hermarriage certificate, which she had signed without evenlooking at it. And at home she had the document that would make Jared honor his promises to her. It would be all right. She just had to get through tonight.

She sat through the picture-taking with an outward showof calm. Jared no longer seemed impatient. The pictureswere taken quickly, and they left. They had not spoken more than a dozen words to each other.

The reception was in full swing when they arrived at the Barrows' townhouse. Again they were bombarded with goodwishes by a jubilant crowd. The party was gay. Samuel

Barrows had ordered the best foreign delicacies and themost expensive champagne. Boston society could alwaysunbend for a wedding party. Frequent toasts were made, and Corinne was seldom without a glass in her hand. But much sooner than she expected, Jared suggested they leave. Corinne refused and refused again, but finally Jared cornered her by the stairs.

"Go up and change, Corinne."

There was a determined note in his voice, but she wasn't nearly drunk enough yet to go with him.

"Won't we be staying here for the night?"

"Under your father's roof? Hardly," he replied derisively. "We shall spend our short honeymoon at my hotel."

"Not yet, Jared. It's still early."

He grabbed her elbow and his grip was unduly harsh. "I know what you're trying to do, Corinne, but it won't work. This night is mine, and I intend that we both enjoy it."

"You can enjoy it all you want, but I certainly won't!" she hissed, furious that he saw through her plan.

"I wouldn't be too sure," he said with a devilish smile thatmade her shiver.

"I don't want to go yet, Jared." She tried pouting, butit didn't work.

"I will take you upstairs myself, Corinne, if I have to,"he warned her. "And if you're not back down here in twenty minutes, then—"

"Very well!" She glared at him before she went upstairsin a huff.

Florence was waiting for her. A burgundy dress andcape were laid out on her bed. "I only just laid your clothesout. I didn't think you would be up this soon."

"Neither did I!" Corinne replied angrily.

"The other things you will need have already been sent to his hotel."

"By whose orders?"

"Mr. Burk arranged it."

"Did you know about this?"

"Come now, Cori. You didn't really think you would spend your wedding night in your own home, did you?"Florence admonished.

"I just don't like having things arranged for me withoutmy knowledge."

"Well, if you had taken the time to discuss things withyour husband before today, you wouldn't be surprised."

"My husband? Yes, well, speaking of him, we had besthurry. He had the nerve to threaten to come up here and get me if I take too long."

Florence chuckled. "He's impatient, is he?"

"He'll have his one night—but that's all he'll ever have!"

The ride to the hotel was accomplished in total silence. Corinne was feeling only a little light-headed from all thechampagne she had consumed, but that was slowly slippingaway because of her anger and, she had to admit, her fear. She had hoped not to be aware of one minute of the ordeal, but Jared had thwarted her.

His hotel suite was large and luxurious, one of the bestthe management offered. There was a burgundy and gold living room, with a balcony overlooking the city, and abedroom hidden by double doors. She eyed those doors warily as Jared took her cloak from her and tossed it on a sofa. Then she saw a bucket on the table with a bottle ofchampagne chilling in it.

Nodding towards the bottle, she smiled. "We haven'ttoasted each other yet."

"Let's not be hypocritical, Corinne."

"For God's sakel" she snapped. "One more glass isn't going to knock me outt"

He came over to her and lifted her chin to stare intoher dark green eyes. "Very well, if you go and change whileI fill the glasses."

She turned away from him. "Can't that wait a bitlonger?"

"No."

"Please, Jared."

He grabbed her shoulders, forcing her to look at him again. "Reluctance was not part of our agreement, Co-rinne," he said in a surprisingly gentle voice. "Why do youbegrudge me this one night? I'm not going to hurt you again, I promised you that."

She knew she was being unreasonable. She had de-manded so much, yet this was all he had asked for in re-turn.

"I'm sorry," Corinne said weakly, lowering her eyes. "Iguess I'm just—frightened."

He drew her into his arms and held her gently forseveral long moments before he spoke. "I know. But youhave nothing to fear from me." He lifted her face to hisand kissed her tenderly. "Tonight isn't going to be like the last time, Corinne. I'm not angry with you, and I promisenot to lose my temper, so there is no reason for you to be afraid."

He spoke so softly that she almost trusted him. Almost. She remembered the feelings that used to soar through herwhen he kissed her before. Perhaps she might enjoy tonight after all.

"I won't be long," she said shyly and walked to the bed-room.

Jared smiled as she closed the doors behind her. Howeasy to manipulate Corinne was, when he made the effort. He would give her something to remember tonight, some-thing to make her wish she hadn't demanded separatebedrooms.

Corinne found her traveling case open on the foot offhe bed. She withdrew the negligee and robe that she hadbought for tonight. The gown was a delicate lime greenlace over a dark emerald silk. It wasn't overtly sexy, butit was provocative nonetheless, with its form-fitting linesand deep cleavage. There were long, filmy silk sleeves, andthe back dipped as low as the front. Pearl buttons held itfrom hem to cleavage.

She changed into the gown and then began taking the pearl pins from her hair. She wasn't quite finished when Jared came into the room with two glasses of champagnedeftly balanced in one hand while he opened the door. Hehad removed his jacket and tie, and his white frilled shirt was opened to the waist, displaying a chest of curly blackhair.

"Go on with what you were doing," he said as he handedher one of the long-stemmed glasses. His eye roamed overher appreciatively before he continued. "I just wanted to start a fire to get this room warmed. Your Boston weather is a bit colder than I'm used to."

Corinne took a sip of the champagne, then put it downand started combing out her hair. She watched him covertlyas he walked to the fireplace. So he was used to a hotclimate. But of course, with that rich tan.

"Just where do you come from, Jared?" She saw hisback stiffen as she asked him. "Isn't it about time youstopped avoiding that question?"

"It's just not important," he replied, not facing her.

She smiled beguilingly. "Maybe not, but satisfy my curi-osity anyway."

"I was raised on an island in the Pacific, Corinne."

She was genuinely surprised. Why had she assumed hewas from out West?

"What's it called?"

"Oahu," he said truthfully, omitting the name of theisland chain.

"I've never heard of it."

"I didn't think you would have," he replied as the firestarted crackling. He turned to grin at her. "Now no morequestions."

"Just one more?" she asked cajolingly.

He shrugged and started to take his shirt off. "Go ahead."

Corinne turned around quickly, embarrassed to watch him undress. "What do you do there?"

"I build houses."

Again she was surprised. She hadn't pictured him as a builder. A rancher or miner, yes, even a gambler—he did that so well. But certainly not a builder. It seemed sounchallenging, so unlike him.

"You have a business there?"

"Yes."

"And you plan to return to it?"

"I thought you were going to ask only one more ques-tion," he reminded her.

"Do you, Jared?" she persisted.

He sighed. "Eventually." She turned away as he shuckedoff the rest of his clothes.

They really would live separate lives, Corinne thought. Thousands of miles separate, for she wasn't about to liveon some obscure island. But she had no more time to think about it as Jared came up behind her and his lips found the smoothness of her neck.

Corinne molded herself to him, enjoying the exciting feel of him. When his mouth moved to the sensitive area of herear, she grew hot with pleasure. She didn't protest as hisfingers unfastened the buttons down to her waist and the gown fell to her feet.

The heat from the fire reached them, but Corinne wasfeeling a different kind of heat as Jared turned her around in his arms and kissed her hungrily. She wasstartled as his hard manhood pressed against her, but she hesitated only a moment before she turned to face him, raised her arms around his neck, and returned his kiss with abandon.

Corinne had never felt such thrilling sensations as she did now with her body pressed against his. She was ac-tually disappointed when he released her. He took herhand and pressed his lips to it, his blue-gray eyes lookingdeeply into her dark-green ones. Then he led her to thelarge bed and gently pushed her down on it. For the firsttime she saw him completely, and was amazed at the sight. All his power and strength was there for her to see, in the long legs, the hard muscles across his chest and arms, and the animal grace. He was a superb, rugged, hard man, and it thrilled her just to look at him.

When she caught him grinning at her she blushed hotly. Had he seen her admiration?

"I—I didn't mean to stare," she stammered and becameeven more embarrassed.

"Have you never seen a man before?" he asked softly.

"No."

"But you must have seen me when—"

"No, I didn't," she admitted quickly. "I kept my eyesclosed."

Jesus, even though he had taken her once, she was still really a virgin. Jared laughed kindly, and lay down besideher.

"You are so innocent, Kolina, so very innocent," he said as he placed soft kisses over her face. "And so beautiful, so exquisitely soft and sensual."

His eyes moved slowly from her waves of gold hair, over the entire length of her supple body. His hand fol-lowed, then his lips. Corinne began forgetting her em-barrassment as she felt every part of her being explored and delighted. Had he done this before? But, no, shewouldn't think of that other time. This was all different.

When he opened her legs and moved on top of her she was ready for him. His lips sought hers again before enter-ing her, and the kiss left her trembling.

"Do you know how much I want you, Corinne?"

She looked into his blue-gray eyes, hazy and half-closed, and she knew. "Yes."

"And you want me?"

She felt no shame in answering, "Oh, yes, Jared."

"Now?"

"Yes, now!"

She hooked her fingers in his thick black hair and pulledhis lips to hers, kissing him with a passion she hadn'tknown she possessed. At the same time, the top of his organprobed for entrance, foundjj, and glided smoothly into her, deeper, until she felt all of him pulsating in her. He wasexquisitely tender at first, moving in her slowly, giving hertime to savor each new sensation to its fullest. It was shewho quickened the tempo when a sweet ecstasy suddenlysurged through her whole being. She met his every thrustwith a

savage fury, feeling this had to be the height ofbliss, but there was more, and she held her breath as the feeling intensified. All too soon, those final thrusts sent hersoaring into the most glorious throbbing esctasy imaginable.

Some time later, Corinne floated back to reality. To thinkshe had looked with dread on that magnificent experience. What a fool she had been! But Florence never told her it would be like that! And dear Lord, she had made Jaredpromise it would not happen again!

Corrine opened her eyes to gaze into Jared's. He actually looked as stunned as she was.

"Is it always like that?" she asked dreamily, her fingersrunning through his hair. She felt so good she didn't wantto move ever again.

"No, love," he answered huskily. "It depends on the part-ners, if their passion is equally matched."

"Ours was, wasn't it?" she grinned.

He touched his lips to hers ever so softly. "Perfectly,"he agreed.

Jared wouldn't admit that it had never been better forhim. He couldn't believe what had happened. He had neverhad a woman abandon herself so passionately before. Oh, there had been-savage meetings of the flesh, but none quiteso satisfying. Why did it have to be this woman who sethis blood on fire and had the power to make him want heragain, even now?

"Oh, Jared." She snuggled her face against his neck and heard him groan. "I loved it. Did you?"

He cupped her face in his hands and grinned down ather. "Are you fishing for compliments?"

"I suppose so," she giggled.

"You were magnificent, Kolina, but then you must knowthat."

"Kolina? You said that before. What does it mean?"

"Your name in my language."

"Oh." she said, disappointed. She had hoped it was anendearment.

Jared started kissing her again. Maybe she wouldn't have to tell him how foolish she had been to insist on separatebedrooms. Maybe he knew and wouldn't make her bring it up. And as he started to move in her, she felt sure thathe, too, would want this again and again.

Chapter 14

ARE you awake, Corinne?", She rolled over under the sheets, half asleep, andfound the space beside her empty. She looked about theroom until she saw Jared standing by the fireplace. He haddonned a black robe and held a glass of champagne in hishand.

Corinne frowned. "Aren't you going to sleep tonight?"

"A man doesn't get married every day," he replied off-handedly. "I'm too wound up yet to sleep."

She grinned impishly. "You want to—"

"I can only do so much in so short a time, Corinne."

"Have I exhausted you?" she teased.

"For the moment, yes."

"Well, come back to bed and I'll make you feel differ-ent."

"My God, you're insatiable!" he exclaimed incredu-lously, and shook his head. "But I want to talk right now."

"I don't," she pouted and turned over on her stomach.

Jared sauntered over to the bed and sat down beside her."Appease me," he said, and rubbed a hand over her behind."When is the next board meeting, Corinne?"

"Why on earth would you want to know that now?" sheasked into her pillow without looking at him.

"It's a matter that concerns me."

"I don't know, Jared. I've never gone to the meetings."

"Why not?" His hand moved up to her back, and thenback down to her thighs. "You're the largest shareholder. Don't you have any interest in the firm?"

"Why should I? My father won't let me vote my sharesanyway."

"But you're married now," he reminded her. "He nolonger controls your trust."

"My money, no, but he still has control of my interests in the firm. He will control my shares until he feels I am capable of taking over my interests."

"But you have a husband now who can look after yourinterests for you."

"My father would have to trust you completely, Jared, before he would turn my shares over to you."

Jared's hand stopped moving. "You're my wife. Ourvote should be the same."

She turned around to look at him. "Why are you makingso much out of this, Jared? My father knows what is bestfor the firm. He isn't going to misuse my vote."

"But that gives him complete control of the firm."

"He should have that control. After all, his family founded the shipyard. What are you worried about?

You will make a handsome profit from your investment. The firm isn't about to go bankrupt."

"What if you told your father you were ready to takeresponsibility for your shares?"

Corinne laughed. "He wouldn't believe me. He knows I don't want to be bothered."

"But if you tried."

"Jared, he would know it was your idea," she saidseriously. "He would revert to his absurd assumption thatyou wanted control of the firm. But you don't, do you?"

He stood up stiffly. "Of course not," he said in a barelycontrolled voice and started to walk from the room.

"Where are you going?"

"I have a letter to write. Go to sleep, Corinne."

It took every effort for Jared to close the bedroom doorquietly. He stood there, so filled with blind rage that thestem of his champagne glass broke in two. Blood flowed unchecked from his palm. He started to throw the glassacross the room, but caught himself in time and let it dropsoundlessly to the carpeted floor.

Damn Barrows to hell and back again! The sly, suspiciousbastard! Why had he kept those facts a secret? Jared hadmarried Corinne for*nothing!* He had had doubts before thewedding—he should have acted on his instincts. Now . . .

He sat down at the writing table and began a letter. Nothing had gone right on this trip, but he would not go home without letting Barrows know why he had .come. The man would not feel his wrath fully, but he would never forget the encounter.

Two hours had passed before he finished the letter toSamuel Barrows and also wrote out a notice for the news-papers. His anger had not cooled. He looked toward thebedroom and did not feel the slightest twinge of pity forthe woman there. She would suffer the most for what hewas going to do, but Barrows would also feel her shame. She was her father's one weakness. What hurt her hurt him.

Jared entered the bedroom and crossed quietly to the bed. The fire had not quite died out, and he could see Corinne's sleeping figure clearly. His face softened as he lookeddown at her delicate beauty, the soft waves of gold hair. He started to reach 6ut and touch her, but stopped himself.

He became furious all over again. He would not haveregrets, damn it! She would recover eventually, he told him-self. She was resilient.

Forcing himself not to look at Corinne again, Jareddressed and packed his things quickly, then left his hotel. He stopped of at the newspaper office and arranged for his notice to be posted the following morning and printed dailyfor one month. Then he went directly to Beacon Street, his last stop before he caught the first train West

It was three o'clock in the morning when the butler an-swered Barrows' door and said dryly, "Another matter ofurgency, sir?"

Jared would not be put off. "I wouldn't be here on mywedding night if it weren't."

Brock straightened his back. "Yes, sir. I will wake Mr.Barrows at once."

"I will wait in his study," Jared said and crossed the darkhall.

In less than ten minutes Samuel Barrows burst into the room wearing robe and slippers, his blonde hair touseledfrom sleep. But he was wide awake, and upset.

Jared saw his fearful reluctance to ask what had hap-pened. "Before you waste time with questions, there is noth-ing wrong with Corinne. She is sleeping peacefully anddoesn't know I am here."

"Then why—"

"Sit down, Barrows," Jared interrupted him coldly. "Iwill ask the questions this time, and one in particular. Whythe hell didn't you tell me you controlled Corinne's sharesin the shipyard and would still have that control even after she married?"

Samuel was not only surprised by the question, but a bitshaken by Jared's icy tone. "It was not pertinent to ourdealings."

"In your opinion! And you still felt those facts weren't pertinent even after I offered to marry your daughter?"

"Isthat why you married her, Burk?" Samuel began todespair. Why hadn't he realized there was something strangeabout the marriage? "To get control of the firm?"

"Yes! And my name is not Burk, it's Burkett."

"Burkett? Why would you use a false name? I don't understand any of this. You have married an extremelywealthy woman. You could buy a half dozen shipyards."

"I don't want her or her money—I never did," Jared saidvenomously. "And you could have spared her a lot of pain and humiliation if you hadn't seen fit to hide those facts from me when I made my investment."

"Why are you so obsessed with this shipyard? Why doyou want it so badly?"

"I don't want it, Barrows! I wanted to destroy it, to bankrupt it and you!"

"Damn it, you're not making any sense!"

Jared threw the letter on Samuel's desk. "Read it. If Ihave to say any of it aloud I am going to lose what littlecontrol I have left and kill you!" Jared said in a deadlycalm voice. "Now read it!"

Samuel stared at Jared in amazement. He had never beenthreatened before. And there was such underlying rage in this young man that was demanding release. There was a great deal he didn't understand.

Without further hesitation, Samuel picked up the bulkyletter and read it quickly. When he finished, the letterdropped to his desk and he sat for a few moments, staring straight ahead. Then his eyes met Jared's. "Is it really true? Ranelle is dead? And all this time?" When Jared didn'tanswer, he said, "All these years I

thought of her as living. I have been waiting for the day Corinne married and lefthome, before I... I meant to try again, Jared, to persuade your mother to come away with me."

"You meant to destroy her life again?" Jared said in that deadly quiet voice. "You did a thorough job the first time!"

"iloved your mother."

"You couldn't have," Jared replied with bitter contempt." If you had, nothing would have stopped you from marry-ing her!"

"You don't under—"

"I said nothing! I know of your family obligations, yourso-called duty to save the family business. Well you saved it, didn't you—at my mother's expense!"

"I'm sorry, son."

"I'm not your son! I might have been, and I almost wish I were, then my mother might still be alive. She loved youso much that she couldn't bear life without you. Shebecame a drunk. You did read that in the letter, didn't you? A drunk! It was the only way she could forget that you stillwanted her!"

"I didn't know."

"Of course you didn't," Jared sneered. "After tearing my mother's world apart, you simply went back to your wifeand daughter. It didn't matter to you what happened afteryou left Hawaii, what affect your visit had on my mother. She no longer cared about me or my father. We didn't exist for her anymore. And my father was nearly destroyed by it. He loved her, you see. She had been his for eight years, until you took it upon yourself to ruin our lives."

"I never meant to."

"I didn't tell you yet how she died, Barrows. You haven't asked. Don't you want to know?" Jared asked cruelly, be-ginning to relive the nightmare. When Samuel said nothing,he went on. "She walked into the ocean one night and took her own life. I saw her disappear under the waves, but Icouldn't reach her in time. I couldn't find her at all untilmorning, when I finally saw where her swollen body hadwashed up on the beach."

"Surely it was an accident, Jared!"

"You would like to think that, wouldn't you? But yousee, my mother couldn't swim, she had never learned. Shenever went near the water, not even to wade in it."

After a long silence, Samuel whispered, "And you blameme for all of this."

"I wanted you to know why I came here. I wanted toruin you, Barrows, but I failed. I would kill you now, butI think I've already suffered enough because of you."

"So you used my daughter to get at me. What about her? She is your wife, and need I remind you there was a matter of honor involved?"

Jared laughed bitterly. "There isn't a shred of honor inme. Haven't you realized that by now? And your daughter got what she asked for."

"Have you no conscience?"

"Have you?" Jared demanded. "Where was your con-science when you wrote my mother telling her about yourbaby daughter and that it was just as well she had decided not to go with you?"

"She did make that decision, Jared."

"Yes, she did, and she regretted it. She blamed me and my father because she felt obligated to stay with us. Butnone of it would have happened, Barrows, if you hadstayed out of her life. What right did you have to seek herout after so many years? Did you really expect her to throwaway the life she had made for herself and run away withyou?"

"But I expected to find her free."

"But you didn't, and yet you still asked her to leavewith you. You killed my mother. Indirectly, but the fact re--mains that she would be alive if it weren't for you. I hopethat weighs on you forever. At least then my coming herewon't be a total loss."

"Jared, please," Samuel began. "You have got to be-lieve I—"

"No!" Jared cut him off sharply. "Nothing you could saywould ease the hatred I have for you."

"And now?"

"I'm going home. Your shipyard is safe again. But at least I'm not leaving your family unscathed," Jared saidwith a vicious grin. "Your daughter isn't going to let youforget our meeting."

"What do you mean?"

"Corinne won't be too happy in the morning, nor will you be. And if you think you can retaliate by trying tocancel our business deal, don't. It would give me great pleasure to take you to court. So I will expect my profitson a regular basis, and I will retain my lawyer here to look after my interests. I couldn't ruin you, Barrows, but I'mgoing to make money from you."

"I don't wish you ill, Jared."

"You will in the morning. It really is too bad Corinnehas to suffer for what you did before she was even born. You can tell her I'm sorry for that. But it probably won'tmake a difference." With that, Jared stalked from theroom without another word or a backward glance. He sawhimself out.

Samuel heard the carriage drive away. Many emotionsclouded his mind as he slouched back in his chair, but fore-most was grief. His first and only love was dead. God help him, how could he live with that . . . and the factthat he was responsible?

THE storm abated Monday morning, and by midday all traces of it were gone except for a few puddles hereand there. The sky was bright. Boston was pleasantly warm for October. The city sparkled. But in the Back Bay section Boston, on Beacon Street, the mood was not so cheerful.

Corinne came home alone at noon. Spending the entire morning sitting in Jared's empty hotel suite had made hermore confused than angry. She waited hours before goingdown to the lobby to inquire if he had left a message. That was how she found out that Jared had checked out ofthe hotel in the middle of the night, without explanation.

At home, she learned that her father had locked himselfin his study ever since Mr. Burk had called in the middle of the night. What was going on?

She found Samuel slumped over his desk, his head restingon his folded arms. There was an empty liquor bottle be-side him.

"Father?"

Samuel raised his head groggily. Corinne gasped at the sight of his haggard face. She had never seen him look soold.

"Are you ill, Father?"

"Just tired, Cori," he answered, running a shaky handthrough his hair. "I have been waiting for you. I ratherexpected you would be here sooner."

'Then you know I woke up alone this morning. Whereis he, Father?"

"He's gone, Corinne. You won't be seeing your husband again—if he is your husband. Christ, the marriage may noteven be legal!"

"Are you drunk?" Corinne demanded.

"I wish I were drunk, but unfortunately I'm not. I wentthrough a whole bottle, but it didn't help at all. Nothing isgoing to drown the truth."

"What truth? What do you mean 'if he is' my husband?" She held out her purse. "I have the certificate right here."

"Have you looked at it?"

Corinne frowned and quickly took the document fromher purse. When she saw the name written next to hers, she drew in her breath sharply.

"Burkett? He used a false name for this!"

"No," Samuel sighed, having hoped that the name Burk would appear on the document. "It looks as though yourmarriage is legal after all. Jared Burkett is his real name."

"What is this all about, Father? Who the devil have I married?"

"A young man so full of hate that he came here just todestroy me. He thought he had failed, but he didn't. God help me—he didn't."

Her father was near tears and it tore at her heart. "Whathappened? What did he do to you when he was here lastnight?"

"He didn't do anything except tell me the truth, thetruth of which I had been mercifully ignorant for nineteenyears."

Samuel pushed the worn letter across his desk. "Here. That explains most of it. You have a right to know whyhe used you to hurt me."

Corinne read the letter, her back becoming stiffer as shedid so. "He says you killed his mother," she gasped, hergreen eyes wide. "What does he mean?"

"My beautiful Ranelle took her own life. My God, ifI had only known what my going to Hawaii would do toher!"

"You loved her?" Corinne asked quietly.

"She was my first love, and I hers. We expected to bemarried. There was no question in our minds. But thenthe damn shipyard was near ruin, and my family urged meto marry for money, in order to save it. God, if only Ihadn't felt it was my responsibility to do it. But I did, and I married your mother instead. Ranelle ran away to Hawaiibefore I could ask her to wait for me. Many years passedbefore I found out where she had gone. Your mother andI had never got along well together, and we had no children. I felt the time was right to go to Ranelle and begher to come back to me."

"You would have divorced mother?" Corinne asked insurprise.

"Yes. Ranelle and I belonged together—we were meantfor each other. But I never dreamed she would also have married, and that she might have a child."

"Jared?"

Samuel nodded. "But even after I knew this, I still beggedher to leave with me. I should never have let her knowhow much I still wanted her. It was that knowledge thatshe couldn't bear to live with once I had left Hawaii. Shewas never a strong woman."

"But she didn't go away with you—shemade that deci-sion," Corinne reminded him.

"Gould you tear your seven-year-old son away from thefather he adored, or desert that son? Could you so easily break the heart of a man who adored you and thought youloved him as much? Ranelle couldn't. But she regretted that decision. And then I disappointed her again. BeforeRanelle could write to me, I wrote her to tell her I would stay with my wife, since she had given me a daughter. Itold her it was just as well that she had made the choiceshe did. That destroyed Ranelle completely, though I never knew it until now."

"I am to blame," Corinne said sadly. "If I hadn't beenborn—"

"No! It had nothing to do with you. I was fool enoughto think I could finally have what I wanted most,

the onelove of my life. But life had gone on, we were not the samepeople anymore. It was too late for us. If only I had real-ized that before I tried to recapture the past—I shouldn'thave gone to Hawaii."

"I can see why Jared might blame you, but he's wrong. And you can't blame yourself, either. You couldn't haveknown what would happen. He blames me so much thathe came here to destroy me. I've never met anyone so filled with hate."

"So he used me to get at you." She shrugged as if it didn'tmatter to her any longer. "But he gave me what I wanted, and if he thinks I will divorce him because he has desertedme, he's wrong. We will just have to hide the fact that he's gone, at least for a while. And then, to explain his con-tinued absence, we can say he had to leave on business. Eventually I will say he died."

"Corinne," Samuel sighed. "Jared Burkett was after re-venge. Though he failed to ruin me financially, he still gothis revenge. Jared struck a final blow before he left. Here." He pushed the morning paper at her.

Corinne took the paper warily, a gnawing apprehensiongrowing. In the lower right hand corner of page ten was a notice in bold black letters. It seemed to jump off the page at her.

	DECLARATION OF DESERTION
Jared Burk hereby acknowledges	
that his new bride, formerly	
Corinne Barrows of Beacon Street,	
has proved an unsatisfactory	
wife. On these grounds	
he has deserted her.	
and began ripping the paper.	The numbness lasted only a moment. Then she stood up
"How dare he!" she shouted, her temper unleas notice? I will take them to court!"	shed fully."And how dare that paper print such a crude
"That would be even more embarrassing for yo done. Well just have to weather this."	ou, Cori,"Samuel said softly. "And the damage is already

"Corinne, honey, no one is going to think otherwise."

wasn't unsatisfactory—I wasn't!"

"Won't they? He's gone—that much is true—and hemade sure everyone would know that he left me!"

"He's going to pay for this! My God, he made it soundas if I—I—" Tears sprang to her eyes. "It's a lie! I

"If it's any consolation, Cori, Jared told me before he left that he was sorry for having to use you to get to me.I think he really regretted that."

"Sorry?" she said furiously. "How can I face people? I won't be able to leave this house without dying of shame."

"It won't last forever, Cori. Gossip only runs its courseso long, and then it is forgotten. It might be better if you went away for a while. I can start the divorce proceedingswhile you are away."

"Divorce? And bring further scandal on this family?" she glared at him. "No! There will be no divorce."

"But surely—"

"No! That's what Jared wants. I will die before I givethat despicable cur what he wants. Let him wonder why he doesn't receive divorce papers. I hope it drives himcrazy wondering. I hope he finds someone he loves andwants to marry. He won't be able to because I won't re-lease him. Believe me, Jared Burk will pay for this—oneway or another.

Chapter 16

Corinne's anger had been a show, a disguise to keep private the terrible hurt she really felt. From that morning, she refused even to think about her weddingnight. She would not allow herself to remember anything of Jared except the unpleasant elements in the man. Shehid herself, refusing to go outside at all and receiving noone.

Florence was the first to see the changes taking place in Corinne, and Samuel also became disturbed. She was pale, she had none of her old humor, and she took no interestin anything. What distressed her father the most was her uncharacteristic quiet. She never argued, didn't join in con-versations at meals, and offered no more than a perfunctory "good night" or "good morning." Samuel began to worry. This wasn't Corinne!

He forgot his own sorrow in his anxiety for his daughter. Nothing he did or said helped her. He had not expectedher to bury her head in shame for so long. He kept urgingher to travel, but she wouldn't hear of it

"Cowards run away," Corinne would say and refuse todiscuss it further.

Samuel prayed for something to jolt his daughter out of her lethargy. His prayers were soon answered.

"I am going to Hawaii, Father," Corinne announced amonth after her wedding.

They were just sitting down to lunch, but Samuel's ap-petite was instantly spoiled.

"I won't allow it."

"Don't be unreasonable," Corinne said calmly. Her voicewas unusually matter-of-fact. "You know you can't stopme from going. And you were the one who suggested I go away for a while."

"Not to Hawaii!"

"Why not?"

"Jared Burkett has already proved how ruthless he canbe," Samuel reminded her sternly. "I don't want you cross-ing paths with him again,"

"Don't be silly," she replied casually. "He's my husband,isn't he?"

"Oh, for heaven's sake! He doesn't give a damn aboutyou, Cori."

"I'm still going, Father." There was a strong determination in her tone. "I think the trip will do me good. And Florence has already agreed to come with me."

Samuel leaned back in his chair and shook his head."Why won't you let it be? Forget about Jared Burkett. I'msure he's forgotten about you."

"It's not finished," Corinne said coldly. "Jared wantedrevenge against you, but it was me he hurt. I had neverdone anything to him to deserve what he did to me. *He* believes in vengeance. Well, he has made a believer out of me, a wholehearted believer."

"Corinne, you can't cross swords with a man like that," Samuel warned her. "There is no way you can win. Hedoesn't fight fairly."

"I don't intend to fight fairly myself. And I'm not afraidof him."

"Well, you should be."

"Stop worrying," she said to pacify him. "I'm not goingto do anything foolish."

"Just what are you planning to do?" Samuel asked. "Youmust have something in mind, or you wouldn't be so de-termined."

Corinne laughed, a wicked sound. It was a laugh herfather had never heard before. "Yes, I do have somethingin mind. I'm "going to give Jared Burkett a taste of his own medicine. We'll see how he likes facing scandal in his domain."

"What scandal?"

"The scandal of a promiscuous wife."

"Corinne!"

"Oh, settle down, Father," she grinned. "I'm not really going to have a multitude of lovers. I'm just going to givethat impression. Jared's friends will think I am a trampand that Jared isn't man enough to handle me. I dont carewhat they think about me, but Jared will. I'm going tohumiliate him the way he did me, in front of all hisfriends."

"You think Jared will just sit back and let you make afool of him? You think he won't stop you?"

"He can't," Corinne replied confidently. "He can't saya thing about what I do. I made sure of that before I mar-ried him."

Later that day, in her new confident mood, she agreed to see Russell when he called.

"The bastard deserves to be horsewhipped!" Russellstated vehemently after Corinne had explained everything. "How dare he slander you!"

"You tried to warn me about him," Corinne said mag-nanimously. "I should have listened to you."

Corinne went on to explain her immediate plans with agreat deal of relish. And Russell surprised her.

"I will go with you, Corinne," he announced.

"Why would you want to do that?" Corinne asked, sur-prised. "I am not going on a pleasure cruise. I'm going to Hawaii with a definite purpose in mind."

"I know. But you need an escort You can't face Burkettalone."

"My father seemed to think the same thing." Corinnewas becoming annoyed. "I wish everyone would stop treat-ing me like a child. I can take care of myself, and I intendto."

"I didn't think otherwise, Corinne," Russell repliedquickly.

"It wouldn't hurt to have me along," he continued. "I could help you with your plan."

She quickly considered it. "Very well, Russell. As longas you understand that I don't intend to take any reallovers for quite some time. It will all be an act"

"I won't push you, Corinne."

"I want your promise on that," she said adamantly.

"You have it."

"One other condition," she said in a lighter tone. "Youlet me pay your expenses."

"That's ridiculous," Russell laughed, knowing full well that she would insist. And thank goodness for that, becausehe would hate to have to borrow even more money nowthat his debts were already so high. "I know you must bedying to spend all that money of yours, but I won't hear of it. I'm not exactly from the poorhouse myself," he liedun convincingly.

"I know that, but I insist. It will be as though I werehiring you as my escort," she explained.

"No!"

"I said I insist, Russell. I won't be obligated to you forhelping me. I don't intend to ever feel obligated to anyone. That feeling destroys people."

"What are you talking about?"

"Never mind," she snapped. "Either I pay your way or you can forget about coming along."

"All right, all right," he sighed wearily. "If that's the onlyway you'll agree, then fine."

"Good," Corinne smiled, unaware of how well he hadmaneuvered her. "And just remember that I didn't ask you to come along. You offered. Now you had best run along and get your affairs in order. We will be leaving the day after tomorrow."

"So soon?"

"I see no reason to postpone it," Corinne answered. "Thesooner I get even with Jared Burkett, the sooner I can re-gain my pride."

Chapter 17

SAMUEL Barrows did not stop voicing his disapproval of his daughter's decision. He Jried to get her to re-consider, even at the train depot, but he knew he couldn'tstop her. He did, however, make her promise to writefrequently.

"And if you get into any trouble, you come home imme-diately."

"I will, Father."

To Russell he said, "I should have let you marry her, Drayton. I wish to God I had."

"I hope you remember that, sir, after I convince Corinneto divorce Burkett."

"Yes, well," Samuel said noncommittally. "I'm rather gladyou're going along. Keep her out of mischief, will you?" Hespoke to both Russell and Florence at once. And Russellreplied for them both. "If that's possible."

Corinne was grateful that she had seen no one she knew on the way to the train station. It was the first time she hadleft her house since the terrible morning after her wedding. When she returned, she wouldn't care what people thought. She would have the satisfaction of knowing that she had gotten even with Jared, and perhaps even bested him. Shecould face anything after that.

The trip across country was not unpleasant. A quartercentury ago it would have been difficult. But with the com-pletion of the Union Pacific railroad in 1869, the journey took only a week. Corinne and Russell and Florence spentanother week in San Fransisco, waiting for a ship.

San Fransisco was a bustling metropolis, so unlike sedate, ordered Boston, even for a city-bred girl. The three of themloved the noisy, colorful place. Corinne wondered what itwas like during the gold rush. How many had struck it rich? How many died trying? That had been a time of adventure, when anything was possible.

In an elegant gambling house that catered only to thevery rich, Corinne finally played in the no-limit game thathad been her dream for so long. She won five thousand dollars. But it didn't seem to matter anymore. Jared hadruined the excitement for her, she reasoned. He had be-come her obsession.

No matter where she went or what she did, Jared seemedalways to be with her. As the days brought

her closer to Hawaii, Jared filled her mind more and more. It wouldn't have been so disturbing, except that she began recallingtheir wedding night. She couldn't forget it, though she had sworn to blot out the whole night.

As soon as they were out to sea she took to her bed withseasickness, and this, too, she blamed on Jared. Anothermark against him, she swore.

She spent the whole three weeks crossing the Pacificlying in her bed. She lost weight. She felt terrible. Andall the while she cursed Jared for every moment of her suffering. When the ship finally docked in Honolulu, she was almost too weak to get out of bed, but with a tremen-dous desire to touch land and Florence's help, she found her way out of her cabin and onto the deck.

Corinne was pleasantly surprised. It was December 12, a time for snow and freezing cold back in Boston, but herethere were balmy ocean breezes and sunshine, and a defi- nite fragrance in the air.

"You smell it, too?" Florence remarked. "It's flowers, allright. I learned a lot about Hawaii while you were indis-posed. Visitors here are greeted with leis. It seems to be a tradition, and a nice one."

"Leis?"

"Wreaths of cut flowers to wear around the neck. Thisisn't Boston, my dear. Flowers grow here all year round. We're in the tropics now," Florence said, already fanningherself with a lace handkerchief. "I suppose it will take usa while to get used to the heat."

"I like it."

"You wouldn't if this were summer instead of the winterseason," Florence replied. "I'm told it can be unbearablyhot for*malihinis* in summer. It's a good thing we will be gone before then."

"Malihinis?"

"That's what the Hawaiians call newcomers," Florence explained with a touch of pride.-

"My, you certainly are well-informed," Corinne grinned."You must tell me more."

Florence didn't mind Corinne's teasing tone. "It doesn't hurt to know something about where you're going. Therewere quite a few passengers who had been here before. And the Captain was very knowledgeable."

"You're right," Corinne confessed. "I should have taken the time to learn something about Hawaii. After all, I could have read up on it while I was bedridden instead of moan-ing my sorrows to the blank walls."

"You can do that while you're regaining your strength. That's going to take a few weeks."

"Well, the sooner I get settled, the sooner I can recover. Where is Russell?"

"He's gone to see about our baggage. He said he wouldmeet us on the dock with a carriage."

They moved through the throng of people on the dockand were greeted with *alohas* from friendly Hawaiians inbright floral clothes, bearing leis for every passenger. Other natives offered fresh island fruits. And a group of musicianswere playing while local girls of dark beauty in colorfulsarongs danced for the

new arrivals.

Corinne was given two leis made of plumeria. Shethanked the giver with a smile, but the scent of the flowers became cloying and she felt her stomach turning again.

"I have to sit down, Florence," she said, grabbing theolder woman's arm.

"Come." Florence led her to a crate in some shade."Wait here. I'll get you some of that fruit the vendors are selling. It's a wonder you can walk at all, you've eaten solittle lately."

She came back in a moment with a large chunk of cutpineapple wrapped in ati leaf, and a small basket withbananas, coconuts, and guavas in it.

"What kind of fruit is that?" Corinne asked warily.

"I've never seen the likes of it myself, but it's grownfresh here. Try this pineapple. They say there is nothing asdelicious."

Corinne brought the yellow fruit toher lipsbut gagged when she smelled it. "Take it away."

"What's wrong, Cori?"

"Just take it away," Corinne moaned, turning sickly white. "I thought this nausea would go away once I leftthe ship, but it hasn't yet."

"Corinne—are you sure it isn't—something else?" Flor-ence asked hesitantly. "You shouldn't be ill now. In fact, the ship's doctor told me that you shouldn't have been illat all. People don't get sick on a smooth voyage like the one we had."

"What are you suggesting?"

"That you might be pregnant."

Corinne managed a chuckle. "Don't be ridiculous. Iwould know, wouldn't I?"

"Would you, as preoccupied as you have been with JaredBurkett? When is the last time you had your monthlyflow?" she asked pointedly.

Corinne couldn't answer. She couldn't remember hav-ing it recently. "Oh, I don't know," she said impatiently.

"Think!"

She did, and-the only time she could recall was beforeJared raped her. Her green eyes widened and darkened al-most instantly.

"No!"

'There's no use denying it, Cori. He sure was a viriledevil."

"I won't have his child! My God, how much more is hegoing to ruin my life?"

"There's not much you can do about bearing the child. It's already growing."

"Well, I won't keep it!"

"That's up to you," Florence said with cold disapproval."But right now we have to decide where you're going tohave it. You can't very well go through with that absurdplan of yours now, not when you'll be showing soon. Maybewe should consider going back home right now."

Corinne grimaced at the thought. "I would die before Igot back on a ship this soon. No, we'll stay here. I'm not giving up my plan. It will just have to be postponed for awhile."

Chapter 18

CORINNE reclined in the shade on her large outdoorlanai overlooking the bustling city of Honolulu. She sipped a lemonade, and frowned every time the babymoved inside her. A notebook rested on her lap for the the treatment that the mood to write. She wasn't in a mood for much of anything except feeling sorry forherself.

Florence had gone down to the market, and Russell wasoff having fun somewhere. Corinne bitterly resented her forced confinement, but she had made the choice herself not to be seen by anyone in her present condition. Shecouldn't take the chance that Jared might find out. He wasn't going to know about the child, she'would make sureof that.

Dear Father,

Nothing has changed since I wrote to you last. We'restill living in the house I rented up here in the hills of Punchbowl. New summer blooms are everywhere, mak-ing it quite beautiful. In fact, you really can't imaginethe multitude of color I have right in my own garden. I've been tending it myself, and learning about all theexotic plants and flowers here. That should tell you whatan exciting time I am having.

The weather is much hotter than we New Englandersare used to. I seem to feel it more than the others, be-cause of my condition. But being so high up on the moun-tain, we do get cool breezes, especially in the evenings. And Lord, how I wait for those breezes!

I am still in excellent health, so my doctor tells me,and I will deliver in another month. And as to the ques-tion in your last letter, no, I have not changed my mindabout giving the baby away. It would just remind me ofJared, and I want to forget him completely once I leave here. Those motherly instincts you told me I should be feeling are just not there. I hate this baby, just as much as I hate Jared. And no, he will never know about thebaby. That is one more bit of satisfaction I will have!

God, how callous she sounded. But she blamed that on Jared, too. He had introduced her to hate, and hate hadeaten away any compassion she might once have had.

I am still going through with my plans, just as soonas I get back into shape. I haven't become too ungainly,so that shouldn't take long.

Jared is here in the city. Russell found out for mewhere he lives and also where he is working. He is build-ing a hotel in the less populated beach area of Waikiki. He has obviously gone on with his life, without a thoughtfor what he did to me. He has no idea I am here. I havenot been seen in public since we arrived. Florence and Russell go out, but Jared doesn't know Florence, and Russell has kept away from Jared, so he assures me.

I can barely stand the waiting, with nothing to do. You know I am not a patient person. I got myself into this whole mess because I couldn't wait to get my handson my trust. By the way, the money I brought with me is safely tucked away in a local bank, so you did not need to put up such a fuss about the large amount Iwanted to bring.

I will write you again soon, Father. However, don'texpect a full report on the birth of the baby. I'm not going to even look at it. It's best neither of us knowswhat it looks like, or even what sex it turns out to be. I don't think of it as my child, anyway. It's Jared's andonly his. I have been informed by my doctor that theHawaiians love all children. He has already found a good home for the baby, so you don't need to worry at all.

I love you, Father, and I hope you can forgive mefor giving away your grandchild. I just couldn't bear to keep it. Please understand.

Your devoted daughter, Corinne Barrows Burkett

Her father wouldn't like this letter. But then he hadn'tliked any of the letters she sent home. She always sounded so bitter and hard. Cold, he had called her. Jared had, too.Perhaps she was. But she was strong. It was not easy to bea woman.

Corinne sealed her letter and took it into the house. Florence would mail it. The house was so quiet. Even thestern German cook they had hired had gone off for theafternoon.

With no one to talk to, Corinne became restless and wentoutside to work in the garden. An hour or so later, the carriage drove up the steep hill and Florence alighted with baskets of fresh meat and vegetables. She found Corinne trimming the hihiscus shrubs that formed a fence around the yard, dense green shrubs with huge paperlike flowersof yellow and red.

Florence frowned. "Look at you, Cori. You're roastingin the sun."

Corinne wiped dripping sweat from her brow with adirty hand. "I have nothing better to do."

"When it's this hot, you could at least work in the shade,my girl. It's a wonder you don't faint in this heat. Now come along and I'll run you a cool bath."

She helped Corinne to her feet and up the few steps atthe front of the house. A porch bordered the front, and potted ferns and flowers hung from the rafters and were set along the banisters. Young palms grew at the corners of thehouse, front and back. Such a profusion of delightful fra-grances and colors made the porch a welcome place to relax.

"You wait here, Cori, while I put these baskets away and get your bath ready."

"I don't know why I let you mother me like this," Co-rinne complained, then smiled tiredly. "But a long cool bath does sound nice. My back has been nagging me again."

"If I didn't know better, I would think you were fartheralong than you are," Florence remarked, eyeing Corinne's large belly under the tentlike Hawaiian dress called amuumuu.

"Don't be silly." Corinne used the phrase she alwaysused when someone came near the truth.

Florence shook her head and went on into the house. Corinne sat down awkwardly in one of the rattan chairs onthe porch. It was possible, she thought sullenly, patting her belly. She could indeed give birth any day now. But eventhough that would end her waiting, she didn't want it to be so. Then she Would have to explain to Florence about the first time she and Jared had been together, and she would rather keep that to herself.

A breeze stirred the plants on the porch and brought with it the intoxicating fragrance of gardenias from the bushes in front of the house. Corinne breathed deeply of the scentthat had become her favorite, but then she held the breathas her back ached sharply again. Too much bending over, she thought angrily. She should have known better. Shecouldn't even work in the yard anymore without the child causing her discomfort.

How she resented it. The baby had caused her nothingbut trouble, even from its conception. Corinne felt defeated, ready to take to her bed and not leave it.

"Come along, Cori." Florence opened the front door. "The tub is full."

Corinne started to get up but couldn't, and fell backwith a huff. "You'll have to help me. I can't even get outof a chair anymore."

Florence chuckled and took Corinne's hand to pull herup. "You're just having a terrible time of it aren't you, my dear? It's too bad*he* couldn't be here to share in whathe did and listen to all your complaints."

"If he were here right now, I think I would gladly cuthis throat for this!"

"Now, now. It took the two of you to make that baby. You did want to marry him, remember?"

"Don't remind me. I didn't know he was just using meto get at my father. And he damn well didn't have to dowhat he did before he left! Nor did he have to leave me with a baby!"

"Now, Cori, the doctor warned you about upsetting your-self. And we've been over this time and again. You know I feel you should have left well enough alone. No good cancome of vengence."

"Satisfaction can come of it," Corinne said stubbornly. Then, suddenly, she gasped and doubled over in pain.

"What is it?" Florence asked, then her hazel eyes wid-ened. "Oh, Lord, it's not coming prematurely, is it?"

"No," Corinne said after the spasm passed. "I'm afraidit's on time. You were right about my being farther along."

"I knew there was something you were hiding from meback there before the wedding. No wonder you rushed intoit so quickly."

"Florence, please!" Corinne moaned. "I will explain later. Right now, just get me to bed. My back is

killing me."

"Oh, Lord, it's going to be one ofthose births," Florencemumbled to herself.

"What?"

"Nothing, love. Come on. I'll get you to your room andthen go for the doctor."

"No!" Corinne cried. "You can't leave me!"

"All right, Cori, all right," Florence said soothingly. "Wehave lots of time anyway. Ill send the cook for the doctorwhen she comes back."

Eighteen hours later, Corinne fought against conscious-ness. That terrible pain that had wrenched her body wasstill too well-remembered. She just wanted to sleep, now that it was over, and forget the agony. But that awful cry-ing wouldn't let her.

"Here, Mrs. Drayton."

Corinne kept her eyes closed. She knew Dr. Bryson wastalking to her, for she had assumed Russell's name for the sake of appearances. After all, he was living in the samehouse with her. Why couldn't the doctor leave her alonenow? He had bullied her for the last few hours, telling herwhat to do, coaxing her to relax when she knew shecouldn't. He kept saying it wasn't time yet, when she knewshe would die if the agony didn't stop.

Dr. Bryson had complained that she was the worst pa-tient he had ever had, whereupon she had told him to goto hell. He was shocked by her language, for she had cursedJared with every loathsome name she had ever picked upas a child visiting the shipyard. Jared's name had come toher lips every time the pressure became unbearable. Lord, his ears must have been ringing. She only wished he couldhave been here to receive her curses.

"Mrs. Drayton, please."

She opened her eyes. "Can't you leave me alone now? Ijust want to sleep."

"We're not finished yet."

"I am!"

Dr. Bryson sighed. He was a little man in his late forties, with thinning hair and large spectacles that kept fallingdown his long nose. He was really at the end of his patience.

"I have to cut the cord yet. You will have to hold your baby for a moment."

"No!"

"You are the most disagreeable young woman I haveever met," he scolded her. "Now stop being unreasonable."

"Let Florence hold it," Corinne said stubbornly while sheavoided looking at the wailing infant. "You know I don't want to see it. I told you that beforehand."

"Your maid has gone for fresh water."

"Well, wait until she returns!"

"Do you want to risk infection?" he asked harshly. "Now hold your child!"

He didn't give her a chance to refuse again, but placed the baby at her side in the crook of her arm. Corinne turned away quickly before she saw it. She wanted no memory, no picture of it to carry in her mind.

"Hurry up, will you?" Corinne said bitterly as the childcontinued to wail.

It seemed to scream louder when the cord was cut and Corinne gasped. Dr. Bryson smiled.

"Relax, Mrs. Drayton."

"Did you hurt it?"

"No."

"Well, take it back then."

"Not yet. We still have you to finish with. Now push,"he said and applied pressure to her abdomen.

The placenta slid from her with only minor discomfort. The infant still wailed.

"Will you take the baby out of here now?" she pleaded.

"We still have to wait for the water to wash the bloodoff of the little fellow."

"Blood!" she gasped and automatically turned to thebaby.

"It's not his blood, Mrs. Drayton," the doctor reassuredher. "No, he's a fine, healthy boy."

Now Corinne couldn't tear her eyes away. She had given this small person life! She had suffered for it, gone through the most excruciating pain imaginable so that it might live. A little boy!

"He's terribly ugly, isn't he?" Corinne couldn't help ask-ing.

Dr. Bryson laughed heartily. "That's the first honest opin-ion I've ever gotten from a new mother. But I guarantee hewill look better once he's cleaned up."

"Why won't he stop crying?"

"He has just been taken from his nice, warm, nourishinghome of the last nine months. He is understandably upset about that and could use some comforting."

"I—I don't—"

"All he needs is your breast, Mrs. Drayton."

"I couldn't!" she said quickly.

"Well, that's up to you. I suppose it won't hurt to let himcry for a while. I'll just go and see what is keeping thatwater."

"Wait!"

But Dr. Bryson closed the door firmly. He found Flor-ence in the kitchen sitting at the table over a half glass ofwhiskey.

"Do you have an extra glass?" he asked.

Florence looked up at him worriedly, almost afraid toask the question. "Did it work?"

"I can't tell yet. We'll give her a little while, but thenI've got to clean that baby. I don't hold with not bathingthem immediately."

Florence got up for another glass and filled it. "Lord,I pray I did the right thing. But I just couldn't bear seeingher give the babe away. I knew she would be sorry after it was too late."

"If I didn't agree with you, I wouldn't have gone through with that farce."

"She wouldn't listen to reason. If leaving her alone with him doesn't do the trick, nothing will."

"Well, we'll just have to wait and see. Where is the father, anyway?"

"Oh, he went off to get drunk," Florence replied, refer-ring to Russell. "He certainly had the right idea," she added, lifting her glass.

She had taken Dr. Bryson into her confidence, but not sofar as to deny Corinne's supposed marriage to Russell. Thedoctor frowned on Corinne enough as it was without mak-ing it worse by telling him the truth. And Russell Draytonwasn't getting drunk because of nervousness. He was cele-brating that it was finally over. He assumed the baby hadcome prematurely, and after Corinne had explained to Florence about the night the baby was conceived, Florencelet him go on thinking that. The truth was that Russell never thought about the baby, and didn't care.

Lord, Florence didn't like that man. Russell seemedsomehow different whenever Corinne wasn't near. He waslike two different men. But she couldn't quite put her finger on what it was, exactly, that disturbed her about him.

Dr. Bryson finished his drink. "We had best get back inthere."

"But do you think Cori has had enough time yet, Doc-tor?" Florence asked with a doubtful frown. "Maybe see-ing the baby and holding it won't make her change hermind. She is such a stubborn girl."

"Stubborn is hardly the word, Miss Merrill! I have never met such a cantankerous, hot-headed young woman."

Florence had to grin. "She does have a bit of a temper, and very little patience."

"That's putting it mildly," Dr. Bryson grunted. "Well,come along with that water."

When they entered Corinne's room, they found herpropped up in bed, gazing down at the child in her arms. When she looked up, there was no anger in her lime-greeneyes.

"Be quiet," Corinne whispered. "He's sleeping."

Florence set the small tub of water down on a table and came over to the bed. "We're going to have to wake himanyway, my dear, for his bath."

"What took you so long?" Corinne demanded, though her voice wasn't harsh.

"I'm afraid that's my fault. I kept spilling the water,"Florence lied. "Heavens, you were in labor eighteen hours, Cori. I haven't had a moment's rest yet. I'm plumb worn out and couldn't keep my hands from shaking."

"Why didn't Russell help you?"

"He's been gone all night. The sun's up, but he still hasnot come back."

"I'm sorry," Corinne replied. "I didn't know he woulddesert us like that."

Dr. Bryson chuckled. "That's generally the way with all new fathers, Mrs. Drayton. Very few of them stick aroundfor the birthing."

Corinne wondered if Jared would have. But there was nopoint in thinking about that. Why, Jared didn't even knowne had a son. A son! she thought with awe.

She watched keenly as Dr. Bryson picked up the baby and took him across the room. His wailing started again asthey washed him. When they were finished, he was wrappedin a small blanket and Florence started to leave the roomwith him.

"Where are you taking him?" Corinne asked.

"I'll just put him in the next room for now," Florencereplied. "The family who is going to take him hasn't beennotified yet."

"I will take care of that this afternoon," the doctor of-fered. "You need your rest now. We all do. I will stop bytomorrow, Mrs. Drayton, to see how you're doing."

Corinne tried to let the exhaustion of the night takeover, but though her body was willing, her mind wouldn'trest. She could hear the distant crying of the baby and the sound seemed to pull at her. Were they just going to lethim wail like that?

What was the matter with her? She shouldn't care. Thatwas Jared's child, and she hated it. What did she care if iteried itself sick? The baby would be gone soon and shewould never see it again.

Corinne closed her eyes against the sound, willing it to stop. But a picture of the baby lying in her arms obsessedher. He had stopped crying when she offered him her breast. He had fallen asleep instantly, as if that had been the only thing he wanted. He had trusted her, depended on her togive him comfort.

The crying seemed to grow louder, reverberating in hermind until she couldn't stand it anymore. She fought theinsistent desire to go to him.

"Florence!" Corinne called desperately. "Florence, make him stop!"

There was no answer and the wailing continued. Corinnefrowned. No, she couldn't see him again. She had to puthim from her mind.

"Oh, stop it, baby. Please stop crying!"

She choked back tears that wanted to come. She gotslowly out of bed. Her whole body ached. She would just make sure nothing was wrong with him, then she couldsleep.

Walking was most uncomfortable, but she managed slow-ly. The baby had been put in the empty room next to hers. No one was there with him, either. The infant was in thecenter of the bed, braced with pillows on each side.

Corinne looked down at him. He did look a little betternow that he was cleaned up. But he was reddish-blue fromso much screaming.

"Hush," Corinne said softly, and touched her fingers to he fuzzy black hair on his head. "You have to stop this,do you hear?"

That didn't work. She opened his blankets to see if some-thing was hurting him, but there was nothing. His poorlittle limbs were stiff with the effort he was making to beheard. He wasn't just crying, he was screaming his heart out and breaking hers in the process.

"Please, don't cry anymore," she pleaded. "I can't standit."

Corinne picked him up and tried to soothe him, butstill he screamed. Would nothing work? She put him backdown on the bed and moved one pillow so she could liebeside him. Giving up, she opened the front of her night-gown and pulled him gently to her. When his cheek touchedher breast he jerked about frantically until his little mouthclamped onto her nipple. It took a while for his breathingto settle down, but as before, he relaxed and fell asleepcontentedly.

Corinne could hold back the tears no more. "Oh, God,no!" she sobbed, pain tearing at her heart. "Why did youdo this to me!"

Florence looked in a while later and found mother andson both sleeping peacefully. She smiled and closed the door very softly.

Chapter 19

CORINNE examined herself critically in the full-length,mahogany-framed mirror. Her dress was azure blue;a delicate cotton poplin with white lace trimmings—very cool, yet stylish. She carried a blue parasol. She wore her golden hair in the new style as well, pulled tightly up on the sides and back into a knot on top of her head, with acurled fringe on her forehead and temples. She didn't care for the uncomfortable

severity of the style. It was designed for shorter hair, not the thick long locks she was reluctant to cut. But at least it was quite cool.

Corinne had a complete new wardrobe. No more of thosetentlike mumuus for her. She had to give the impression that she was newly arrived from the mainland, and she couldn't do that in island clothes.

"You look lovely, my dear," Florence remarked as shecame into the room with a hasket of fresh-cut flowers. "But why are you trying on those new dresses again?"

Corinne ignored the question and turned to catch differ-ent angles of herself in the mirror. "I did it, Florence," shebeamed. "After two grueling months of exercise, I have myold figure back. The new dresses were measured from anold one, and they fit perfectly now."

"It's not too tight in the bust?"

Corinne frowned with confusion. "No, but it should be, shouldn't it?"

Florence chuckled. "You can thank me for that. I toldthe seamstress to enlarge that area. It's a good thing Ithought of it, eh?"

Corinne couldn't help but smile. "Another bit of takingthings into your own hands? Like that trick you and Dr.Bryson played on me?'

"I won't deny it."

"Oh, Florence, what would I do without you?" Corinne embraced her old friend, something she rarely did.

"Not nearly so well, that's a fact."

Corinne laughed, thoroughly delighted. "You know, I only have this bigger bust line and two small stretch marksto show for what I went through. Did I thank you for in-sisting on all those applications of coconut oil to help myskin expand without stretching? Only two marks!"

"Well, that's not all you have to show for it," Florencesaid quietly.

"No. I can never thank you enough for that." The twowomen looked into one another's eyes. They understood each other, the childless one and the new mother.

They both heard the cry at the same time.

"You want me to go?" Florence offered.

"No," Corinne grinned. "I'll bet you thought that whenI came to my senses and decided to keep him, you wouldget to care for him all the time. Well, you can help, but Ienjoy him too much to give over all his care completely."

"It's not fitting," Florence grumbled. "Why, your mothernever bothered with you, except to show you off to her friends. A woman of your breeding has a nurse to take careof the changing, bathing, and feeding."

"I'm not my mother," Corinne replied. "I happen to likeall those little things. Can I help it if I just can't get

enough of him?"

Florence laughed. "No, I suppose not. But I still say it'snot fitting."

"You're just jealous. Why, I think you love him as muchas I do," Corinne said. "Come on then, we'll both go. Headores the attention anyway."

They both went into the room next to Corinne's that hadbeen turned into a nursery. The morning sun fell acrossthe matted floor in patterns from the screened, openedwindows. A delicate breeze stirred the dangling sculptured birds hanging over the bassinet, causing the wailing to stop.

Corinne smiled down at Michael Samuel Burkett. "He's facinated by those birds you found in the antique shop. Heis really starting to notice things."

"The doctor told you there was nothing wrong with hiseyes," Florence replied, grinning down at Michael, who hadturned toward their voices. "Babies don't see so well atfirst. And I'm glad to see his eyes changed from that murkyblue to your yellow-green. Lord, he's going to be a hand-some devil when he grows up, just like his—"

"No." Corinne cut her off. "He's not going to be any-thinglike him!"

"If you say so, my dear."

"I do," Corinne returned firmly. "Michael is going to bespecial. I know he is."

"Well, right now this special young man needs changing,"Florence replied and began to unwrap the diaper.

"Did Dr. Bryson leave more of that salve for his heat-rash?"

"No, he said he would drop it by today. There's nothing to worry about,'though. The rash doesn't seem to botherMichael at all."

"I don't like it. Maybe I should put an overhead fan inhere."

"You worry too much, Cori," Florence chided her. "Mi-chael was born in this climate. The muggy heat probablydoesn't bother him half as much as it does you and me.Look at him. He's as healthy as can be."

"I know. I just want him to stay that way," Corinne re-plied, and lifted Michael from the bassinet.

She smiled down at his chubby little face, all the love in the world reflected in her eyes. He was her little angel. Shestill shuddered to think how close she had come to giving him up. She would never for give herself for the awfulthoughts she had had about him while carrying him. Shecould only think that she must have been a little crazy.

Michael was no longer Jared's son, to be cast aside with-out a care. He was her son, and only hers. She had neverdreamed that anyone could be so important to her.

"Are you hungry, precious?" Corinne fussed over him."I suppose I should feed you again before I leave. Thenyou can sleep the afternoon away and won't even miss me."

"Leave?" Florence crooked a brow.

. Corinne moved to the cushioned rocker by the windowand opened the front of her dress to nurse Michael. "It's time, Florence. Russell told me a ship is due in late this morning. We are going down to the harbor with some ofmy luggage and then ride from there to the Royal Monarch

Hotel, as if I had just arrived from the mainland. I will take aroom there as Mrs. Jared Burkett."

Florence shook her head. "So you're still going through with it? I had hoped you'd forget all that."

"Just because my heart has softened, doesn't mean I haveforgotten why I came here. Not for one moment have Iforgotten."

Florence had become sympathetic to Corinne's fury onceshe learned of the rape. But since then she had had time tomull over it again, and she still thought leaving well enough alone was a good idea.

"Michael is old enough to travel, Cori. Why don't we gohome instead?" she suggested. "Your father is dying to seehis grandson."

"I know, but he can wait a few more months. I'm not go-ing home until I have been revenged."

"Damn and botheration! Corinne, you're going to getyourself in trouble fooling with that man!"

Corinne was surprised and a little amused. "It's not likeyou to use strong language, Florence," she observed.

"One picks up the habit living around you," Florencesaid testily. "Whatever possessed your father to let you runwild at the shipyard when you were a child, I'll never know. Some of the words you picked up—!"

"He was happy that I showed an interest."

"An interest that didn't last. But it turned you into themost unladylike lady, Corinne Barrows."

"Corinne Burkett," she reminded her old nurse. "And be-sides, I don't swear intentionally. It just happens when I getangry."

"Which is most of the time."

"Now, have I been disagreeable these last two months?" Corinne asked with a smile.

"No, but you will be once you run into him again," Flor-ence said knowingly.

"No, I won't. I don't have to see Jared in order to make a fool of him. I may not run into him at all, and that willbe just as well. But if I do, why should I lose my temper?He can't do anything to stop me. He can't play the out-raged husband, not when he deserted me. I have the upper hand this time."

"I don't like it, Cori," Florence warned. "He fooled mewell enough with his charm, and you even more. You seemto forget how ruthless he was."

"Stop trying to talk me out of it, Florence," Corinne said firmly, her green eyes hard. "Nothing has

changed. I'm not going home until I've done what I came to do."

"What about Michael?" Florence asked huffily. "Doyou plan to keep him hidden in a stuffy hotel room whileyou parade about town?"

"Of course not. You and the baby will stay here. I am only checking into the hotel because it is a public place andI have to be seen in public. I will spend most of my timehere, though no one will know it."

"And if Jared follows you here and discovers Michael? Then what will you do?"

Corinne frowned. "That isn't likely to happen, Florence.But if it does, the solution is simple. We will just say that Michael is your son, and that you are staying up here on Punchbowl because it's cooler here and you had difficulty adjusting to the heat."

"I'm not even married!" Florence gasped.

"Who is to say you're not recently widowed, Mrs. Mer-rill?" Corinne said. "And that Michael wasn't born in Bos-ton, before we left? After all, we're saying that we onlyarrived today. And we can say that Michael is a montholder than he actually is."

"You're making things too complicated, Cori. Why lieabout his age?"

"So Jared can't possibly suspect anything if he does hap-pen to discover Michael. Dr. Bryson is the only one herewho knows that Michael is mine and that he was born June14. And the good doctor knows me as Mrs. Drayton. It is doubtful that he knows Jared or will connect me with the soon-to-be notorious Mrs. Jared Burkett."

"I don't like any of it, Cori. You know I don't like lies. I never could tell one convincingly."

"You probably won't have to lie at all. I will be carefulwhen I come and go from here. And in the unlikely eventthat Jared does follow me here, we don't have to let him in. So there is nothing to worry about."

"So you say," Florence replied. "But I'm afraid that does not relieve my mind in the least. Not in the least."

Chapter 20

JARED leaned back against the trunk of a large coconutpalm and stared out over the ocean. He looked downat the waves breaking on Waikiki Beach. Behind him wasthe hotel he was building. While Jared was proud to becontributing to the growth of his island, he was also sad. The old way of life was ending.

"The job goes well, huh, Ialeka?"

Jared looked over at Leonaka who straddled a benchunder the palms, paring a mango and tossing large chunks of the juicy fruit into his mouth. Leonaka Naihe was a de-scendant of Leimomi Naihe, as Jared was, but Leo was thetruer Hawaiian, lossing his pure blood line only a genera-tion ago, when his father took a Japanese wife. He looked pure Hawaiian, for he was a dark-skinned giant, towering well above

Jared, with coal-black hair and black eyes.

They had grown up together on the north shore, gone toschool together, and now worked together. Leo was Jared'sbest foreman as well as his closest friend and distant cousin.

"Yes, the job goes well," Jared grinned. "I don't knowwhy I even bother to come down here. You have everything running so smoothly."

"Da successful boss no need work," Leo teased in pidgin,though he spoke perfect English. "He lay in da sun all day wit' pretty*wafune*. No worry 'bout na'ting."

"Are you suggesting I retire before I'm thirty?"

"We manage fine without you, boss. Mo'better you enjoylife while you young, huh?"

"Thanks a lot, Leo. It's nice to know I'm needed."

They both laughed. Then Leonaka's sudden change inexpression alerted Jared.

"Look who is paying you a visit," Leo said seriously, nodding toward the hotel. "It must be something pretty im-portant to take your uncle away from Fort Street."

Jared followed Leo's gaze. Edmond Burkett was stridingpurposefully toward them. "I have an idea why he's here."

"So do I," Leonaka said, frowning. "I wanted to talk toyou about it myself, but since you haven't brought up thesubject, I haven't dared to pry. I guess your uncle's got more courage."

"Audacity, you mean," Jared said coldly.

When Edmond reached them he was sweating profusely from the noon heat and breathing hard. The exertion oftrudging through the sand had exhausted him. He collapsed on the other end of the bench by Leonaka and started fan-ning himself with his hat.

Leonaka rose without acknowledging Edmond's presence."I guess I better get the men back to work now."

"Yes," Jared said tightly, and watched him walk away.

"I sent messages to you for the last two weeks, Jared," Edmond began, foregoing cordialities. "Why have youignored them?"

"I have been busy."

'Too busy to spare me a few minutes?"

Jared stood stiffly before his uncle. "Yes. And I'm sorry you came down here for nothing, because I can't spare you any time now either. I have work to do."

Edmond became flustered. "You can't pretend you don'tknow why I'm here. I demand to know what you are going to do about your wife!"

"Nothing," Jared replied calmly, "Now is there anythingelse you wanted to discuss?"

Edmond stared incredulously at him. "Nothing? Noth-ing?"

"Your hearing is excellent, Uncle," Jared said sarcastic-ally.

Edmond frowned. "Perhaps you're not aware of whatshe is doing."

"No, Uncle. I know all about her indiscretions. I canname you every one of the lovers she's taken in the six weeks since she arrived. I know exactly what she is doing. The difference is, I also know why."

"My God, Jared! How can you let her go on flauntingher infidelity? Doesn't it bother you?"

"If you mean that she's a whore—no, that doesn't botherme. She's not going to be my wife very much longer. She will probably divorce me as soon as she gets tired of hergame and returns home."

"I don't understand any of this." Edmond shook his head."You didn't even have the decency to tell me you had mar-ried."

"As I said, it won't be for much longer."

"I had to find out from friends, and that wasn't all they had to tell me," Edmond went on as if he hadn't been in-terrupted. "I couldn't believe it. I went to see her, to de-mand she stop passing herself off as Mrs. Jared Burkett."

"You saw Corinne?" Jared began to show interest.

"Yes, I saw her," he replied in disgust. "A trollop! Witha painted face. Even after she knew who I was and had showed me her marriage papers, she had the effrontery tomake a pass at me! Why, I'm old enough to be her father, let alone the fact I'm your unclel How could you have mar-ried such a creature?"

Jared's eyes had turned slate gray. "Why I married heris not important."

"Maybe you don't mind having your name draggedthrough the gutter. But I am a Burkett too, and so is yoursister. Have you considered how Malia is going to feelabout having a whore for a sister-in-law? The whole bloodyisland knows about it. You've got to put a stop to this!"

"Since when are you so concerned about Malia?" Jaredasked icily.

"I know how she is going to feel when this reaches her. It's fortunate she's in the country now. She probably won'tever want to leave once she hears."

"That's enough!" Jared said furiously.

"Then do something about it! The damage has beendone, but it needn't continue. The political problems on thisisland are coming to a head. We might have a revolutionsoon. At least that will make people forget about your wife."

"I told you never to mention revolution to me. Youknow I am opposed to overthrowing the queen."

"I'm just saying that your scandalous wife won't remainthe topic of conversation for very long once she's gone."

"What are you suggesting? That I ship her home whether she wants to go or not?"

"Yes. And pay her to leave, if you have to. I'll even help you if her price is too high for you."

"She's richer than you and I together, Uncle," Jared re-plied, watching his uncle's reaction carefully.

Edmond was surprised, but not deterred. "Damnit, Jared, you have to do something! You're letting that woman make a laughing stock of you and ruin our name."

"All right, Uncle," Jared sighed, turning to look down the beach at the castlelike structure of the Royal MonarchHotel, where Corinne was staying. "I will take care of it."

This was the second conversation he had had about hiswife since her unexpected arrival. The first had been withDayna, the woman he ought to have married. She nowknew all the sordid details of the marriage. Curiously,Dayna had recently accused him of being jealous, which wasabsurd. He didn't care for Corinne. Couldn't Dayna seethat?

"You'll put a stop to it soon?" his uncle pressed.

Jared's mouth was set in a grim line. "Yes, soon."

chapter 21

was bored. The constant acting, the long drives from Punchbowl to Waikiki and back againkept her irritable. The charade was keeping her away from Michael far too much, and she hated that.

Yes, it was time to go home. The venture just hadn'tbeen satisfying. If only Jared had reacted in some way, ifhe had shown her that her behavior had had some effecton him, she'd feel as though she'd accomplished something. But she hadn't seen him once. Maybe he didn't give a damn what people thought.

"I think I might just miss this island, Russell," Corinneremarked as she poured more Chinese tea into a tiny cup."You have to admit, it's nice having summer all year round, and fresh fruit whenever you want it."

They were at a restaurant in Chinatown, a crowded part of Honolulu not far from Punchbowl. It was an exotic ex-perience, eating pork chow mein, egg fu yung, chow fun,and a host of other delightful dishes. The courses just keptcoming, seven different dishes in all, enough to feed ten hungry people. Corinne was aghast at the waste, but shedid get to sample each dish.

"So you've finally decided to give it up and go home?"Russell asked.

"Yes. I should get Michael away from here before hegets too accustomed to the warm climate and has troubleadjusting to Boston."

"Michael," Russell said drily. "Everything you do now seems to center around him. When you're not acting outyour little drama, you're playing with that baby, nursing him, bathing him. I hardly ever see you anymore unless it's myturn to be your lover for the day."

"Don't be crude, Russell."

"I wouldn't mind, if it were true—if I really were your lover," he replied bitterly. "But the only one you let getclose to you is that damn baby."

"Russell!"

"I'm sorry, Corinne," he said quickly, taking her handin both of his. "I didn't mean that. I'm just dispirited. I'vebeen losing constantly at the cockfights in Kalihi, and this muggy weather we've been having is enough to put anyone on edge."

Corinne sighed. "I know. Why don't you see about find-ing us a ship tomorrow?"

"You're that eager to leave?"

"Aren't you? It's been ten months."

"I just thought you would settle things with Burkett first. You haven't even seen him."

"Why should I?"

"What about a divorce?"

"Russell, I told you. There will be no divorce. Jared will continue to be my absentee husband, even if we never see each other again. I happen to like the present arrangement."

"Where does that leave me?"

"Just what are you getting at, Russell?" Corinne de-manded, putting down her fork and sitting back.

"I want you for my wife, Corinne." His hands squeezedhers more tightly. "/ want to be your husband, not that rascal who doesn't give a damn about you."

Corinne sighed. "That's impossible now. I've told youthat before. I never made you any promises, Russell. I don'tlove you and I wish you would stop expecting my feelings to change. I don't want anyone except Michael."

Russell's eyes darkened. "Maybe you wouldn't feel thatway if you didn't have the baby," he said acidly. "I wonder what your husband would do if he knew he had a son."

Corinne's face turned pale. She had never heard Russelltalk so callously before. Why did he seem so bitter?

"Are you threatening me, Russell?"

"I'm just curious, is all," he shrugged. "Do you think he would try to take the boy from you?"

Corinne's green eyes darkened and shot sparks. "If youtold him, Russell," she said in a whisper, "I would probablykill you."

"The lioness protecting her cub, eh?" he sneered. Then his dark eyes widened in surprise. "Well... the

lion justwalked into the den.""What?""Your absentee husband is no longer absent."

Corinne felt her heart begin to pound. She couldn't bring herself to turn around and look. She glared at Russell.

"If you dare say one word about—"

"Relax, Corinne." Russell smiled warmly and kissed thepalm of her hand. "I was only teasing you. Don't you knowme better than that?"

"I was beginning to wonder," she said with little relief."Has he seen us?"

"Not only that, my dear, but he is coming this way,"Russell answered smoothly.

Corinne held her breath. How should she act? For somereason, the old anger at Jared wouldn't surface. Instead, she found herself worried about *his* anger, about what *he* would do.

When she heard the slow moving footsteps stop behindher, she wanted to run.

"Mr. Drayton," Jared drawled. "I trust you are enjoyingmy wife's company, but would you mind if I borrowed her for a few minutes?"

Russell didn't move. He replied smugly, "I do mind, Mr.Burkett. I don't believe your wife would care to be*bor-rowed*, as you put it."

Jared placed his palms flat on the table and leaned to-ward Russell. "Let me put it another way," he said in adangerously calm tone. "If you don't leave, I am going topersonally escort you out of here and beat you senseless."

Russell rose indignantly. He wasn't quite as tall as Jared, and was ridiculously slim in comparison, but he didn't ap-pear in the least bit intimidated.

Corinne rose also. "Russell, please. We're finished here,anyway. Wait for me in the carriage. I'm sure whatever Jared has to say will only take a few minutes."

Russell looked at Corinne for a long moment. Quickly,he reached into his pocket and threw money down on the table for the bill. He then stalked angrily from the restau-rant without another word.

Corinne sat down again, aware of the many eyesfocused on her table. She finally looked up at Jared. A spark seemed to pass between them. She couldn't tear hereyes away from his.

"You're looking fit, Corinne." Jared broke the silenceand sat down opposite her. "My uncle was right, though. That makeup you wear is appalling. Didn't anyone tell you that you don't have to look like a whore to be one?"

She had expected similar words, but they stung neverthe-less. "You've grown a beard," she remarked in lame re-taliation, noting that his tan was darker, too. "It doesn'tsuit you."

"I didn't ask for your opinion."

"Nor did 1 ask for yours!" she retorted hotly, the oldanger coming back with surprising quickness.

"What's the matter, Corinne?" he asked. "You enjoy be-ing a whore, but you don't liie being called one? Is that it?"

Corinne changed her demeanor with great effort. "Itdoesn't bother me, Jared," she said. "Does it you? Don'tyou like having it known that your wife is a whore?"

"That's enough, Corinne."

"Has it been humiliating, Jared? Tell me how you felt.Did you feel just a little bit like I did when you left your newspaper ad behind? A little bit shamed, Jared? A littlebit of a fool?"

"So your behavior here was all intentional?"

"Yes, you cur!" she hissed, letting her anger show now. "You're not the only one who understands revenge!"

Jared looked down at the table thoughtfully. "Wouldn'tyou say we are even now? I did you a bad turn, but you have retaliated."

"Whether or not we are even is debatable. I couldn'teven leave my house in Boston because of the humiliation.But I see you haven't had that problem. Perhaps you don'tcare about public opinion?*

"I care, Corinne."

"Well, thank you for that much satisfaction," she saidcoldly.

"You didn't let me finish. I care, but I don't let it affectme," he said. "But since you put such importance on publicopinion, how could you degrade yourself here just to settlea score with me?"

"I don't care what these people think," she replied. "I don't live here. Gossip here isn't going to follow me toBoston."

"I could see that it did," he tested her.

She glared at him. "If you're out for a never-ending bat-tle, I will oblige you."

Jared's shoulders seemed to drop a little. "No, I just wantto see this one ended. You've done enough damage, Co- rinne. I want you to call it quits and leave."

"Youwant?" she laughed derisively. "I don't give a damnwhat*you* want, Jared. Maybe / don't want to leave yet. Maybe I just happen to like it here. After all, I've beenhaving a marvelous time."

"Whoring?" he said contemptuously.

"Yes," she grinned "You showed me how pleasurablelove can be. But I've found that any man will do."

Jared's eyes were a steel gray. "You're going to leave, Corinne, if I have to—"

She stood up in rage. "Don't you*dare* threaten me!"You lost any rights when you treated me the way you did. I hadnever harmed you, Jared. You are in no position to ask meanything, ever."

Jared stared after her departing figure with a murderous fury growing in him. Why was she doing this? Was shereally going to stay here?

A few minutes passed before Jared decided to followCorinne and her favorite lover. The other men had been only one-night affairs, but Russell Drayton was a regularbedmate of Corinne's. Jared wondered what Draytonthought about sharing Corinne with other men. What kindof man loved a whore?

Jared's carriage followed theirs. He was about to over-take them when they surprised him by turning off towardsPunchbowl, rather than going on to Waikiki and Co-rinne's hotel. Jared slowed his carriage and continued tofollow them at a distance. They stopped on a hill overlook-ing the city, and he watched as Corinne and Russell entered a house there.

Jared settled down and waited, wondering who they werevisiting. As the minutes turned into hours it became clear to him. He had not been able to discover where Draytonwas staying. Now he knew. Corinne not only flaunted heraffairs publicly, she also enjoyed them privately. Did thewoman never sleep alone?

Toward midnight, Jared watched the lights go out in the front of the house. He couldn't say why he had waited so long, hoping they would leave. Why, damnit, why did he have the urge to go in there and kill Drayton? Jared didn't care who Corinne slept with. Was he letting it get to himsimply because she bore his name?

Jared rode back down to the city with one thought inmind—Corinne had to leave Hawaii. He wouldn't seek herout again. Let her come to him. When she did, he knewexactly what to do.

Chapter 22

CORINNE woke with a splitting headache. Rain wasblowing into her room through the open windows. She jumped out of bed and raced to Michael's room. Buthis windows were closed against the downpour, obviously Florence's doing.

Michael was still asleep, so she quietly closed the doorand moved sluggishly back to her own room. She shut herown windows, then pressed her palms to her temples and grimaced against the throbbing pain.

Too little sleep, she reasoned, and too many upsettingthoughts—that's why her head ached. Why had she let hermeeting with Jared upset her so?

She had forgotten how handsome he was. She had lainawake much of the night, recalling his touch, their weddingnight, the wild pleasure he had given her. Most disturbing, she knew that if he had walked into her room last night, she would have welcomed him.

Florence knocked on the door and poked her head in-side. "You're up? Good." She came into the room withoutinvitation. "I wanted a word with you before Michael wokeand demanded your full attention."

"Maybe you will tell me now what was the matter withyou and Russell last evening?"

"What do you mean?"

"You know what I mean. You both came home and both went to your separate rooms without a civil word to me. Did you have an argument?"

"I'm not really sure." Corinne shrugged. "You see, we met Jared."

Florence frowned and took a deep breath. "And?"

'To be sure, it wasn't very pleasant Jared and Russellalmost came to blows. But fortunately, I persuaded Russellto leave."

"Well, don't stop there," Florence said with impatience."Did you and your husband fight?"

"Yes, and I'm afraid I lost my temper."

"I was afraid you would."

"Well, how should I feel about Jared after all he did tome? And last night he called me a whore."

"What did you expect, my dear? You deliberately madeeveryone think you were a—" Florence faltered and grew red, unable to say the word. "—an immoral woman," shecompromised. "Did you believe he wouldn't think thesame?"

"I never really considered what he would think of me, only that he would be humiliated by what others thought,"Corinne admitted, her eyes troubled.

"It bothers you, doesn't it?"

Corinne's chin came up stubbornly. "Why should it? Illnever see him again, so his opinion isn't important. *I* knowthe truth about myself, and that's all that matters."

"Then why did you lose your temper?" Florence de-manded, a wise look in her hazel eyes.

Corinne bit her lip. "I guess I was stung by his bitterness. And surprised. He had no right to condemn me after allhe's done. I was only getting even with him. He was the onewho started the whole thing. He used me for revenge, then left me to face the shame of desertion. The blackguardunderestimated me if he thought I would let him get away with that!"

"Cori, you're losing your temper again," Florencewarned. "If you don't lower your tone you will wake Mi-chael."

"Oh, Jared just infuriates me so!" she said in exaspera-tion. "He had the audacity to demand I call it quits andleave here. He didn't ask me, he told me! He didn't say oneword about being sorry for what he did. Not a word ofapology. He only criticized me for what I've been doing—what he thinks I've been doing."

"Well, I hope you told him you will be leaving," Florence replied.

"No!" she snapped. "I wouldn't give him that satisfaction. I told him I like it here."

"Cori, enough is enough."

"I know," Corinne answered in a subdued voice. "I hadalready decided to leave. In fact, I will check out of thehotel today and withdraw my money from the bank. I was just too angry to tell Jared that. Let him be uncomfortablea little longer, while we wait for a ship."

"Thank heavens you've come to your senses!" Florenceexclaimed.

Corinne smiled. "Besides being bored with the whole affair, I just can't handle the pretense anymore," she ad-mitted finally. "I keep running into the men I've taken upto that hotel suite, and they keep pressuring me to fulfill my promises. I can't put them off anymore."

"The Lord knows it was a dangerous scheme to beginwith," Florence reminded her. "You could have foundyourself with an ardent rogue not willing to wait. Thenwhat would you have done, my dear?"

"Screamed for help, what else?" Corinne laughed, thenadded, "I was never worried about that, Florence. Every- thing went smoothly. I would waltz through the lobby of my hotel with the gentleman of the day, take him to myroom and ply him with wine, avoid his advances, and thenmake my excuses. I always promised he would find his wildest pleasures the next time. It was really so easy. Each man left with a smile of anticipation, and anyone who sawMm leaving would assume he had already gotten what he wanted. Men being men, not one of them would admit de-feat and say they had struck out."

"Men being men, it's lucky you were able to pull it off,"Florence told her sternly.

"Well, I did," Corinne said smugly. "Now I can gohome. I just hope I can avoid those men I used when I check out of the hotel today. I have really run out of ex-cuses for why I won't see any of them a second time."

"Should I go with you?"

"No, you have to watch Michael. I'm not about to lethim be seen by anyone. He has too many of Jared's features, and I can't take the chance of someone jumping tothe right conclusion about him and spreading a rumor that Jared has a son. If I run into any of my so-called lovers, Iwill just have to hope further excuses will suffice."

"Take Russell with you, at least," Florence suggested."Then there won't be any problem."

"Russell will drop me off at the hotel. But then I wanthim to go and see about a ship. Now that I've made up my mind to go, I want to get it over with quickly. I'll just hideout here until we sail. No more parading. No more takingthe chance of seeing Jared again. Once was enough."

Florence looked closely at Corinne's expression. "Hefrightens you, doesn't he?"

"When he's angry, yes," she admitted grudgingly." **But**only because he's so damned unpredictable."

Florence understood a bit too clearly. "You underesti-mated him before. You should have remembered that be-fore you came here. It pays to learn from past mistakes."

Corinne wondered. Did she have good reason to fear Jared? She mouthed a silent prayer that the big

man'srage would remain dormant until they had sailed.

The young Hawaiian attendant in bright floral shirt andflappy white trousers hailed a waiting carriage and put Co-rinne's few things inside. He sheepishly avoided looking atthe beautiful wahine who tapped her foot impatiently. He knew who she was—she was the talk of the entire hotel. But the young boy didn't believe half the things they were saying about her, she who always had a smile of thanks forhim whenever he helped her.

He knew her husband, too, had seen him this morning when he came to the hotel. So he knew why the lovelywhite-skinned lady was not smiling now, why sparks were shooting from her dark green eyes. Why did he have to bethe one standing idly in the lobby when the manager or-dered her bags taken out? He somehow felt personally re-sponsible for her anger.

Corinne sat stiffly on the edge of the seat in the en-closed carriage. Her hands clenched and unclenched re-peatedly in her lap. She was at a complete loss.

She had walked through the expansive lobby of her hotel, overly crowded today because of the rain. The commotion she caused amused her, women stepping well out of herway as if she were diseased, men trying to catch her eye. She had been on her way to her suite to pack the few be-longings she kept there when the hotel manager stoppedher.

Before she could tell him to prepare her bill, he informed her quietly that her suite was no longer available. Corinne'sgreen eyes opened wider with every word the managerspoke. He explained that her luggage was already packed and waiting for her, that her bill had been paid in full, andthat *he* was no longer welcome at the Royal Monarch.

"And what is the reason for this?" she had demanded, daring the cowardly little man to tell her that her scandalous activities had warranted this action.

His reply was the last thing she expected to hear. "Yourhusband has threatened to wring my neck if I allow you to stay here another day."

Now Corinne glared out the carriage window at the pour-ing rain, not really seeing the swaying palms lining the streets, or the elaborate houses. She had come to look withdelight on the profusion of color everywhere, each house with its own unique garden—not formal, but with flowersand plants everywhere, framing houses and walkways, cov-ering porches, hanging from roof edges. Bright colors were everywhere, but today Corinne wasn't seeing anything.

She was not aware that they had reached the center of Honolulu until the carriage stopped before her bank, the destination she had given the driver. Her eyes still blazed as she approached a teller, and she was too preoccupied to notice the surprise on the man's face when she handed him her account book and asked for her money.

"There must be some mistake, Mrs. Burkett."

The middle-aged teller with the gold-rimmed spectacleshad her complete attention now. He had called her Mrs.Burkett. How did he know she was married? She had opened the account as Miss Corinne Burkett.

"What mistake?" she asked with growing alarm. "I havecome to withdraw my money."

The man's surprised look turned to one of consterna-tion. "But we don't have your money any longer, Mrs.Burkett. It was withdrawn this morning."

"By whom?" she demanded, though she needn't haveasked. She knew.

"Why, by Mr. Burkett," the man explained.

Corinne tried to control herself. She pointed a trembling finger at her account book.

"Do you see his name on that book beside mine? Howdare you release my money to him!"

"He is your husband," the man said lamely.

"How do you know that?"

Now the poor man began to sweat. "I had no reason todoubt his word. We know Mr. Burkett quite well here. He is a competitor of ours. He and his uncle own a Savingsand Loan down on Fort Street."

"I don't give a damn what he owns!" she stormed, notcaring anymore about the attention she was getting. "Youhad no right to give him my money!"

"If he is not your husband, then we have indeed made a mistake and I assure you the law will be called in. But ifMr. Burkett is your husband, then your money is also his, and he has the right to withdraw it."

Corinne turned abruptly and stormed out of the bank.'Take me back to Waikiki, and quicklyl" she shouted ather Hawaiian driver.

"Da hotel we just come from?"

"No. There is a new one being built on the beach. Doyou know where it is?"

"Sure t'ing, lady," he grinned. "I got one cousin workdere. Plenty work he says. Long time 'fore dat hotel finish."

She ignored his comments and got back into the car-riage for the long drive back to Waikiki. A few blocks pastthe hotel that had evicted her was the shell of a new hotelunder construction. By the time her carriage stopped there, it was already late afternoon. The rain had stopped and the sun was out. But the effects of the storm were still on the ground, and Corinne had to trudge through wet sand to reach the building.

Corinne stopped to look about the area for Jared, but shedidn't see him. A monstrously tall Hawaiian of slim ath-letic build appeared to be in charge. She had never seen a man so tall before, and was almost reluctant to approachhim and interrupt his work. She became even more reluctant when whistles and lewd remarks came her way. Con-struction came to a standstill. All the workers watched herapproach.

The tall Hawaiian turned tp see what was distracting his men and scowled when he saw Corinne. He noted her richdress of copper silk, the matched parasol opened to block the sun, the dark-gold hair under a stylish hat, the palewhiteness of her skin. A*malehine*, probably lost, and a stunningly beautiful one at that.

He moved towards her and blocked her way. "This is a restricted area, miss."

Corinne had to raise her head to look into the Hawaiian'sdark eyes. "I'm looking for Mr. Burkett—Mr. Jared Burk-ett. Is he here?"

The Hawaiian was a bit surprised. "Jared didn't come inthis morning. I'm Leonaka Naihe, his foreman. PerhapsI can help you."

Corinne showed her disappointment. "Only if you cantell me where I might find my husband, Mr. Naihe."

His brows raised. "Mrs. Burkett?"

"Unfortunately, yes," she answered bitterly. "Do youknow where he is?"

"You might try his office on Merchant Street. Or hishome on—"

"Yes, I know where his home is," she cut him off im-patiently. "Thank you."

Leonaka watched her leave and let out a slow whistle. So that was Ialeka's promiscuous wife. Why hadn't hebrought her home with him when he returned from the mainland? And why did she come here to flaunt her lovers in his face? Leonaka wished he knew what was going on. But he just couldn't bring himself to ask.

Chapter23

THE red-orange glow of the setting sun lit the sky onthe leeward side of the island as Corinne's carriage pulled off Beretania Street into the private lane of Jared'slarge, impressive house. She had already gone to his office, only to be told by an Oriental clerk that she had just missed him. Her temper was at fever pitch.

Her breasts, swollen with milk, were very painful. Shepressed her palms to them to keep the milk from dripping asit sometimes did when she went this long without nursingMichael. Fortunately she wore a tight binder, but shewasn't taking any chances, and pressed harder to be surethe flow stopped before she stepped carefully out of thecarriage.

For the fifth time that day, she asked the driver to waitfor her. If Jared were not at home, she would have to give up for today. She hurt so badly that she almost considereddoing that anyway. But her need to vent her anger was greater than the pain in her breasts or her exhaustion. Florence would have fed Michael anyway by now.

Before Corinne could pound on the front door of Jared'shouse, the door opened and she stared into the blue-gray eyes of her husband. He gazed at her with a triumphantgleam. A slight mocking curve to his lips incensed herbeyond caution, and she took a step closer to him and raised her hand to strike.

Jared caught her wrist and held it in an iron grip. "I wouldn't try that again if I were you," he said in a deep drawl. "I just might hit back."

Corinne tried to get her hand loose, but he pulled herinto the house and shut the door before releasing her. She turned to look at him. She had so many vile names to callhim that she hardly knew where to begin.

Jared laughed. "I expected to see you much soonertoday. Couldn't you find me?"

He didn't wait for her to answer but walked past herto a long bar in the living room and poured himself a tallglass of punch, then added a generous amount of rum. Hewas dressed in cream-colored pants and a white shirt, opened halfway down his chest. His casual attitude wasmaking Corinne livid.

"Cur!" she hissed, coming further into the room.

Jared chuckled deeply. "You're a fine one to be callinganyone names, dear wife."

"You're despicable!" she gasped, her face turning redderas she looked about for something to throw at him.

How she needed to hit him, to hurt him. But Jared antic-ipated her intent when she went after a vase of flowers on a nearby table.

"Oh, no," he said warningly. "Either you behave yourselfor I'll have to restrain you."

Corinne ignored the threat and hurled the vase at hishead. Flowers and water were strewn across the room, butthe sturdy vase crashed harmlessly against the wall behindJared. She didn't see the fury on his face as he started afterher. She was too busy looking for another weapon.

Before she could get her hands on a potted plant in awindow nook, Jared had grabbed her from behind. Hethrew her down on the sofa and stood with hands on hipslooking down at her sprawled form, silently daring her toget up.

"I should make you clean up that mess, damn your greeneyes!" he growled at her. "Now, you came to me this time. If you're ready to talk, do so. Otherwise I will lock you in a room upstairs until you decide you can behave decently."

"You can't do that!"

"When are you going to learn that I can and will do any-thing short of murder? You should have realized that bynow."

The rascal really would, she thought furiously. She satup, straightened her dress, then fixed the hat that hadtilted to the side of her head.

Jared moved back to the bar. "Would you care for adrink?" he offered, as he picked his up and leaned his backagainst the bar. "You really should have listened to melast night, Corinne. You could have avoided this."

"What have you done with my money, Jared?" she asked in a calm tone.

"It's in my account."

"Where?"

"That doesn't matter, since I made sure you can't drawon the account," he replied smoothly.

It was all Corinne could do to keep the-rage out of her voice. "You had no right to do that. Youstole my money!"

"What's yours is mine. Or have you forgotten you'remy wife?" he taunted her.

"You swore you wouldn't touch my money!"

He shrugged. "So I lied. You should have rememberedthat I don't always play fairly, Corinne."

"But you should have remembered the signed paper Ipossess, stating that you will not at any time exert your willover mine or interfere with anything I do. You've done justthat today."

"So?"

"So?" She couldn't understand his calm. "If you thinkI won't take you to court over this, then you don't knowme at all, Jared Burkett!"

"Oh, I think I know you well enough," he grinned."You're just like me. You can't stand to let someone getthe best of you."

"Jared, I—"

'That ridiculous paper you had me sign isn't worth adamn here."

"What?" she gasped.

"Find yourself a lawyer and see for yourself. You're in Hawaii, Corinne, and though we're near to bursting withAmericans and they have been conniving for years to haveus governed by the United States, we are still a sovereignkingdom with entirely different laws."

Curse it all! Why hadn't she thought of that?

Suddenly the full meaning of what he said sank in andshe shivered. The extent of his power over her was frighten-ing. He could probably do anything he wanted to her, and the law would protect him because he was her hus-band.

Jared watched tier changing expressions closely and grinned. "You do understand now, don't you?"

He was lording it over her. God, how she hated him!

"I understand, Jared," Corinne said coolly as she stoodup and raised her chin proudly. "I understand you are beyond contempt. Keep my money if you want it so badly. I still have enough cash and jewels to last me until myfather can send me more."

Jared sighed. "You have missed the whole point, Corinne.I don't want your money. I never did. I want you off thisisland. As soon as you decide to give it up and go, you willhave your money back."

Why couldn't she tell him that was what she wanted too? Why did she have to feel such defiance?

"I won't be forced to leave, Jared," she said stubbornly. "I won't be forced into anything."

Jared's eyes darkened to a dusky gray. "That's too bad, because I have had quite enough of your whoring abouttown, no matter what your reasons are. You're going out ofcirculation, Corinne, one way or the other."

"And you're going to hell!" she yelled furiously. Real-izing she had no control over her temper, she whirled and ran from the house.

If he thinks he's going to put a leash on me, he has losthis mind, she thought angrily as she ran along the walk in front of the house. He can't tell me what to do! He can't!

Before Corinne reached the waiting carriage, Jaredcaught up with her and swung her around to face him. Shewas still too angry to be frightened and struggled to getaway, losing her parasol and purse in the process.

"Let go of me!" she screamed, beating at his chest with her free hand.

"You're staying here, Corinne, until I decide what to dowith you," he said coldly.

"I will when you're in hell!"

Corinne tried kicking at him, but only succeeded in losinga shoe. Her hat fell off and her golden hair tumbled downinto her face, momentarily blinding her. In the next instant, she found herself tossed up over Jared's shoulder, herglorious long hair hanging down to drag on the ground. Herbreasts had hit against his hard back and the pain from the tender swelling was excruciating.

"Help!" she suddenly screamed at the top of her lungs. "Help me!"

"Be quiet, Corinne, before I really give you something toscream about," Jared hissed. "No one is going to come toyour aid." To the driver who sat watching the scene inamusement, Jared ordered, "If my wife left anything in your carriage, bring it inside and I'll pay you for your trouble. She won't be needing your services anymore."

Jared started back to the house. Corinne sank her teethinto him. She heard his yowl of pain and her satisfactionwas so great that she didn't care what he did—until hetossed her to the floor.

She fell just inside the door, bruising her shoulder as shelanded. Jared stood over her with one hand pressed to hiswound, his eyes smoldering.

"You damned blood-thirsty vixen! I ought to thrash youfor that!"

"Go ahead," She cried defiantly. "It doesn't matter. Youare already the lowest, vilest beast. Go ahead and beatme. See how much more I can hate you!"

But when Jared reached down, she shrank away. Hegrasped her wrist and yanked her to her feet, then dragged her up the stairs.

She held back with all her might when she saw the bloodsoaking the back of his shirt where she bit him. He wouldbeat her for that, she knew he would. Was she really athis mercy because a piece of paper said

she was his wife? Could he do anything he wanted to her and get away withit? The answer was terrifying.

At the top of the stairs was a long corridor. Jared opened the door of the second room he came to and pushed herinside, then slammed the door shut and locked it fromoutside.

Corinne pounded on the door. "You can't do this, Jared!"she screeched and pounded again.

But he had done it. She heard him walk away. Swingingaround, she looked at the room she found herself in. It tooka few moments for her to calm down. She located a lampand lit it.

It was a large room, masculine in appearance, done in dark blues and browns, suede, leather, and heavy brocades. Jared's bedroom? She inspected further, carrying the lampwith her. A large armoire revealed a man's wardrobe—suits, shirts, robes, and shoes and boots along the floor. Another door led to the newest kind of bathroom, with a carved marble tub and a sink with crystal faucets.

She caught her reflection in the mirror that covered one entire wall and gasped at her dishevelled condition. Her dress was wrinkled terribly, she had lost two buttons at thetop of her bodice, her hair cascaded down her shoulders in mess of tangles, and she wore only one shoe.

The pain in her breasts was unbearable, and the pressureCorinne applied to stop the flow didn't help anymore. Shehobbled back to the bathroom and locked the door from the inside.

Every movement made her breasts throb and she slowlyremoved the top of her dress to let it hang to her waist. Gently, she squeezed the milk from her breasts. What a waste, she thought bitterly. She should be home with Mi-chael, feeding him this abundance of milk.

The process was long and tiring, but eventually she found some relief, though not enough. She still needed Michael. By morning, she would need him desperately.

Corinne bound her breasts tightly again and fixed her dress, then went back into the bedroom, taking the lampwith her. It was completely dark outside now. A coolbreeze blew in through the open window. She went to standthere and let the fragrant air refresh her. Carriages passed on the street before her, filled with unknown people un- aware of her plight. She suddenly felt sick with apprehen-sion and exhaustion.

Hours passed. Corinne sat in a comfortable stuffed chairby the window and waited. The headache she had hadthat morning returned. Her stomach grumbled, and hershoulder hurt. The longer she waited, the more she forgot her fear. Her anger grew to near bursting.

When the door finally opened, it was all Corinne coulddo not to race at Jared and scratch his eyes out. He stoodthere with a tray of food in his hands, her lost shoe tuckedunder his arm, an unreadable expression on his face. "Areyou hungry?"

She didn't answer, but he brought the tray into the room anyway. "I would have come sooner, but I had a difficulttime explaining that mess in the living room to Soon Ho."

She showed no curiosity, but he explained anyway. "SoonHo takes care of me here. He cooks, cleans the house. He's really remarkable."

Corinne remained silent, seething. She watched his every move through narrowed eyes. After he set the tray downand tossed her shoe on the floor by the bed, he faced her, frowning sternly.

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"Are you just going to sit there killing me with youreyes, or will you come and eat?"

Her sudden peal of deep, throaty laughter played on hisnerves. "I wish to God my eyes could kill."

"I'm sure you do," he said curtly and moved to light another lamp.

Corinne stared at his back, noticing that he had changedhis shirt. She also saw the faint outline of a bandage be-neath it. She hoped the wound pained him. Better still, shehoped it would get infected. Perhaps he would die ofblood poisoning. The thought brought a wry smile to herlips.

Jared sauntered back to the cherrywood table and pickedat some fruit pieces in a bowl on the tray. Corinne frowned. Was he going to ignore her now?

"You know you really can't keep me here, Jared," she said in a calm, practical tone.

"Yes, I know," he answered coolly. "But you won't mindstaying here just one night, now will you?"

"What's the point, if I can go in the morning?"

"You're not going in the morning. I agree I can't keepyou here in this house. You would have to stay lockedin this room indefinitely. In the morning, we will leavefor the country."

"The country?" she asked in alarm. "You mean the other side of the island?"

"Yes. I can at least leave you there without worryingabout you causing any more scandal. It's far enough from Honolulu to keep you out of trouble."

"I won't go!"

"I'm not giving you a choice, Corinne," Jared said calmly. She began to panic again. He was taking her away from her babyl

"Look, Jared." She tried to keep the fear from her voice, but he could see it in her eyes. "I lied to you last night when

I said I liked it here. I had already decided to leave. I was just too angry to admit it. Russell even went to the harbortoday to see about a ship. The first one that sails, I willbe on it."

"It's too late for that, Corinne." He came to stand beforeher, his eyes inscrutable. "You had your chance to leave, but you refused."

"What do you mean?"

He smiled down at her. "I have decided I want you tostay after all."

"Why?"

"You came here to make a fool out of me and suc-ceeded," he said, his tone turning harsh, his own angerfinally showing. "I didn't mind being known as the poor, deceived husband, because I didn't give a damn about youto begin with. But when it was said that I wasn't manenough to handle my wife, well, that went against the grain. And the one way to have gossip turn in my favor is to show that I've taken you in

hand."

"Do you really think people will believe you have for-given me?" she asked, thinking quickly.

"A man could never forgive a wife who has whored asmuch as you have," he said cruelly, delighted to see her flinch. "But that has nothing to do with it."

"Then what?"

He put his hands on each each side of her chair and bent over her, trapping her there. "You carry my name. Youshould have remedied that. But since you didn't, you'regoing to be the model wife from now on."

"You're insane!" she hissed, green fire in her eyes. "Iwill never do what you want, Jared. We were even, butyou're tilting the scale again. Don't think I won't make you pay for it! I promise you I will!"

He laughed and walked towards the door. "We'll see how much damage you can do isolated in the country."

"You won't get me there!"

"If I have to gag and tie you for the whole day's journey,I will," he warned her and closed the door, turning thelock firmly once again.

Chapter 24

JARED tilted the bottle of rum and took a long drink. He had gone through half the bottle since he had leftCorinne in his room. But it didn't help to drown out thepounding going on upstairs that he was trying desperately toignore. When the devil would she settle down?

He sat at his desk, pen in hand, trying to compose aletter to Leonaka explaining about his wife, explaining thathe would be gone for a few days. The right words wouldn'tcome. There was just too much to tell.

Corinne's baggage from the carriage had been placed in the corner of the room, along with the things she haddropped in the yard. Jared's eyes kept straying to the corner. A large case, a small one, and a single hat box wasall. It didn't seem to be enough. He just couldn't picturehis stylish wife traveling with so few belongings.

He took another swig of rum and got back to the letter. Soon Ho would deliver it in the morning. In the end, itturned out to be just a short note leaving Leonaka incharge while he was gone. He didn't say anything abouthis wife.

An hour later, the bottle empty, and Jared was pacing the room like a frustrated animal. The pounding upstairshad stopped. Was she sleeping?

Her baggage still drew his attention and curiosity. Hefinally went to examine the contents and was even

morepuzzled than before when he found only two dresses and some underthings in the large case, powders, rouge, and perfumes in the smaller case, and just one hat in the hatbox. Where were the jewels she had mentioned earlier? Or the dress she had worn last night?

He knew the answer. These things had come from thehotel, that's why she had them with her. The rest of herclothes must be at that house up in Punchbowl, whereDrayton stayed. So she had obviously spent a good dealof time there. Somehow the thought of her living with theman she seemed to love was worse than her bedding count-less strangers at her hotel. But for the life of him, Jaredcouldn't explain why.

Jared looked up at the ceiling, knowing she was justabove him. For a moment he considered going up thereand having his way with her. She wouldn't like that. She had shown the whole island that she preferred any manexcept the one she married. He started towards the stairs, then stopped abruptly.

What was the matter with him? Corinne was the lastwoman he wanted. She had used her body for revengeagainst him, had purposely let other men have her, not because she wanted them, but just to even a score. Hewouldn't touch her, no matter how damnably desirable shemight be. She meant nothing to him.

"So why don't I just let her go and be done with it?"he asked himself aloud.

Jared went back into the living room and hunted out an-other bottle of rum, then dropped down on the sofa. Aftera few careless swallows he wiped his lips and his eyes re-turned once again to Corinne's few possessions. She wouldneed more clothes than that to get by on. He would justhave to stop by Drayton's house on the way to the country. He didn't like the idea of leaving his wife's things with herlover, anyway. But that would cause a problem, for no doubt Corinne would scream for Drayton's help.

Well, he could solve that problem at least. It was stillearly enough. He would go to Drayton's house now.

Jared grabbed his jacket and left the house. It was ten thirty when he stopped in front of the single-story house. Through curtained windows he could see light, so he knewDrayton was there.

Jared's lips turned up slowly in a malicious grin. He hadn't realized how much he was going to enjoy this encounter. He moved a bit unsteadily up the walkway tothe front porch, regretting the amount of liquor he hadconsumed. But even in his inebriated condition, he couldtear Drayton apart. He just hoped he hadn't drunk somuch that he wouldn't be able to remember tonight. Itmight be an entertaining evening.

Before Jared pounded on the door he heard the soundof a baby crying from inside. He stepped back in con-fusion. Could he be so drunk that he had come to thewrong house? He went back into the yard and looked at thehouse again, then at the others along the street. No,camnit, he wasn't wrong. He marched up to the porchagain and hammered on the door.

Several minutes passed. The crying had stopped and Jared decided it must have been his imagination. He pounded on the door again and it opened, but only as faras a chain latch would allow.

Jared narrowed his eyes when he saw the small womanlooking out at him through the crack in the door. Shecouldn't be more than five feet two, with fuzzy brownhair and hazel eyes. She wasn't too much older than him-self, and she certainly didn't look like a housekeeper. Could Drayton be keeping more than one mistress?

His tone was belligerent enough to make the woman'seyes grow round, but she obviously felt confident behind the latched door, for she answered spunkily, "He's not hereand neither is Corinne. So you can just go away, Mr. Burkett. You're not welcome here."

She started to close the door, but Jared stuck his bootedfoot into the crack. "You know me?"

"Of course I know you. I was in the church the unfor-tunate day you married my Cori."

"What do you mean, your Cori?" he demanded.

"I've taken care of Corinne since she was five years old. I'm her maid, Florence Merrill."

Jared laughed heartily at the foolish assumption he hadmade earlier, but then a thought struck him. "What inthe name of Hades are you doing here?"

"That's none of your business," she replied tartly.

"Open the door, Florence Merrill." His voice hadlowered. "I want to talk to you."

"Oh no." She shook her head stubbornly. "Corinnewouldn't want you in her house when she's not here."

Jared's muscles tensed and his brows drew together dangerously. "I thought this was Drayton's house. Youmean to say he's been living off my wife?"

"She's paid his way, yes. She insisted on it," Florenceexplained quickly. "Corinne doesn't like to feel obligatedto anyone."

"And did my dear wife pay for her other lovers as well?" Jared asked scornfully.

"You knowwhy she came here, Mr. Burkett. She feltshe had good reason—"

"Don't you dare defend that whore to me!" Jared cuther off fiercely. "Now open this damnable door immediatelybefore I tear it down!"

"No," Florence managed, though timorously. "You haveno right—"

"The hell I don't!" he growled and stepped back for onesolid kick against the door.

The chain latch broke easily, and the door slammed back against the wall. Florence had moved out of the way. Horrified, she watched Jared step into the house and beginlooking around.

"So this is the little love nest, eh?" he remarked acridly. "Not as luxurious as the Royal Monarch Hotel. In fact, it's downright homey." He turned icy gray eyes on the frightened woman. "No comment, Florence Merrill?"

"I—I told you I'm alone, Mr. Burkett," she stammered."What do you want here?"

"I want Corinne's things, all of them. You can startpacking them right now."

"I couldn't!" she gasped. "I really couldn't. Corinne willbe furious. She—"

"—she will be grateful," he finished for her. "You see, Corinne is with me. And she will be staying with me for an indefinite period of time."

"No! I don't believe you!" Florence replied. "Cori would never agree to that!"

Jared laughed derisively. "You're so right. She's quiteagainst it, in fact. But what she wants doesn't matter. I'mher husband and I've made the decision for her."

Florence was aghast. The man was within his rights! Now she understood why Corinne hadn't come home.

"Where is Corinne now?"

"She's at my house in the city."

"Are you sure she will be there when you retum?"Florence asked doubtfully.

"You know her well, don't you?" Jared chuckled, thoughwith little humor. "I made sure she'll be there. She's lockedin my room."

"Mr. Burkett!"

"Never mind telling me how cruel you think I am," hesaid coldly. "It was necessary, and it is only for tonight. In the morning I am taking her to my beach house on theother side of the island where I won't have to worry abouther." Suddenly he looked at Florence thoughtfully. "Isuppose I should offer to take you along for Corinne's sake. I'm sure she would like having a friend with her. Thereare other women there, but I doubt they will take to my hot-tempered wife."

Florence found herself in a quandary. If she went along, Jared would see Michael. The baby was sleeping right now and not drawing attention to himself. Would Corinne wanther to take the risk of letting her husband see the baby? She could use the story they had worked out earlier.

Jared spoke again when she didn't agree readily. "If you would rather not go with Corinne, I could pay your way back to the mainland."

"Maybe that would be better," Florence said reluctantly, praying she was making the right decision.

Jared shrugged. "That's up to you, Miss Merrill."

"It's Mrs. Merrill," she lied just in case she needed thestory they'd made up. "And if you'll sit down and wait,I'll get Cori's things together."

She went off to Corinne's bedroom, a deep frown creas-ing her brow. Lord, why was this decision placed in herlap? If only she could talk to Corinne first. She abhorredthe thought of leaving Corinne behind with the one manshe hated above all others. But she had been so adamant about not wanting Jared to see his son.

Florence dragged out the traveling bags and started emptying Corinne's bureau. There was one thing she hadn't considered. Could Corinne bear to be parted from Michaelfor so long? Would she rather take the risk than be away from him? Just how long did Jared plan to keep his wife?

Jared appeared in the doorway. "You're going to have tohurry, Mrs. Merrill," he said impatiently. "It's a hellishlylong trip to Sunset Beach, and I need at least a little sleeptonight."

"It takes time to pack," Florence replied indignantly. "Cori has quite a few belongings here."

"I can see that," he retorted curtly, looking about theroom. He walked over to the open wardrobe, his eyes caught by the Hawaiian clothes there. He took out amuumuuand laughted heartily. "I can't picture my stylishwife in this thing. Does she really wear it?"

Florence's eyes widened in alarm. "Cori bought a fewof those on impulse, because they looked so comfortable." She said the first thing that she could think of. "But she's never worn them."

She knew it wasn't necessary to lie, but she felt she hadto keep anything connected with Michael a secret. She was beginning to panic.

"My wife does like to waste money, doesn't she? Oilclothes ... on her lovers," Jared said scornfully. "It willtake forever to pack all these dresses." He stood back, frowning. "There is an easier way," he said and scoopedthe entire length of dresses into his arms and started outof the room.

"Mr. Burkettl" Florence gasped, running after him. "Those dresses will be ruined, and they cost a fortune!"

"A few wrinkles doesn't ruin a dress, Mrs. Merrill," hecalled over his shoulder as he moved toward the door. "Itold you I'm in a hurry. Now finish getting the rest of mywife's belongings into her bags."

Florence turned in a huff and went back into Corinne'sbedroom. The man was impossible. How would Cori eversurvive living with such an overbearing husband? Her temper would be forever on the rise, and Florence knewall too well that Cori did wild things when riled.

They should never have come here. Florence had warnedCori enough times that no good would come of her out-rageous scheme.

Jared loomed in the doorway again. "You're not finishedyet?"

Exasperation arid anxiety made her shout, "You do it, then! But you wait and see what Corinne thinks about themess you make of her things!"

Her raised voice woke Michael in the next room.

Florence blanched, hearing his cry. Now the lies wouldbegin. There was no help for it.

Jared looked dumbfounded as she turned accusing eyes on him. "Now look what you've made me do," she saidreproachfully and hurried from the room into the nursery.

Florence quickly picked up Michael and soothed himagainst her breast. Jared had followed her into the roomand stood watching her for several moments before hespoke.

"Whose baby is that?"

Florence looked at him warily. His voice had been dangerously low. His eyes were narrowed, dark and

menac-ing. He stared at Michael. Michael continued to cry, pay-ing no attention to the drama going on around him.

"Mine, of course," she answered quickly, keeping Mi-chael's face turned away from Jared. "Whose else wouldhe be?"

His expression didn't change. Lord, what was he think-ing?

"You mean to tell me my wife brought you all the wayhere with a newborn infant?"

"Michael is older than he looks, Mr. Burkett," Florence said defensively. "He was old enough to travel when wecame. I would not have brought him otherwise."

"And your husband didn't object?" he demanded in-credulously,

"I—I'm a widow," she explained, finding the lie difficult to get out. "And I have no family. Cori—Corinne didn't want to bring us with her, with Michael being so young.But I insisted. I wasn't about to let her come all this waywithout me. She's all I have—besides Michael."

"I'm finding this very hard to swallow, Mrs. Merrill," Jared said coldly. "Corinne should have had more sense than to take a newborn baby on a long journey. From thesize of him, your son couldn't have been but just born. And you couldn't have been in any condition to travel, either. How could Corrine have been so foolhardy?"

"I told you Michael is small for his age, Mr. Burkett. He is five months old. He—he was two months when we leftBoston. That was old enough to travel."

Florence knew she didn't sound convincing. She justwasn't any good at lying. Please let him believe her, sheprayed silently.

"Well, change him or feed him or something," Jaredsaid harshly as Michael's wailing continued. "I can't standto hear a baby cry."

He marched from the room and Florence let out a sigh of relief. She put Michael back in his bassinet and beganto change him. She knew he must still be hungry. She hadfed him ground vegetables earlier, but he didn't take wellto the cow's milk she was forced to give him. He needed his mother. Now that Jared knew about him, and hadapparently believed her story, there was no reason any- more for her and Michael to go back to Boston without Corinne.

After she got Michael quieted, she went back to Co-rinne's bedroom. She found Jared packing the rest of Corinne's things with little care, just dumping the contents of drawers into the bags.

When Jared noticed Florence at the door he growled,"Anymore damnable bags and I'll have to bring along acart tomorrow!"

"You will probably have to do that anyway, Mr. Burk-ett," Florence replied. "For I've changed my mind aboutgoing back to Boston. After seeing how cantankerous and disagreeable you are, I'm not about to leave my Cori alonein your care."

"Cantankerous, am I?" Jared scowled.

"You certainly are," she assured him, determined tohold her ground.

Jared finally showed a smile. "Well, don't just standthere, woman. Get busy if you and the little one are coming with me."

A little over an hour later, the open carriage was jammedfull of clothing, trunks, and bags. There was no room left for Florence, so Jared helped her up onto the drivers seatbeside him. She held the baby on her lap.

Michael had slept through the packing of his room, buthe was awake now, and gurgling softly, fascinated at the starlit sky above him. Jared leaned over to look down at him, though he couldn't see him clearly in the dark.

He shook his head as they started down the hill. "I stillcan't believe Corinne would travel with a baby," he remarked casually. "Babies require patience, and that's something my wife doesn't have."

"You would be surprised, Mr. Burkett," Florence re-plied, hiding her smile. "Cori has even more patience than I do where Michael is concerned. She's really quite fond of him." Then, cleverly alleviating any future suspicion hemight have, she said, "Why, you sometimes think she ishis mother, not I."

Florence was shocked at herself. The lie had been just the right thing to say. And it had come so easily. Whatwas happening to her?.

Chapter 25

DAWN was nearing, the sky a somber gray and gettinglighter. But the house was still dark, and Jared carried a lamp along with the change of clothes he had for his wife when he entered his bedroom, quietly locking the door from the inside. Corinne was still asleep.

He walked over to the bed and laid Corinne's clothesdown, then held the lamp high to cast a better light. Heremembered the last time he had looked down on hersleeping form, on the night of their wedding. How longago? He recalled the date and was shocked. It would be a year ago tomorrow. Would she remember?

Jared had thought about that night often before Corinnecame to Hawaii. He had dwelled on the beauty of it, onher beauty, on her surprising response to him, her wildpassion that had inflamed his own. During those exquisite moments, he had forgotten why he had married her. For that short time, it had been a true marriage.

But hate had rooted in him first. And so he had put herbehind him, had worked desperately to forget those won-derful moments.

Corinne stirred and smiled in her sleep, making Jaredwonder what she was dreaming about. Her glorious hairwas fanned out behind her. Gold and copper glinted in the lamplight. She looked so innocent, so childlike. But, ofcourse, he knew better. Yet he still had an almost irresis-tible urge to reach out and touch her, to feel the silkytexture of her skin. His lips burned to taste hers, recallingthe sweetness.

Jared's better judgement returned and, with a dark scowl,he marched over to the bathroom and started cold waterrunning in the sunken tub. He made enough noise to wakeCorinne, then came to the door to see if he had succeeded.

She was just sitting up in bed and looking around, be-wildered.

Jared was furious at himself for the weakness he hadalmost succumbed to, and he directed that anger at her."Get dressed!" he heard himself shouting. "I want to be on the road by sunrise!"

Corinne turned startled eyes in Jared's direction, onlyto see the bathroom door slammed shut. As she stared at the closed door, her eyes changed from yellow-green tosparkling emerald. Taking a deep breath, she mastered herfury. It would not do to anger Jared. She had to get backto Michael, yet she couldn't tell Jared about the baby. Somehow, she must talk him into letting her go. She had already been separated from her son for nearly an entireday.

She would reason with Jared, cajole him. She could notafford to anger him any more. Michael was at stake now,not her pride.

"You have to be reasonable, Jared," Corinne ventured, calling through the door, forcing a pleading note into hervoice. "I have a maid on this island. I can't go off and justleave her stranded."

Jared came out of the bathroom wearing white trousersthat molded his powerful thighs. He was still putting on acream-colored shirt and didn't bother to look up at herwhen he answered.

"Your maid is here, Corinne. So there will be no stops on the way."

Corinne's eyes widened and her face turned white. Flor-ence here? Dear God, where was Michael? Had Jared seenhim?

"How?" she managed to whisper.

"I picked her up last night, along with the rest of thethings you kept in your lovers' hideaway. The poor womanspent half the night sorting out the mess I made of yourclothes once I got her here. Soon Ho is packing a cart now—more damnable weight to make the journey slower. You really are a good deal more trouble than I had bar-gained for. A maid and a baby, too! How you talked herinto sailing to Hawaii with a tiny baby, I can't understand. Now hurry and get ready, Corinne. I have even less pa-tience than usual this morning."

Corinne turned away so he wouldn't see the giddy reliefon her face. Florence had done it! She had remembered their story and stuck to it! Her Michael was safe . . . and he was here! For just a moment, Corinne almost wishedshe could hug Jared. She had Michael again!

When Corinne and Jared approached the carriage, she saw Florence already seated, the bassinet on the seat be-side her.

"You'll have to put a cover over that bed if you don'twant the little one to get sun stroke," Jared mentioned to Florence as he got into the driver's seat.

"Why can't you just put the carriage top up?" Corinnedemanded. "Or is it all right if we get sunstroke?"

"I don't trust you enough to put the top up, dear wife,"he told her coldly. "I want you where I can see

you."

"So Florence and I are supposed to just suffer in theheat?"

"Make use of those straw hats on the seat. That's whatthey're for."

She let it go at that, eager for him to be occupied withdriving so she could talk to Florence. Florence was just aseager. As soon as they turned onto Beretania Street, she leaned towards Corinne.

"Are you all right?" she whispered.

"Yes, yes, but what about Michael? What did you tellJared?"

Florence smiled reassuringly. "That story we concocted."

"Did he believe it?"

"Yes, I'm sure he did. He was only surprised that youwould bring a baby along with you."

"Thank heavens." Corinne sighed. "Oh, Florence! I was frantic at being separated from you and Michael. Jared has been a beast."

"He wasn't none too pleasant last night, I'll tell you, "Florence said huffily."

"Was Russell there?"

"No, he was out looking for you. He'll have a fine sur-prise when he returns and finds the house empty."

"But tell me everything you told Jared about Michael.I can't take the chance on contradicting anything."

"I will, Cori, only let's not take the risk of him ovehearing us now. I'll tell you as soon as we get a momentalone."

They went slowly through the city streets, which were congested even at that early hour. But once they passedthrough Kalihi and rode on towards Aiea, there was lesstraffic. Then Michael started fussing, no longer content tolet the ride lull him.

Florence dug into the casket Soon Ho had packed anddrew out a bottle of sweetened water.

"I didn't feed him this morning," Florence confessed."I knew you would be hurting. But I didn't know we would be in an open carriage. This water will have to dohim for now."

"No, give him to me," Corinne ordered.

"Cori, you can't!" Florence gasped. "Jared will see youlAnd so will anyone we pass on the road.'*

"Jared and I are back to back," Corinne whisperedback. "And I'll use Michael's blanket to hide what I'mdoing. But I can't stand this pain anymore. I've got to nurse him."

"Very well," Florence said reluctantly. She handed Mi-chael to her. "I just hope your husband doesn't lean over to see what you're about."

Chapter 26

Stars were winking in a blue-black sky when the car-riage finally pulled off the beach road. They turned onto a sandy drive that led to a sprawling single-story houseset far back from the road.

Corinne was exhausted and she knew Florence was, too. Heat had suffocated them most of the day. They were deplorably filthy too, from the red dust that had settled on them as they passed the miles and miles of cane fields.

Once they rounded the end of the majestic Koolaumountain range and started traveling on the windward side of the mountain, the view became fascinating and made the rest of the journey tolerable. The landscape was almostjunglelike, and wildly beautiful on the mountain side of the road. On the other side they skirted bays, the ocean always present. Sometimes the road veered right to the shoreline. And then came the sunset in all its splendid colors, and Corinne was spellbound. She marvelled, and forgot for a short while why she was in the carriage.

Now they were at their destination, and Corinne staredat the white house, bathed in moonlight. She was relieved to find that it was not the shack she had been expecting. The house was wide in front, and set on pillars high above the ground. Tall pine trees, spaced closely together, formedwalls on both sides of the house from the road all theway to the beach behind it. Only one space was openbetween the pines, in front of the house on the left. This space led to a small stable on the other side of the trees.

The huge long yard in front was a garden. Flowers greweverywhere—around trees in the yard, along pathways,

around the house. Scents came to her through the warmsalt air, scents of fruit and ginger, the blossoms a mutedwhite, yellow, and red. Gardenia grew in profusion. There were stunted plumeria trees in full bloom, and a magnifi-cent colvillea tree with its red-orange buds carpeting the ground beneath it. Stately coconut palms skirted the roadlike a gigantic fence, swaying gently in the ocean breeze.

Corinne reached across the carriage and gently shook Florence's shoulder while Jared stepped down from the driver's seat. "We have arrived."

Florence woke with a start. "Michael?"

"He's still sleeping," Corinne replied.

Michael had been a darling all day since she had fedhim, not fussing at all because of the heat and dust. Co-rinne had been able to nurse him three times, and the painin her breasts was completely gone now.

"We shouldn't have let him sleep so much today," Flor-ence said as she sat up and rubbed her eyes tiredly, forget-ting Jared's presence. "Now he'll keep you up half thenight."

Corinne nearly choked. She looked at Jared hi panic, but he didn't seem even to have heard. He was looking atthe house and grinning. Corinne followed his gaze and saw the front door open slowly. Someone was peering out, holding a lamp high in the air, trying to see who the visitorswere.

Suddenly, the door flew open, and the lamp was setdown on the porch. Corinne stared aghast as a woman of mammoth girth came bouncing down the porch steps and, despite her size, seemed to fly toward them. Jared met herhalfway and Corinne watched in amazement as he pickedthe huge woman up off the ground and swung her in theair.

"Ialeka, put me down!" the woman ordered sternly, then laughed as she tried to get out of his bear hug. "You breakyour back lifting this old woman."

Jared chuckled and let her down. "The day I can't sweepyou off your feet, I'll be an old man, Aunty Akela."

She hugged him to her, then pushed him abruptly awayas if the show of affection embarrassed her. She stood backand folded huge arms across an equally huge bosom.

"I like know why you no send word you coming?" thewoman asked, that stern note in her voice again. "And why you no come sooner, huh?"

"I've been busy, Aunty."

"Too busy to come home after you return from main-land?" she asked gruffly, then threw her hands in the air." Auwe! Malia mad as a shook bee. You wait till she seeyou!"

Jared smiled tightly. "Where is Malia?"

"Where you think this time of night?" Akela said, as if the answer was obvious. "She sleeping."

"Well, don't wake her tonight. I'm too tired to put upwith any tantrums. Just heat up some water for a couple of baths, then you can go back to bed yourself."

"What you mean, couple?" she asked, looking suspi-ciously toward the carriage.

"My wife and her maid are with me," Jared explained reluctantly. When the revelation didn't seem to surpriseher, he grimaced. "You already know?"

The woman nodded with a grunt. "Now*you* know why Malia so mad. Naneki not so happy too. Good thing shestay Kahuku, visit my cousins."

Jared groaned. He had not considered Naneki. Howcould he have forgotten that his mistress was a servant in the very house he was bringing his wife to? Did Corinneeffect his thinking that much?

"What is that thewahine carries?"

Jared saw that Corinne and Florence had stepped from the carriage. Florence held the bassinet in her

arms.

"There is a baby—"

"Akeiki?" Akela exclaimed and ran forward withoutwaiting for Jared to continue.

Corinne became alarmed when the huge Hawaiian wom-an ran toward them and stopped next to a terrified Florenceto peer into the bassinet. When she reached inside the lit-tle bed and attempted to pick Michael up, Corinne nearly pounced on her.

Florence anticipated Corinne's move and stepped infront of her. "Please, madam, he's sleeping," Florence saidquickly.

"He no sleep." Akela dismissed Florence's protest. Shereached again for Michael, this time lifting him from thebassinet. Florence and Corinne were taken aback when they saw tears in her eyes. She gazed down at the baby."I wait long time to hold Ialeka's*keiki.*"

Jared came up behind her, his face grim. "The baby is not mine, Aunty. He belongs to my wife's maid."

Akela looked at Jared, then back down at Michael. Then she shook her head knowingly and, against protests fromFlorence, carried Michael to the front porch and sat downon the step, examining Michael critically in the light of thelamp.

They all followed the large woman to the porch, and Corinne's heart beat frantically. She wanted to snatch Mi- chael away from her. She couldn't do that, though. Nor could she say anything, not with Jared standing right therebeside her, bewilderment in his eyes. She would have tolet Florence talk for her, and hope that she did so quickly.

Akela was frowning. The *keiki* she cuddled in her arms was the image of the *keiki* she had helped Ranelle to birth twenty-eight years ago. Only the eyes were different, and she looked at the two *haole* wahine and saw the eyes of themother, and the mother was not the wahine she had taken the *keiki* from. The mother was the other one, the prettyone with the gold hair and anxious face.

She looked at Jared accusingly. "Why you deny thiskeiki? You think to fool Aunty Akela?"

Jared stared incredulously at her. "What in damnationare you talking about?"

Corinne pinched Florence into rapid speech. "Really,Mr. Burkett. This woman's insinuations are insulting," she said indignantly, and bent down to take Michael from theold woman.

Akela stood up, towering over Florence, and glared downat her. "Why you say thiskeiki yours?"

Florence gasped. "Because he is! Now give him to me!"

"Give her the boy, Aunty," Jared ordered, his voice cold. "I don't know what you've got into your head, but you'rewrong."

"No! You wrong!" She pierced him with dark eyes, and then pointed a denouncing finger at Corinne. "That one isthe mama, not this one!"

Jared turned to Corinne. She was hypnotized by the growing suspicion in his eyes. His face was a mask

of fury and she rebelled at the thought that he might just believe this old woman.

"Don't you dare look at me like that!" she said in anoffended tone.

"Corinne, if "

"This is ridiculous!" She cut him off, then lowered hervoice. "If you will just think about it, Jared, you will seehow foolish all this is. That baby is too old to be yours. If I had a baby, I certainly wouldn't deny him. I wishMichael were mine. I have helped Florence care for him and I've actually grown to love him a great deal."

Jared sighed, running his hands through his hair. "She'sright, Aunty. The baby couldn't possibly be mine. Wewere married only a year ago tomorrow." Corinne's gaspdrew Jared's eyes back to her. "You didn't rememberthat, did you?"

Corinne's back stiffened. "Why should I?" she shrugged. "The day holds no fond memories for me."

Jared felt his anger building. Could she really have for-gotten their wedding night, the night that had haunted hisdreams ever since?

Jared saw that they were all staring at him in surprise. Was his rage so obvious? He would have to get a grip onhimself. He had never before let his feelings be so trans- parent.

What was happening to him?

"Go into the house," he told them. Then he went off tounload the baggage and see to the horses while Akela ledthe other women inside. The house was dark and quietAkela carried the lamp from the porch through a largeliving room in the center of the house. Stuffed sofas, sandal-wood tables, potted palms, and a piano dominated the room. Beaded doorways were on each side of it, and Akela wentthrough the one on the right which showed a narrow cor- ridor leading to three rooms.

"You sleep here," she told Florence in a whisper, open-ing the middle door.

She went inside and lit a lamp on a tall bureau. The room was not large. It was oddly long and narrow, but looked comfortable, with a small bed and a chair and desk againstone wall. Woven matting covered the floor, and there was a large wardrobe and even a separate bathroom at the end of the room.

"Very nice," Florence remarked.

"Shh," Akela whispered. "Malia sleeping next room. Nowake her, or be trouble."

"Well, I'll be as quiet as I can," Florence replied, butAkela was already leaving the room, indicating that Co-rinne should follow.

"I don't like that woman," Corinne whispered as sheleaned over to kiss Michael good night.

"She's very astute, if you ask me," Florence replied."But go on now. Michael and I will be all right."

Corinne left Florence and found Akela waiting impa-tiently at the end of the corridor. She followed her into amuch larger bedroom at the front of the house. Once aporcelain lamp was lit on a bedside table, Akela startedout the door.

"Who is Malia?" Corinne asked, but Akela ignored herquestion.

The big woman stopped at the door and gazed at Co-rinne thoughtfully. "I know you lie about keiki, but we befriends anyway, for you give my Ialeka a son and that is good. Someday he know and be happy."

It took Corinne a moment to reply indignantly, "Michael is not minet"

But Akela had shut the door behind her. Corinne beganpacing. That woman was going to ruin everything if shepersisted.

When Akela came back a short while later with hotwater for a bath, Corinne ignored her. She pretended an interest in the room that would be hers, noting that it waslong, like Florence's, though much wider. A large bed with wooden posts sat in the center of the left wall, covered bya quilted rose silk spread. There were tall cupboards on both sides of the door, and across the room was another door, leading to the bathroom. To the right of the bathroom was a window and a big stuffed chair in front of it with a matching foot rest upholstered in dark green brocade, shot with silver. Two more windows with lacy rose curtainslooked out on the front yard with all its flowers. Between them was a chaise, an odd-shaped mahogany coffee tablebefore it

Corinne moved to the dresser beside the bed, noticingpictures in silver frames. There were two of them, one of a man and woman, and another of a little girl with longblack hair in pigtails and an impish smile. Corinne stared at the first picture, wondering if these two people wereJared's parents. The woman was stunning, with silky black hair and blue-gray eyes exactly like Jared's. Was this the woman her own father had loved?

"Your bath ready," Akela said, startling her.

Corinne turned to thank her, but the big woman with salt-and-pepper hair in a tight bun was already out of theroom. Corinne didn't waste any time. That hot bathsounded heavenly. Akela had even scented it with a deli-cate sandalwood fragrance, and Corinne was grudgingly grateful, deciding she just might like the big Hawaiianwoman after all. She quickly disrobed and climbed into the large tub, then leaned back and relaxed for the first timethat day, letting all her problems drift away with thefragrant steam.

A loud thud in the bedroom shattered her quiet peaceand Corinne bolted upright. When no other sounds wereforthcoming, she realized that Jared had brought her bag-gage into the room. She relaxed again and took her time, not wanting to leave the tub even after the water hadturned cold. But she was already finding it difficult to keep her eyes open.

Corinne opened the bathroom door warily, a large towelwrapped around her, but no one was in the room. The lug- gage was there and she opened several cases before finding nightgown and robe. Then she found her brush, and after few quick strokes, she climbed into bed.

She fell back on downy pillows and soft sheets and sighed, then groaned. The lamp was still burning on theother side of the bed. She reached over to extinguish it, but stopped when the bedroom door opened.

Jared stood there in the doorway, almost exactly as she had seen him that morning, barefoot and wearing only histrousers, a towel wrapped about his neck. He had shaved off the beard, and looked more like the Jared she had firstmet.

"What do you want, Jared?"

Ever so slowly, his lips curled. "Not.a thing, my dear."

"Then why are you here."

"This happens to be my room." He closed the door andcame towards her.

Corinne sat up, holding the covers up to her neck. "/was led to this room."

"Of course. You're my wife."

"I won't share the same room with you!" she hissed. "Now get out of here!"

"I gave up my bed to you last night," he said in a cooltone, coming around to the other side of the bed. "I'm notabout to do so again."

"Don't blame me for thai, damn you!" she retortedhotly, green fire flashing in her eyes. "I didn't ask to sleepthere. Nor do I want to be here. If you want your bed, you're welcome to it." She slid to the floor and grabbedthe robe she had left on the foot of the bed. "I'll sleepsomeplace else!"

"I'm afraid that's not possible, Corinne," he replied. "There are no other rooms available."

She started for the door. "Then I'll sleep with Florence," she said haughtily over her shoulder.

Jared bounded after her and caught her arm. His gripwas viselike as he swung her around to face him.

"You're not going anywhere," he said harshly, and pushed her back into the room. "Now get back in that bed."

Corinne stumbled. Her unbound hair fell across her face. When she managed to throw it back over her shoulders and look at him again, the angry response she was about togive him died on her lips. He had tossed his towel awayand was starting to remove his trousers.

"No!" she gasped, her face draining. "Don't you comenear me, Jared!"

He halted his movements, staring at her in bewilderment. Then he suddenly threw his head back and laughed deeply.

"I mean it, Jared!" Corinne said, her voice rising in hys-teria.

"I don't sleep with clothes on, Corinne. I never have,"he explained, still chuckling. "And all I intended to do wassleep."

Corinne felt her cheeks flushing in embarrassment. "You will sleep by yourself, then." She snatched the cover from the bed. "I will use the chaise, thank you!"

Jared sobered quickly, watching her stomp away from the bed in her haughty manner. His eyes narrowed and turned a stormy gray.

"The one thing you can be assured of is that I won'ttouch you," he said, his voice heavy with disdain.

"Yourbody has been used a bit too much to interest me."

He heard her sharp intake of breath and took perversepleasure in it. She straightened her back rigidly and wentto the chaise.

Damn her for looking so beautiful! He had been stunnedwhen he entered the room, seeing her there in bed, soinviting, so damnably tempting. And then her eyes had sparkled with anger and she was even more beautiful,magnificent in her fury. But he had control of himself. He wouldn't allow her to make him feel anything.

It was only lust, but he still detested himself for feeling it, and was determined not to let her know that she couldstill stir his blood.

He turned off the lamp and yanked his pants off, thenfell heavily into bed. As tired as he was, it was a longtime before he fell asleep.

Chapter 27

WHEN Jared woke the next morning, he dressedquickly. Corinne was still sleeping, lying on her back with one arm fallen to rest on the floor, the other thrust overher forehead. Her long golden hair also dangled to thefloor over the end of the chaise, and the silk spread shehad used was kicked to her feet, revealing slim curves be- neath her nightgown.

Jared stood looking down at her for a moment, his faceset in hard lines. But he had spent half the night thinkingabout her. He had to get her out of his mind now. Hehad Maliato face.

Malia was Hawaiian for Marie, which she was never called. It was only eight months since he had seen his younger sister. But in truth, it was well over a year since he had actually paid much attention to her. This was un-like Jared, for he loved Malia better than anyone in theworld. Since their mother died, he had watched over her, worried over her, and cared for her as though he were her mother instead of her brother.

But the past year had been a torment for Jared, andhe had to admit that Malia's eighteen-year-old concernshad receded into the background of his thoughts.

Malia had come back here in February, furious with Jared for ignoring her. And according to Akela, she wasin a worse temper now. He couldn't blame her. They hadalways been so close, Jared taking it upon himself to makeit upto her for the loss of their mother. For him not to tell her of his marriage must have been a shock to her. He wouldn't even consider that she might have heard the sordid details about his wife. No one would bring that kindof gossip to an eighteen-year-old girl.

Corinne started to stir and Jared left quickly, closingthe door quietly. He heard voices in the kitchen and knewthat Malia would be having breakfast there. The formal dining room was always ignored except when there wereguests, for he and Malia both preferred the warm atmos- phere of the kitchen and Akela's jovial presence.

Corinne's eyes fluttered open just as Jared left the room. Her spirits soared as she heard the door close.

He would be going back to Honolulu now. And she had every inten-tion of leaving soon after he did. He couldn't keep her isolated here in the country. She would find a way back tothe city, even if she had to hire someone to take her. She still had her jewels and also a small amount of cash. No,she wouldn't be here much longer.

Michael's faint cry from the next room "broke into her thoughts. Corinne got up, wincing at the kinks in her neck and back, but quickly crossed the room to pull a pink-and-white day dress from one of her trunks. Dressed, a simple ribbon tying back her long hair, she left her room and knocked softly on Florence's door, then entered.

Florence looked up from the bassinet which had beenset up at the foot of her bed. Corinne joined heir there, smiling down at her son.

"Did he just get up?"

Florence chuckled. "He's been awake for hours, just lying there cooing to himself. But I guess he finally decided he'shungry."

"Come on, sweetheart." Corinne picked him up, snug-gling her cheek next to his. "Mama will feed you."

"You had better let me lock the door first, then," Flor-ence suggested.

Corinne shook her head. "That's not necessary. Jared hasleft already."

"But that Akela is still here," Florence reminded her asshe marched to the door. "There's no point in takingchances. How she could be so sure that Michael is yours and Jared's is beyond me."

"She must have known Jared when he was a baby. The resemblance is there. You and I have both noticed that Michael has too many of Jared's features."

"Well, it's a good thing Jared hasn't really had a goodlook at Michael in strong light."

"Oh, stop worrying, Florence. I'll be getting us out ofhere today. I hope you're up to that long ride back to thecity."

"Just how are you going to get us out, might I ask?"

"I don't know yet, but I will," Corinne replied. "So don'tbother unpacking."

After Michael was sated and cooing contentedly in hisbassinet again, Corinne and Florence started to leave theroom. They stopped short when they heard loud voices.

"I thought you said your husband had left," Florenceremarked.

"I thought he had."

Corinne bit her lip, wondering if she should keep out ofhis way. His deep voice sounded awfully angry. But whowas he yelling at? Was Akela at him again about Michael?

"Come on," Corinne said reluctantly. "We'd better gosee what the fuss is about."

Jared was staring at his sister, gripping the ends of thelong kitchen table. Malia's small chin was set stubbornly, and he flinched from the condemnation in her strikingblue eyes. The one thing he had thought wasn't possible wasindeed possible. She knew everything.

He was waiting for the answer to his question, but it was not forthcoming. "I repeat, Malia. Who told you?"

"It doesn't matter how I found out!" she replied hotly. "But now I know why you didn't bother to tell me you had married. You were too ashamed!"

"I saidwho!" he shouted, pounding a fist on the tableand rattling dishes.

Malia flinched, but kept her chin jutted forward. Sheanswered petulantly. "Our neighbor, John Pierce. He feltI had a right to know, considering that it's my family everyone's talking about."

Jared leaned back, his eyes taking on a steely glint. JohnPierce! He should have guessed. The blackguard had been after their land ever since Jared could remember, for his land bordered on each side and he wanted all of it. ButJared's father had refused to sell, and so had Jared. Forspite, John Pierce had run to Rodney Burkett years ago withthe story of seeing Ranelle on the beach with another man. Now he had done it again, stirring up trouble just for spite.

"How could you marry a woman like that, Jared?" Malia's question cut into his thoughts.

The hurt in her eyes made him furious. "It's none of yourdamned business!"

She gasped, her eyes widening. "How can you say that?" she cried. "When you married her, she became my sister-in-law. Do you think I like having a whore for—"

Akela swung around from the counter where she hadbeen grinding poi to a smooth paste. "Malia, you watch'your mouth!" she scolded her.

"Well, it's true!" Malia cried. "Isn't it, Jared? Can you deny it?" When he couldn't, she glared at him. "Why didn'tyou stop her? Everyone knew what she was doing. I can'tbelieve*you* didn't!"

"That's enough, Malia," Jared said, trying desperately tocalm the rage that was burning inside him. Corinne hadcaused this whole situation.

"But how could you let her make such a fool of you?" she continued, undaunted. "You, who never let anyone get the better of you. Well, everyone is laughing at you now! They're laughing at all of us!"

"No more, Malia," Akela warned her.

Malia came to her feet, glaring at both of them. "Fmnot through yet! Do you know what you've done to me, Jared? I can't leave this house now. I would die of shameif I went to the city for the winter season. And you know I hate it here when the storms come."

"Auwe!" Akela threw up her heavy arms. "Malia, you make*me* shame you act so selfish. How you think yourbrother feel, eh? You think he like what happened?"

"He could have stopped it!"

"You don't understand how it is between Corinne andme," Jared replied.

How could he tell his sister that he didn't stop his wifefrom whoring because of his pride? He couldn't let Corinneknow that it mattered to him. What a mess he had made ofhis life!

"Did I hear my name mentioned?"

Corinne stood in the doorway, looking angelic in herpink-and-white dress. Her expression was serene, her eyes bright lime-green, innocent. Jared saw his sister's shockedsurprise. He had assumed Akela would have warned her that Corinne was here.

He turned to the large woman, but she shrugged. "Notfor me tell her," she said, having read his thoughts.

"That'syour wife?" Malia asked. She had expected apainted floozy, not the stunningly beautiful lady Corinneappeared to be.

"And who might this be, Jared?" Corinne inquired as shecame further into the room, leaving Florence standingnervously in the doorway.

Florence had good reason to expect trouble, for she recog-nized the aggressive note in Corinne's voice. So did Jared.

He said uneasily, "Corinne, this is my sister, Malia."

"Your sister!"

Jared was almost amused at the surprise Corinne re-vealed, until he saw her eyes darken to a deep emerald. The wheels of her mind seemed to be turning furiously, for she looked at Malia and then back at Jared.

"She is younger than I am, isn't she, Jared?"

Now it was his turn to be bewildered. What in damna-tion did that have to do with anything?

"By a few years, yes," he answered warily, unable tosee what she was getting at until it was too late.

"You beast!" Corinne hissed. "You lied to my fatherjust to make him suffer!"

Jared caught his breath. He suddenly knew what conclu-sions she had jumped to. "Shut up, Corinne!" he warnedher, the knuckles of his hands white as he gripped thetable.

"Not until you burn in Hades I will!" Corinne shoutedfuriously. "You tell me how your mother could have had her if she was languishing with a broken heart? I don't believe she killed herself because of my father. It was anaccident, wasn't it?"

Jared had turned pale. Corinne followed his agonizedgaze to Malia and saw the horror on the girl's face. Sheheld her breath as the girl burst into tears and ran from the room.

What had she done? She was afraid to look at Jaredagain, but he forced her to when his fingers bit into hershoulders.

"I could kill you for that!" he said in a deadly whisper, his grip on her becoming painful. "Malia didn't know, confound you. She was told our mother's death was an ac-cident!"

"I—I'm sorry, Jared," Corinne stammered, never morefrightened by him than she was at that moment.

"You're sorry!" he spat at her, shoving her away fromhim. "You meant to hurt and you did. I hope to hell you'resatisfied!"

He stormed out of the room to follow his sister, leavingCorinne shaken. Florence rushed to her, putting an armabout her shoulders.

"Don't fret now, Cori. I know you didn't mean to hurtthe girl."

"Why couldn't I have stilled my vicious tongue? I de-served everything he said, and more." She turned to Akela. "I really am sorry."

The old woman frowned. "Bad thing you do, Kolina,but I understand now."

"Understand?"

"Your father the one my Ranelle love too much. Ialekahate him long time. I know why he go mainland now, whyhe marry you. He hurt you, huh? Then you come here forhurt him back. Auwef Bad thing hate." She shook her peppered head. "Mo'better love."

"That's impossible," Corinne replied dismally, her eyesdowncast.

Akela shook her head again. "Think of thekeiki and yousee love mo'better."

Corinne drew herself up defensively, but Florence urgedher out of the kitchen before more damage was done. She spent the rest of the day with Michael and Florence in their bedroom. Akela brought them food, stopping to fuss overMichael for a while. Wisely, she didn't say anything more about him, or about Jared and his sister.

Corinne knew it had taken Jared hours to calm the girldown, for they had all heard the heartbreaking tears com-ing from the patio. If only she hadn't barged into thekitchen that morning. Damn her temper.

Jared hadn't left that day, and it was too late for himto go now. She dreaded facing him again, especially alone. But by that night, she dreaded even more the thought thathe might come looking for her.

She bid Florence good night and walked hesitantly to Jared's room. He was there already, standing at the farwindow, looking out, his arms braced on each side of thewindow. He was so deep in thought that he didn't hear hercome in and she had to clear her throat. Because he wasin the shadows, she couldn't see Ms expression when he turned to look at her.

"If you've changed your mind about my sleeping in thisroom, I'll—"

"Come in, Corinne," he said. "You're my wife and thisroom is as much yours as it is mine. I told you before, there are no other rooms. And I won't have you incon-veniencing your maid just because you and I would rathernot share the same room."

"She wouldn't mind."

"I mind."

His voice was not harsh. In fact, he sounded terriblytired.

"Well, I won't sleep on that chaise again," she warnedhim. "My neck is still stiff from last night."

"Suit yourself."

"You wont—"

Corinne halted in mid-sentence and bit her Up.

"I won't," he answered.

Corinne closed the door and crossed to the bed where Akela had left her nightgown. She picked it up and wenton towards the bathroom, but stopped before she got thereand turned slowly to Jared.

"I—I really am sorry for what happened this morning,"she said, thankful his back was to her and he hadn't turned around. "I would never have hurt your sister intentionally,Jared. I had no way of knowing she wasn't aware of the circumstances surrounding your mother's death."

"I know," he murmured, still without facing her. "It'sover with, so forget about it."

How can I? she wanted to say. But she went slowly into the bathroom and closed the door quietly. She changed inwhat little light the moon provided as it filtered in throughthe row of short windows high on the bathroom wall. Whenshe came back into the bedroom, Jared was still standingat the window, looking out at the front yard and the high clifflike base of the mountain on the other side of the road.

She got into bed, but hesitated before asking, "Do youmind if I turn the light out?"

"Go ahead. I'll be up a while yet."

Sleep was impossible. And it was indeed a long whilebefore Jared finally left his vigil at the window and cameto bed. Corinne pretended sleep as she heard him removinghis clothes. When she felt him get into bed, she stiffened.

He was so close, so very close, and she couldn't helpthinking of their wedding night a year ago on this day. She would never have that thrilling pleasure again, never know his strong arms holding her close, his lips touching hers,drawing her will away. Never again seemed so very long, when at this moment she wanted those powerful hands tocaress her, wanted to feel the length of his body on hers. Why had they destroyed what might have been?

She fek the bed move again, and sensed that he was looking down at her. She kept her eyes closed and held her breath.

"I'm sorry, Kolina," he breathed softly and then movedback to the far side of the bed.

Sorry for what? But she knew that he had assumed shewas sleeping. He believed she hadn't heard him, or hewould never have spoken. Would she ever know what hewas sorry for? Sorry that he had ever met her? Tearswelled fiercely in her eyes and she didn't know why.

Chapter 28

Corinne woke to find Jared's chest against her back, with one arm slung over her possessively. Her first impulse was to scramble from the bed, but she realized thatwould wake him and might even draw his anger. She laystill, revelling in the feel of him pressed to her.

She became unnerved by his closeness, feeling his warmbreath on her neck, the weight of his arm over her, hishand slack against her breast. She could feel the excitementbuilding in her like a live thing. Daringly, she pressed even closer to him and her eyes widened when she felt the soft bulge of him against her buttocks. She had forgotten that he was completely naked. Her own gown was bunched up about her waist.

The thrilling feel of him was almost more than she couldbear. She forgot everything that had ever passed betweenthem, everything—except his lovemaking on their weddingnight, the night that he had inflamed her passion. Shewanted that again, she wanted to stir his desire and -make him take her again. But could she do that? Would he forgethis hate long enough to satisfy his needs—and hers? Yes, she admitted that she needed Jared.

Corinne's passionate quandary was all for naught, for at that moment the bedroom door opened and a young, very attractive Hawaiian girl with light golden skin burstin on them.

"Ialeka! I see your carriage and—"

The girl stopped, her dark eyes widening as she took inthe scene on the bed. Jared had awakened instantly and Corinne could feel the tightening of his body before he pulled away from her with a muttered curse.

The girl raced back out of the room with a strangled crybefore Jared bellowed, "Naneki!"

Corinne watched with shock and disbelief as Jaredyanked on his trousers and, without looking once in herdirection, ran out after the girl. She stared at the emptydoorway and felt her face grow hot with the rage thatsuddenly took hold of her. The girl was Jared's mistress! Nothing else could explain her familiarity with his room or her reaction to Corinne's presence.

"Damn him!"

Corinne grabbed her robe and went after them. Jaredhad caught up with the girl in the back yard, just outside patio. Corinne stood bristling on the top step that leddown to the sunken patio. She could see them clearly through the screened door, Jared holding onto the girl's arm, making her listen to him even though she tried to pullaway.

The dining room was beside her, enclosed with latticedshelves that held all manner of colored crystal and china vases. The kitchen was directly across from this and Akelaappeared at the door there.

"Leave alone, Kolina."

Corinne turned flashing emerald eyes on her. "He'smyhusband!"

Akela nodded. "But I no have chance tell Naneki you here. She hurt. Let Ialeka explain."

"What is she even doing here?" Corinne demanded, herfists clenched in anger.

"She live here, work here. She away yesterday, come back just now. Naneki my adopted*keiki,"* Akela explained.

"Shelives here? And he brought me—"

Corinne couldn't finish she was so choked with rage. Sheighored Akela's staying hand and moved down the stepsand across the room. But she stopped before opening the door to the patio and revealing her presence.

"Why you bring her here?" Naneki was crying. "Howyou can forgive her for what she did to you?"

"I haven't forgiven her for anything, Naneki," Jared saidimpatiently. "And I brought her here to put a stop to herwhoring."

"But you sleep with her!"

"Only sleep, confound it! Nothing else."

"Well, I no stay here with her," Naneki said defiantly. "I share you with Dayna, but not with this haole!"

Who was this Dayna? Corinne wondered. Another of Jared's mistresses? Corinne started to turn around, but herattention was caught by a little Hawaiian girl who came running around the side of the house toward Jared.

"Papa!" the little girl cried and flew into Jared's out-stretched arras.

Corinne gasped, watching Jared hug the child. ButNaneki grabbed her angrily from his arms.

"Come, Noelani," she said roughly. "We go backAunty's house."

Corinne opened the door. "You don't have to leave onmy account," she purred smoothly, wondering how shemanaged such control.

Naneki looked at Corinne with loathing before shewalked away stiffly, little Noelani waving good-bye inno-cently over her shoulder. The little girl with dark hair andeyes and golden skin was the image of her mother. ButJared also had those dark good looks. Was this really hisdaughter?

"So you have a daughter, Jared." She smiled. "How nicefor you. I wonder why you never mentioned her before."

"Because Noelani is not mine, Corinne," he said flatlyand started to walk back into the house.

"But Naneki is your mistress, isn't she?" she said tohim, her voice rising.

Jared turned on her and said icily, "She was my mistress before I married you. But I'm afraid I haven't

found any time for her since I got back from the mainland."

"You expect me to believe that?"

"Jealous?" he said sarcastically.

"Of course not!"

"Good, because you shouldn't be. You can't begrudge meone mistress," he said in a cruel tone. "Not when you giveyourself to any man who comes along."

She gasped and instantly raised her hand to slap him, but he caught her wrist and held it firmly. His eyes were cold gray slits as he looked down on her.

"Does the truth hurt, my dear?" he asked unmercifully, his grip tightening. "Whores have to get used to insults, it comes with" the trade. You really should have thought of that?"

"I would gladly give it to anyone rather than you!" shespat, wanting furiously to hurt him in return.

He paled, and shoving her away from him, marched back into the house.

Corinne turned away, fighting to control the tears. Why did they*always* have to hurt each other? She would ratherhe had struck her than say what he had with such venomin his voice. For an instant she was ready to tell him thetruth, all of it. But she reasoned that he would only laugh at her, scorning her once more.

She had done too good a job of creating the illusion thatshe was a whore. No one would ever believe otherwise now —except her so-called lovers. They knew, but they would never tell! It was all so absurd.

Dismally, Corinne picked a gardenia from the shrubsthat grew along the three-foot lava rock wall of the patio. She breathed deeply of the velvety white flower, then placedit behind her ear and slowly started walking through theback yard towards the beach. The yard was long and not nearly so heavily cultivated as the garden out front. Therewere banana trees, guava, lichee, lemon and lime trees, andtwo huge mango trees which cast abundant shade overlush grass. The giant mango tree on the left had a bench swing attached to it and Corinne stopped there instead of going on to the beach.

The sound of the waves beating against the shore wassoothing. She couldn't see the deep blue of the ocean, for the beach slanted downward beyond the yard, but she knew it was very close. It was so peaceful here. It would beheavenly to sit in this swing and watch the sunset, to have someone she loved beside her, drawing her near, sharingthe beauty and wonder of nature and the love of one an-other.

She suddenly felt so lonely and confused. Why hadJared's scathing remarks hurt her so much? She shouldn'tcare what he thought of her. He had admitted that Nanekiwas his mistress and, for some reason that hurt, too. Andthe little girl who had called him Papa. Corinne didn'tbelieve for one minute that she wasn't Jared's child. Jared should have married Naneki, if only for the sake of hisdaughter. But instead he had come to the mainland and married her, for revenge against her father.

She was weary of it all. She was tired of fighting withhim, of trying to understand what had happened to theirone loving night. She just wanted to go home. She wouldn't even try to get back the money Jared had taken from her. Let him keep it all, she didn't need it.

A door slamming at the front of the house drew Co-rinne's attention. She turned in the swing just in time to seeJared cross from the house to the wall of pines and go to-ward the stable. A few minutes later she heard a horsecanter away. So he was gone. And without even a good-bye. Instead of relief, she felt the tears begin again.

Chapter 29

CORINNE sat alone at the kitchen table, sipping the Chinese tea Akela had made earlier. It was the first of November, three weeks to the day since Jared had re-turned to the city. Her efforts to get back to Honolulu her-self had been frustrated over and over again.

She had found out quickly enough that the stable wasoff-limits to her. *Kapu*, the big Hawaiian who tended thefew horses had shouted at her the day she went there. Jared had left orders that she wasn't to use the carriage, nor could she have a horse. And each time she had sneakedinto the stable to try and get a horse anyway, she was dis-covered by the big Hawaiian and had another exchange of shouts that neither of them understood, for he hardly spokea word of English, and she understood only a few Hawaiianwords.

Corinne had had only one other opportunity for gettingaway, when the iceman stopped to deliver ice, as he didperiodically. She had quickly asked him to give her a rideto the nearest town, shoving what little cash she had into his hands. But Akela had overheard, and warned him thatJared would come after him with a club if he took hiswahine maleanywhere. The poor man's eyes had bulged. He couldn't get away fast enough.

"Kolina no leave," Akela had said to her afterwards. "Ialeka say so."

Corinne had been furious with her, but the huge woman only clucked her tongue and walked away. That had been more than a week ago. Corinne couldn't bribe Akela. She'd been with Jared since he was a baby. Akela would neversell her loyalty.

"Why did you marry Jared?"

Corinne caught her breath at the sudden intrusion into her thoughts. She looked up to see Malia standing acrossthe table from her. It was the first time the girl had spokento her in three weeks, in fact, the first time she had'evencome near her. She had always left a room wheneverCorinne entered, and she took all her meals in her ownroom, avoiding Corinne.

"Well?"

Corinne couldn't blame the girl for her hatred. "Therewere several reasons why Jared and I married," she an-swered, hoping the girl wouldn't press her.

"Did you love him?"

"No."

"Did he love you?"

"No, he certainly didn't." Corinne heard the bitternesscreeping into her own voice.

"Then why?"

. Corinne felt as if she were being backed into a corner."It really... isn't any of your business."

Malia rested her hands on the back of a chair and leanedforward. "He is my brother," she said, nearly pleading."I asked him why he married you, but he said the samething you just did. I am asking you now to help me under-stand."

Corinne lowered her eyes from the beseeching look on Malia's face. She tried to put herself in this young girl'splace and realized how terribly bewildered she must be.

"Your brother promised to give me what I wanted outof a marriage—no husband."

"What do you mean?"

"He was not to interfere in anything I did. We were tolead separate lives."

"If you didn't want to live with him, then why did youcome here?"

"I don't think you would really care to know the answerto that," Corinne said in a hard tone. "It does not say much for your brother."

"My brother has done nothing wrong, except to choose you for his wife!" Malia came to Jared's defense, quicklyhostile again.

Corinne matched Malia's anger with her own. "Jared is not the paragon of virtue you think he is, my dear. He liedabout his reason for marrying me. He claimed it was amatter of honor. You see, your dear brother had raped me. He offered to save my reputation through marriage."

"You lie!"

"Ask him and see if he can deny it. That was his excuse for marrying me, Malia. But it was only an excuse, for your brother has no conscience. The real reason he mar-ried me was this; he thought that as my husband, he couldcontrol the stock I owned in my father's shipyard. Hewanted to ruin my father. He found out too late that he couldn't control my stock at all. It must have been a terrible blow."

"Your father is ..." Malia couldn't finish.

"Did Jared explain to you about my father? Or did heonly tell you his side of the story?"

"He—he said my mother died—that my mother killedherself because she couldn't live without Samuel Barrows,"Malia said brokenly.

"Yes, she loved my father and he loved her. She wasn'tstrong enough to go on without him. But my father never knew how badly their separation affected her. All theseyears, he had thought she was alive and happy with herlife. He was crushed when Jared told him what had happened, for he still loved her. Remember, she originally sent my father away from here."

"But Jared said he was to blame!"

"No one can be held responsible for the weakness of another." Corinne replied. "Jared never saw it that way,though. That's why he went to the mainland, and that'swhy he married me, all for revenge. He used me, Malia, when I had never done anything to him to cause suchtreatment."

"Is this why you came here then?" Malia asked. "Youwanted revenge too?"

"You sound as though you don't think I was justified, Malia," Corinne said quietly.

"You were not! You got what you wanted. Jared camehome—be left you to lead the separate life you wanted."

"Yes, he left me, but there's more to it than that. Yousee, he deserted me publicly, Malia, the very day after wewere married and he learned that he couldn't use me toruin my father. He ruined me instead, with a formal an-nouncement in all the newspapers that his wife had proved unsatisfactory and he was deserting her. It was not true. Your brother found no fault with me. He meant only tohurt me. And if you think you have been humiliated bywhat I did, think about how I felt after the public an-nouncement."

"I don't believe you! You say all this only because Jared is not here to deny it! And nothing could excuse what youdid—nothing!"

Corinne lost all patience with the girl. "I haven't done anything to be ashamed of. I created a scandal, but it wasall an act."

"What are you saying?" Malia demanded. "Everyoneknows you've slept with a great many men!"

"Everyone thinks I have!" Corinne replied furiously, not caring anymore what she revealed. "I entertained men inmy hotel suite, but not in my bedroom. It wasn't necessary to go that far to humiliate Jared, not when people jump so easily to the worst conclusion. It was all a farce, Malia. The only man who has ever touched me is your brother!"

Malia drew herself up. "I should never have come toyou for the truth."

Corinne stood up, her eyes reflecting exasperation. "AndI should have known better than to tell you the truth. It's easier to think I'm a whore, isn't it? You can go on think-ing that, because I don't give a damn what you believe."

"You—you're horrible!" Malia cried. She ran from theroom in tears.

Corinne slumped back in her chair. She had hurt the girlagain. Why the devil couldn't she keep her temper? She hadtold Malia that her brother was a cad, and had tried tomake herself appear blameless, when she knew she wasn't.

Corinne glanced out the windows at the storm cloudsgathering. The sky was as dark as her mood.

JARED stood at the window in his uncle's office, look-ing down at the busy street below but not really seeingit. He was listening with embarrassment while Edmond rep-rimanded his young assistant Marvin Colby for some realor imagined mistake. Edmond Burkett was forever findingfault. It was a wonder anyone worked for him. The young Miss Dealing had quit long ago, a prim Mrs. Long taking her place.

"I won't tolerate your ineptitude any longer, Colby," Ed-mond was saying. "You know that the final approval of allloans is made by me!"

"But you weren't here, sir, and the man desperatelyneeded the money yesterday. It was a small loan, and he had ample collateral."

"That is no excuse for ignoring the policy of this com-pany, my policy! And this is the last blunder you will make here, Colby. You're fired."

"You're being unreasonable, Mr. Burkett." Marvin Colbydared to let his temper show.

"Getout!"

After the door had closed, Jared turned to face hisuncle. "Don't you think you were a bit hard on him?"

"You don't know the facts, Jared, so don't presume to interfere."

Jared sighed. He had enough problems of his own. Andhe had learned long ago that it was pointless to argue withhis uncle over anything concerning the Savings and Loan.

"Just why did you send for me, Uncle?" Jared askedimpatiently.

"Don't be so defensive, my boy," Edmond smiled, con-genial now. "I thought we might have lunch together.

There's a new restaurant on King Street that serves excel-lent shrimp Canton."

"You called me here to invite me to have lunch withyou?" Jared asked incredulously. "I don't have time forleisurely lunches, Uncle."

"Nonsense," Edmond scoffed. "I happen to know thatyour hotel job is running smoothly. And you've told meenough times that you couldn't find a better*luna* than your friend Leonaka Naihe. Let him do the job you pay him for.He must get better results from your local laborers thanyou do since he's a local boy himself."

"I happen to like the work," Jared said stiffly. "I thrive on work."

"You mean you lose yourself in it," Edmond replied knowingly. "That won't make your problems go away. Infact, you shouldn't have any problems left to deal with. You handled the situation with your wife admirably. I toldyou the talk would die down if you just put a stop to heroutlandish affairs. She has been forgotten because of thecoming revolution."

"Uncle!"

"The fact won't go away by ignoring it, Jared. Therewill be another revolution, and soon. Only this one

willhave more results than the revolution of 1887, which won our constitution. This time, the queen will be overthrown. No one is pleased with Liliuokalani's reign. She's too hot-headed and wants too much power."

"Sheis the queen," Jared reminded him. "The old mon-archs had absolute power. Queen Liliuokalani just wants areturn to the old ways."

"It's too late for that Too many foreign interests are involved here in Hawaii."

'Too many greedy interests, you mean."

"Can you deny that annexation to the United Stateswould benefit these islands? And better America than some other foreign power like China or Great Britain."

"The Hawaiians should rule their own islands, Uncle," Jared said in exasperation. "I've always felt that way, andnothing has made me change my mind. These islands be-longed to the Hawaiians, but bit by bit *huoles* have takenthem away."

"The fact that you have a touch of Hawaiian in you in-fluences you, Jared," Edmond said harshly.

"I just can't condone a race being destroyed for the greedand benefit of another."

"Good heavens, man. I'm not talking about war! It cer-tainly won't come to that. It will be a quick revolution."

'Tin talking about a culture dying. More than half ofthe Hawaiian peoples have lost their lives to foreign dis-ease, the rest are intermarrying and forgetting the old ways. The number of pure Hawaiians left is few. Their beliefs have been stripped from them, and their land, and now you would take away their last bit of pride."

"Can you approve what the queen is doing? Nothing getsaccomplished anymore at the palace. She does nothing but fight with her ministerial advisers. The legislature is com-pletely blocked because of opposing parties. Resignationshave been forced. The queen no longer hides the fact that she wants to do away with the present constitution we allfought so hard for. She wants to proclaim a new one thatwould give her unlimited power and give only Hawaiians and foreigners married to Hawaiians the right to vote. Canyou really condone such tyrannical behavior?"

"Perhaps she is overdoing it a bit, but I certainly can'tblame her for trying. Her reign has been a mockery. Shebears the title of queen, but she has been robbed of her power by the foreign interests you side with. They have made the decisions for years. Can you blame her for want-ing her people to rule their own islands?"

"The islands have prospered because of foreigners!" Ed-mond said defensively.

"At the expense of the Hawaiians, who have nothingleft!" Jared replied furiously. "Nowpau! I don't want tohear anymore talk of revolution."

"Jared, wait!"

But Jared was already halfway through the outer office. If Edmond wanted to talk politics, he would have to findsomeone else to do it with.

On the ride back to his own office on Merchant Street, Jared finally took notice of the storm that was brewingoverhead. He grew uneasy. Judging by the strong winds, he knew that this would be one of the destructive storms. Andthe windward side of the island always suffered worst. Onthe north shore, devastating waves would wash rightthrough houses and flood roads. Trees toppling and roofsblowing away were common occurrences during this kind of storm.

Malia had always feared such storms. And Corinne? Shewouldn't know that she was safe where she was. The wavesmight reach the yard, even flood the patio, as had hap-pened many times, but she would be safe. Only shewouldn't know that. Akela would reassure her, but wouldCorinne believe that the winter storm wouldn't last longand the sun would shine again tomorrow? Or would she befrightened by a natural occurrence that came often in thewinter rainy season?

Jared turned his carriage toward Beretania and whipped the horses on. He suddenly felt an irrational desire to pro-tect and comfort his wife. He knew it was absurd, but nevertheless he rode home recklessly. He quickly saddled ahorse and then set out again with a growing urgency that bordered on panic.

Jared made excellent time until he reached Wahiawa. He changed horses there, but before he set out again hecould see the rain approaching in solid sheets. It sweptover him in a matter of seconds. The rest of the ride wentmuch slower, for many parts of the road were washed out, leaving gaping holes that could easily cause his horse tostumble.

He rode down to the sea, but the view of the ocean waslost in the blinding storm. Once he passed Haleiwa he sawevidence that this storm had been building for days, with frequent showers. Fields and roads were already flooded. Wagons and carriages were abandoned. Twenty-foot wavescame up to meet the road in many places, slowing hisprogress even more.

It was night when Jared finally reached the beach house. He had made no better time on horseback than he wouldhave with a carriage on a clear day. He was drenched to the bone, and it was still pouring steadily. The front yardwas swamped and Jared knew that if the ocean waves roseanother five feet the yard would be drenched with morethan just rain water.

The front of the house was dark, but there was a lightin the kitchen. Jared could see that the patio had been closed off with heavy shutters to keep the wind out. All ofthe patio furniture had been moved into the living room. Akela had everything in hand, as usual, but Jared was still anxious about Corinne.

He went directly to his bedroom, but found it dark andempty. He stopped only long enough to grab a couple oftowels from the bathroom before he went to the kitchen.But Corinne wasn't there either. Akela and his sister sat at the table sipping hot chocolate.

Malia saw him first and jumped up to run into his arms. She began crying immediately, moaning his name over and over as she had done as a child.

Jared tried to hold her back from him. "You're gettingsoaked, Malia." But she clung to him that much harder andhe quickly relented and held her soothingly. "It's only astorm, dearest. You've been through enough of them toknow that we are safe here. It has never gotten so bad that we had to desert the house."

"It's not the storm, Jaredl" Malia sobbed. "It's yourwife!"

Malia only called him Jared when she was angry or upsetwith him, so he knew that she and Corinne had fought.

"What about her?"

"That—that woman is horrible! She told me terrible things about you. But she lied! I know she lied about every-thing. And she tried to tell me she wasn't a whore!"

Jared grabbed his sister's shoulders and held her awayfrom him. His whole body had grown rigid.

"What did she tell you?"

Malia repeated the story she had sobbed to Akela earlier, but in greater detail. A murderous gleam grew in Jared'seyes. Akela saw it, but Malia went on, unaware.

"She was so spiteful," Malia finished. "And she shoutedat me, when I did nothing to cause her anger. I hate her!"

"Where is she?" Jared asked in a deadly whisper.

Akela stood up apprehensively. "Ialeka, no. No see hernow."

But Malia answered, "She is with her maid and thatbrat who keeps me awake at night with his squalling."

Jared left the room. Akela felt like boxing Malia's ears."You*lolo!*" she said angrily. "Why you make so much outof nothing, Malia?"

"It wasn't nothing!" Malia cried.

"Kolina no hurt you, girl. But because of what you tellyour brother, he hurt her. And you to blame!"

"I am not! She is—for all the mean things she said tome!"

"PwSno ka uahi, he ahi ko Idol" Akela spat, and turnedaway in disgust.

Malia grimaced and said no more. Akela was right. "When smoke rises, there is fire below," she had said. When angry words are used, there is a cause. Yes, she hadinstigated the whole scene with Jared's wife. She hadsought Corinne out and said spiteful things herself. But thatdidn't change anything. Corinne was still a horrible woman, and if Jared beat her, it would only be what she deserved.

Even with the rain pounding on the roof, they still hearda door crashing in against a wall, and Malia said quickly,"I think I will have some more hot chocolate. I never sleep when it storms, anyway."

Akela grunted. "What wrong, Malia? You no like goyour room where you can hear the trouble you cause?"

"Quiet. I only told the truth. Can I help it if Jared gotso angry?"

"You as quick with your tongue as Kolina. You should both learn when to keep silent."

Corinne stared incredulously at Jared when he bargedinto Florence's room without knocking, startling all

of them. She had been holding Michael, walking him about the room because the storm and the thundering roar of the ocean frightened him. But as Jared came at her with pur-poseful strides, she quickly handed Michael to Florence.

"What is the matter with you, Jared?" Corinne asked fearfully, backing away from him.

He didn't answer her, but grabbed her wrist and startedto pull her from the room. Corinne held back, terror grip-ping her now, but Jared gave her a yank that almost sent her crashing into him.

"See here—" Florence started to protest.

Jared glared at her and the words that had sprung to herlips died there. "Don't interfere," he warned her harshly. "She's my wife. Remember that."

"Interfere with what?" Florence questioned, but Jaredwas already out of the door.

Florence held her breath. But there was really nothingshe could do. Cori*was* his wife and furthermore, hewouldn't hurt her. No, he wouldn't, she told herself.

When she heard their bedroom door slam shut, shequickly left her room with Michael and went to the kitch-en on the other side of the house. She couldn't stay whereshe might overhear what was going to happen.

As soon as Jared shoved Corinne into the room and re-leased her long enough to close the door, she raced acrossto the bathroom and locked herself in. Her heart beat fran-tically as she pressed her ear to the door. She had neverseen Jared like that before, not even on the night he hadraped her. He had been determined then, but not violent.

She could see a light from beneath the door and heldher breath. What was he doing? Why had he come backhere in the middle of a storm and in such a rage?

Corinne could hear Jared just outside the bathroom doornow. He turned the handle, but found it locked. And then he slammed a fist against the hard wood, making her jumpwith the explosive sound.

"Open the door, Corinne."

He didn't shout. In fact, his voice was deadly calm.

"Not until you tell me what you want, Jared."

"Open it!" his tone raised menacingly.

"No!"

"Then you had better stand back!"

She jumped away from the door quickly, and just intime. The bolt gave way under Jared's kick and the door crashed open. He was silhouetted in the doorway with the light behind him, making it impossible for her to distin-guish his features. Her own face was a mask of fright.

When he reached out for her, she gasped. He caught herarm and dragged her back into the bedroom,

then swungher around to face him. He let her go and she felt a second of relief. She was unprepared for the stinging slap that fol-lowed, so forceful that it knocked her sideways. She fellagainst the coffee table, nearly tumbling over it.

Tears sprang to her eyes. She brought her hand up tocover the spot, while she kept her shocked eyes on Jared, still standing several feet from her.

"What in all damnation is the matter with you?" sheshouted, her temper rising, despite the fear and shock.

His face was black with rage, and when he took a steptoward her she panicked and scrambled around the coffeetable, her eyes wide with fear.

"Stay away from me, Jared," she warned, though hervoice was too timorous to carry much weight. "I'm not go-ing to take your abuse, especially when I don't know what's bothering you."

"You'll take whatever I give you," he snarled, his fistsclenched at his sides. "I should have taught you to keep your mouth shut a long time ago!"

"What am I suppose to have done?" she begged desper-ately.

"You drove my sister to tears again! You told her what a blackguard I am, didn't you?"

Corinne struggled for breath. "Why should I take all thescorn when no one but you knowswhy I did what I did? She insisted on the truth and I gave it to her!"

"And you tried to paint a picture of innocence for your-self!"

"Not entirely," she said through tight lips.

"Not entirely?" Jared repeated with a cold sneer. "Youliedto Malia! Will you try to tell me that you're not awhore?"

Corinne winced. "I'm not," she said defiantly.

Jared's eyes blazed even more. "I know half the menyou've been seen with, and they are not the kind who willbe shrugged off by a tease."

"That's all I did, Jared. I teased. I made promises tothem that I didn't keep," Corinne said simply. "It wasn't so difficult to put them off. I never saw the same man twice."

"And of course Russell Drayton only pretended to beyour lover?"

"Yes. He knew I wanted to get even with you and he helped me."

"He just went along with your so-called sham, nevertouching you? Never asking for you, even though he knewyou loved him and would be willing?"

"What?"

"You admitted to me once that you loved him," Jaredreminded her.

"I—I lied to you," Corinne stammered, groaning in-wardly that he should remember that. "You would havethought me callous if I told you the truth. After all, I was planning to marry Russell. I didn't love him anymore than I did you when we married. Russell and I had an arrange- ment."

"You're incredible. You have an answer for everything,don't you?" Jared's eyes narrowed and he growled ominous-ly, "I'm tired of your playing me for a fool! I hope you gotyour pleasure out of using that viperous tongue of yours on my sister, because now you're going to pay for it)"

He started toward her, but the green fire that shot intoher eyes stopped him. "What about my feelings, damnyou? I didn't mean to hurt Malia, but she wouldn't leave well enough alone. And I have never been able to take in-sults without getting angry."

"Your temper has caused trouble ever since I met you!"he stormed.

"If you strike me again, Jared, I'll—"

"You'll what?" he cut her off virulently. "An errant wifedeserves a beating, and yours is long overdue."

She ran for the door again. It was locked, and beforeshe could throw the bolt, Jared's fingers bit into her fore-arm and he pulled her to him. She saw him raise his hand to strike her again, his eyes without mercy. She couldn'tstand pain, and she couldn't bear the realization that if he beat her, she would never be able to forgive him for it.

"Jared, no!"

Without hesitating another second, Corinne threw her-self at him and wrapped her arms tightly about his chest She could feel the sudden tensing of his muscles and knewhe was about to push her away.

Jared was thoroughly jolted by Corinne's unexpected re-action. But his fury didn't lessen. It was not entirely rageover what had happened with Malia, it was also the lies shehad just told him. He knew she wasn't innocent—he knewit! And for her to attempt to convince him otherwiseshowed her utter contempt for him.

"Let go, Corinne!" he breathed through clenched teeth, and started to pull her arms away.

Corinne tightened her hold on him, desperately lockingher fingers together behind his back. She looked up at him, but could still read no mercy in his expression. And thenshe felt his hands in her hair, gripping the curls arranged in a high sweep, and he began to pull her away from himthat way. She resisted, even when it became terribly pain-ful, her eyes glistening with tears.

"Jared . . . please!" she cried, feeling her hair comingout by the roots. "Please ... don't... hurt... me!"

Corinne felt his grip slacken slowly. And' then suddenlyhe let her go, and she buried her face against his chest. Her sobs came naturally, a mixture of pain, the humiliation ofbeing forced to plead, and relief that Jared had masteredhis fury. She held to him and sobbed.

When Jared released her hair, his arms remained out-stretched, inches from her back. He didn't know whetherto drop them at his sides or put them around his wife. Theterrified look he had seen in her eyes had unnerved him. He remembered his reason for coming home—to comforther during the storm. The storm still raged outside, butCorinne wasn't frightened of the storm. She was terrified of him.

What in God's name had come over him? He had neverstruck a woman before, yet he had wanted to strangle thisone, to throttle her senseless.

Jared felt her trembling against him and shrank from herheartbreaking sobs. His arms ached to hold her, and atlast he did. He smoothed the silken hair that had tumbleddown her back because of his cruelty, cursing himself for the pain he had caused. She cried and cried and the sound tore at his heart.

"I'm sorry," he murmured. He cupped her face in his hands, but she wouldn't look at him, and the tears still fell. "Please, *makamae*, don't cry anymore. I swear I won't hurt you again."

He kissed her eyes, her cheeks, and then her lips, gently. Slowly he raised his head, waiting for some sign from her, a sign of relief, anger, anything. When she opened her eyes, they were sparkling green pools that still seemed to pleadwith him, but in a different way. And suddenly his own eyes blazed again. Not with anger, but with the fire of passion.

He brought his mouth back to hers, but this time hiskiss was demanding, devouring. He couldn't get enough ofher. And her responses matched his. She did not resist. She was wholly his. She released his back in order to grasp hisneck and draw him down to her. She raised herself up ontiptoe to press even closer. Their kiss became savage, even painful, and Jared finally broke awayto bury his lips in the silken hollow of her neck.

"I want you, Kolina," he breathed huskily. He raised his head to look down at her and started to unfasten her dress. "I'm going to make love to you."

"I know," she whispered, her eyes meeting his directly. "Iwant you to."

Jared nearly ripped her gown in his urgency to remove it.At the same time she unbuttoned his wet shirt. But whenhe started to lift her shift she stopped him. "Turn the lamp off first, Jared.""No," he said forcefully. "I want to look at you." "Please, Jared."

At that moment he couldn't refuse her anything. Asmuch as he wanted to gaze on her beauty, he did as sheasked.

As soon as the lamp was extinguished, Corinne quickly removed the rest of her underclothes and the binder on herbreasts that she had been so afraid Jared would see. God, how he stirred her blood! She didn't care what had hap-pened earlier. None of that mattered anymore.

He wanted her, needed her. The knowledge made herown desire build to a warm ache, and she was the one whopulled him to the bed and pushed him down on it. Shefollowed him and brazenly rubbed her body aganist his, then teasingly pushed him down when he tried to rise. On her knees, she touched him where he throbbed and heardhis gasp. She revelled in his desire for her. Then she ran her hands up his chest, to his face, through his hair. Her lips found his.

Jared's reaction was immediate. He couldn't wait anylonger, and neither could she. Their passions had been de- nied too long. He pushed her down on the bed and mountedher and she opened for him, her body starved for him. They moved together, wildly, savagely, as the climactic mo-ment neared. And then it was upon them and Corinne cried his name as her thighs widened, drawing him deeper into her, savoring the blissful throbbing he had caused.

It was over too soon, and the time for remembering re-turned. But Corinne thrust memory aside. She

was too hap-py to let anything spoil this.

"Corinne—" Jared began.

"Jared, please, don't say anything. Let us both keep si-lent," she answered quickly. "Can't we at least have thisnight?"

His answer was to draw her near to him. She fell asleep like that, her head cradled on his shoulder, a blissful smileon her lips.



JARED stopped in the doorway to the kitchen andstretched the sleep from his body. Akela was at the counter making poi, a morning ritual that dated as far backas Jared could remember. Poi was made from the taroplant, from the bulbous root which Akela cooked once aweek and then pounded to a hard consistency so it wouldn'tspoil. Each morning she took what was needed for the dayand mixed it with water and pounded it again, this time toa smooth paste. Jared thought the sticky gray starch rather bland, but Akela couldn't live without it

"How about some breakfast, Aunty? I haven't eaten sinceyesterday morning."

"Auwel"She gave him a sharp look over her shoulderfor startling her. "I no hear you come in, Ialeka."

He laughed. "It's a wonder you can hear anything, withall that noise you're making."

"You like poi?"

"Not for breakfast," he groaned. "I'll take some bananapancakes, though."

"No more bananas," she chuckled. "The *keiki* Mikaelethink they *ono*. He eat one mashed every day. No more on our trees. You go up the mountain today, bring some stalksdown, huh?"

"We'll see. How about those papayas on the ledge? Arethey ripe yet?"

"Go see. Kuliano bring them with some sausage. I fixyou eggs, huh, with sausage?"

"Kuliano's blood sausage?" Jared shook his head. "Just the eggs will do," he said. He found one of the green andyellow papayas on the windowsill ripe enough. "And fruit. And maybe some toast with guava jelly." He slit thepapaya in half and took it to the table. "How is Kuliano?" •

"My nephew just fine. That Japanee wife of his Tceephim jumping. But he complain he no see Leonaka longtime. He say you work his hoy top hard."

Jared grinned. "I guess I'll have to give Leo some timeoff to visit his father, or Kuliano will end up disinheritingme from the family. I'll send for Leo today. The rain isgoing to slow the hotel job anyway." He paused to take a large chunk of papaya in his mouth. "I haven't seen Kuli- ano for ages. Maybe I will stop by when I go for thosebananas."

"Why you no take Kolina too?" Akela suggested, look-ing at Jared closely. "I think she like the view from uphigh."

"Do you?" Jared said, his lips turning up slowly at the corners. "Maybe I will. Has she given you much troublewhile I was gone?"

"Kolina? No!" Akela replied emphatically. "She all the time play with little Mik&ele, take care him. She alwaysstay with the keiki."

Jared ignored the emphasis she put on her words. "Shedidn't try to leave here?"

"Only few times. Kolina lonely, I think. Maybe she missyou, huh?"

"You can get that hopeful look off your face right now, Aunty. Corinne and I may have reached a temporarypeace, but I'm sure it won't last."

"Youmake it last," she said sternly.

"Good morning, Mr. Burkett." Jared turned to see astiff-lipped Florence coming into the kitchen. "I didn't hearCori stirring about in her room," she said in a manner thatdemanded reassurance.

He grinned. "Didn't you go in to check on her?"

Florence squared her back, her hazel eyes glaring athim. "I didn't want to disturb her if she was still sleeping."

"She probably still is." Suddenly Jared laughed. "Sitdown, Mrs. Merrill, and have some breakfast. And stoplooking at me as if I had committed some abominablecrime. I haven't. Your Cori is just fine."

Florence relaxed and even smiled a little. "I didn't reallythink she wouldn't be all right."

She joined him at the table, noting his good spirits. The hard lines were gone from his face, leaving him younger-looking and decidedly more handsome.

"Would you care for some papaya?" Jared offered. "Thisis the only one that's ripe yet."

Florence accepted a piece of the yellow-orange fruit, butset it aside. "Ill just save it for Michael, if you don't mind. He loves fruit."

"And poi," Akela added proudly.

Florence grimaced, wondering how anyone could likethat moldy-looking starch. "Remarkably enough, he seems to thrive on it," she conceded.

Jared laughed. "I've been told I was raised on it myself. If Akela has been stuffing poi into your baby, I imaginehe's fattened up some. He did seem awfully tiny when I first saw him."

"You should have a good look at that keiki, Ialeka," Akela said slyly. "Maybe you see what I see."

Florence rose quickly to distract Jared's attention. "You certainly have unusual weather conditions on

this side of your island, Mr. Burkett," she said as she crossed to thewindow overlooking the left side of the house. "I havenever known such a violent storm as we had yesterday. But today the sun is shining and the winds are calm."

"Thar*s not unusual weather for the islands, Mrs. MerrilLIt's not so bad here on the end of the island, but this isthe rainy season and we do tend to get a few violent seastorms. On the windward side it generally rains at leastonce a day, every day, for a few months. But that's furtherup the coast, where the mountain draws clouds to it."

"That doesn't sound too bad, compared to a gloomywinter in Boston," Florence commented before she went to the other kitchen window. It was now just an opening onto the patio. "I see the waves didn't reach the house, after all. I'm afraid I had visions of waking to find my bed floating in the sea."

Jared chuckled. "A highly unlikely possibility. The ground level is high here, and the house is elevated for further protection. The patio serves as an added blockage, to cut the force of any waves that might reach the house."

"You have such an unusual house, Mr. Burkett," Flor-ence said as she turned back to face him.

"I suppose it is," he agreed. "My father built it as a sum-

mer retreat. It was only three rooms then, two bedrooms and the living area."

"No kitchen?"

"The cooking was done outside, in the Hawaiian tradi-tion," he explained. "But my mother liked it so well herethat she decided to stay. My father then set about enlarg-ing the house. A kitchen was added, and the dining room. Later the bedrooms were lengthened."

"And the patio?"

"At first it was a garden area for my mother, enclosedwith the three-foot lava rock wall. But she was more inter-ested in cultivating the front yard, and so a roof and floorwere put in there to make it a patio, Still later it was en-closed completely with windows and screens. With all thewindows open, it still has the outdoor effect and is the coolest room in summer."

"You like it best here too, don't you?" Florence re-marked.

"I suppose I do," Jared replied. "I grew up in this house, and helped build some of it, once I was old enough. But I haven't spent much time here in recent years. Taking overmy father's business has kept me quite busy."

"Has your work slowed, then?" she asked. "I mean— well, you're here now." Jared frowned, and she quicklyadded, "Forgive me, Mr. Burkett. I didn't mean to pry."

Jared fell silent, thinking about his reason for comingback here so soon, and what it had led to. He had to admitto himself that ever since he had left Corinne here, he haddone nothing but think about her. He had wanted so often to tell her how sorry he was, sorry about so many things. But he couldn't bring himself to say the words.

He hated what she had done, but still he wanted her. The sight of her reminded him of all the men who

had hadher, but he still wanted her. The storm and wanting to comfort Corinne had only been an excuse to bring himback here. He knew that. And look what it had led to. Hewanted her more than he had ever wanted a woman. The mere touch of her made him forget what she had become.

He knew in his gut that he could never really forgive herfor being with all those other men. But, after last night, healso knew that he didn't want to let her go. It was crazyand could never work, yet he hoped the truce they had reached last night would continue, if only for a little while. He sighed. A lot would depend on Corinne, though. AndCorinne could be very difficult.

Jared did not notice how carefully he was being watchedby the Hawaiian nurse and the nurse from Boston.

Chapter 32

CORINNE stared pensively at her reflection in themirror hanging over the dresser. She was mesmerized by the swollen area of her cheek with the slight tinge of blue. If she did not bruise so easily, there would be no tell-tale reminder of what had happened last night. The swell-ing would last a few days, and the bruise would fade tobrown, then yellow.

She wondered what Jared would say when he saw the mark. Surprisingly enough, she wasn't in the least angryabout it. What had happened after Jared struck her waswell worth anything that had gone before. She didn't hatehim anymore, she knew that now.

But she wasn't quite sure what she did feel. There was a powerful *physical* attraction, but anything more than that was frightening to admit. It wouldn't doto *fall* in Jove withhim. He hadn't believed her confession, and never would. And the disgust he felt for what he thought she was would destroy any relationship they might have had. No, it was hopeless. She would be better off gone from here as soonas possible.

The door opened, but Corinne was reluctant to lookaround. She held her breath, waiting for someone to speak, but when no one did, curiosity got the best of her. She turned to see Jared standing by the door, looking just asshy as she felt.

He came forward slowly, and stopped abruptly when hesaw her cheek.

"Oh, no—did I do that?" Jared didn't give her a chanceto answer, but was in front of her in an instant, gentlylifting her face up to his. "I'm sorry. What is it about youthat makes me lose control? I've never hit a woman before,I swear it. I'm sorry."

Corinne became unnerved. He was standing so close. Her pulse quickened, and her face flushed. She lowered hereyes, embarrassed.

"Does it hurt?"

"Not very much," Corinne answered, looking up at him again. "It looks much worse than it really is."

Jared moved away, discomfited by the soft words thatwere passing between them. "Akela suggested

that you might like an outing. I'll be going up into the hills today tobring down a few stalks of bananas. I understand Mrs. Merrill's son has a passion for them."

"I hope you don't begrudge him the fruit growing onyour grounds," Corinne said stiffly.

"Not at all," Jared replied, looking at her curiously. "Youdo like that baby, don't you? I understand you've beenspending a good deal of your time with him."

"Is there anything wrong with that?" she demanded, abit sharply.

"No, I suppose you needed some diversion to fill your time." He took a step closer, his brow furrowed. "But whydo you get so sensitive every time I mention the boy?"

"I don't know what you mean," she said evasively, turn-ing away from his penetrating eyes.

"Do you think it's wise to form such a close attachmentto another woman'schild?"

"Florence is not just another woman, Jared. She's been&mother to me, a sister, and she's my only true friend. She's been with me all my life and I love her. There wouldbe something wrong with me if I didn't care for her child."

"That's good enough logic for most people, but I was under the impression that you were different. Didn't you want a life free of attachments? That's not possible whenyou love, Corinne. Then you need love returned."

"Perhaps I've changed," she whispered.

Jared wasn't quite sure he had heard her correctly. "Have you?"

"You don't know anything about me, Jared, you reallydon't. But then, I didn't know myself."

"And do you now?"

"I think so," she replied slowly, thoughtful. "I've foundthat I have a lot of love to give, but very few people that I care enough about to give it to."

"You seem to have spread it around recently," he saidunthinkingly, and immediately regretted his words.

"You had to bring that up again, didn't you?" she saidangrily, her hands on her hips. "Our marriage was a farceto begin with, but must I remind you that you desertedme?"

"I didn't come in here to fight with you," Jared said. "I'm sorry for that remark—it was uncalled for. I washoping we could continue the truce we started last night."

"So was I, but—"

"No buts." He cut her off with a grin. "Will you comewith me today?"

She hesitated, wanting to gp, yet thinking that she hadn'tnursed Michael. "How soon? I haven't even eaten yet."

"You'll have plenty of time. We'll leave in a couple ofhours."

"Ill be ready then," she smiled.

Corinne was disappointed later to find that Jared had along walk in mind. She brought along a parasol, for the sun persisted throughout the day, and Jared had warnedher to wear comfortable shoes. She found out why afterthey left the road a good half mile up the coast and started over the rough terrain.

The path they followed was narrow, and still quitemuddy from the storm. There were ditches to cross, anddried-out thicket and leafless trees to skirt. This area lookednothing like a tropical paradise. The only color was that ofthe wild kalamona shrubs, with clusters of bright yellow-orange flowers, and the green and brown of the *koa*, rub-hish trees.

They walked along silently yet companionably, with Jared holding her hand to pull her along behind him, help-ing her over deep ditches. She was at ease with him, per-haps for the first time.

They passed between craggy hills, and the landscape sud-denly changed drastically to green splendor. It was beauti-ful here, like an enclosed valley. An upward climb ledthrough thick wildflowers and lush trees.

Finally the path leveled off arid they came to a patch ofbanana trees, where Jared stopped. While he searched for likely stalks, Corinne looked back the way they had come.

She gasped at the view. It took in the entire length of thenorth shore.

"It's lovely, isnt it?"

Jared had come up behind her and now she felt hisarms slip around her waist and pull her back against him. At that moment, Corinne was undeniably happy.

"Yes, it is lovely," she said with a sigh. "Thank you for bringing me."

"My pleasure."

When Jared didn't move away, but instead brought his lips down to the side of her neck, Corinne felt the stirring of desire. She wanted to scream at him for arousing herwhen there was nothing they could do about it up here. She tried to pull away, but his grip tightened about her.

"Jared," she began in frustration. "Jared, shouldn't webe going back now?"

"We'll have to go on a bit," he said into her ear. Hismanner was unhurried. "The bananas aren't ripe enough in this spot."

"How much further?"

"My cousin has a good patch of trees behind his place. I meant to stop by for a visit, anyway."

"Your cousin?" Corinne asked, surprised. "You have acousin—up here?"

"Don't look so astonished," Jared said. "Lots of peoplelike the seclusion of the mountains."

"But I'm not dressed to meet your relatives."

"You're dressed just fine. But I like the idea of yourbeing not dressed."

The devilish glint in his eyes gave her warning even be-fore he reached to unfasten the buttons at her neck. Shemoved out of his reach and started backing away frojnhim, shaking her head slowly from side to side.

"Jared, no."

"And why not? You're my wife."

"You're crazy," she said, unable to keep from smiling.

He shrugged and reached for her, but she turned and started running down the path. Jared caught up with herbefore she got more than a few feet away. He tumbled them both to the ground. He began to raise her skirt and she laughed, even as she protested weakly.

"Not here, Jared."

"Yes, definitely here, and definitely now," he said, andkissed her soundly to silence her.

Corinne lost herself to the moment. She wanted Jared. He had the power to arouse her with just a soft word, animpassioned look, a touch. Why him and no other man? Other men had desired her, but the fact that Jared did thrilled her.

With the heady scent of wildflowers surrounding them, they made love with a savage urgency that suddenly over-came them both. Corinne was left feeling decidedly wicked, yet utterly pleased with Jared's impulsiveness. She wantedto stay there all day, making love again and again. How she wished they could. But now that Jared was satisfied, he would want to go on.

But Jared surprised her. He made no move to rise, butpropped himself on his elbows, easing his weight from her. His eyes were bright blue as he gazed down at her, thentouched her lips with a featherlight kiss.

"You are magnificent, makamae."

"Well, thank you, sir," she said impishly.

He smiled. "I think I'll take you for a walk on the beachtonight. Walking with you is quite enjoyable. The nightwill be perfect, with the stars and the moon out to touchyour beauty."

Corinne sighed. "I think I'm going to like this truce, Jared."

He kissed her again lazily, then sighed. "We'd better gonow, before I'm tempted to forget all about bananas andeverything else."

Reluctantly, she let him pull her to her feet and help herstraighten her clothing.

* Twenty minutes later and further up the cliff, they cameto another leveled-off area where a crude shack made ofthin wood and metal scraps huddled beneath thick trees. Animal pens were all around, yet small pigs and chickensran about freely, unpenned. Ferns and plants abounded, covering the hillside. There were mountain apple trees, ahuge mango tree which shaded the shack, and the bananapatch Jared

had mentioned not far from the shack.

Corinne clung to Jared's arm. "Surely your cousindoesn't live here?" she whispered.

"Why not?" Jared looked down at her in amusement

"He likes ft up here. It's like living in a past century. Hehas never taken to the modern world and what the haoles have done to his island."

"Hisisland? I don't understand."

At that moment a huge Hawaiian stooped through the doorway and sauntered over to them. He was immense, with a mat of black hair and a beard, and warm browneyes. He wore only a pair of yellow flowered baggy shorts. Even his feet were bare, but he didn't seem to feel the sharp twigs he walked over.

"Ialeka!" He gave Jared a bear hug before he releasedhim and turned a curious eye on Corinne. "Wahine male?""Yes," Jared answered with a note of pride. "This is mywife, Kolina."

"Aunty Akela tell me you marry, Ialeka. When youmakeluau, celebrate?"

"It's rather late for that," Jared said. "Auwe! Any reason good reason for *luau*. But come. You no visit long time. Kikuko!" he yelled, and a small Oriental woman in a faded kimono appeared in the door-way.

She was a solemn creature, shy, and so tiny compared to the big Hawaiian. She scurried back into the house with-out even a greeting.

"She put more laulaus in calabash. You stay have kaukauwith us, huh?"

Jared didn't have a chance to answer before the big manambled back to the house, motioning for them to follow."We've been invited for dinner," Jared explained. Corinne began to relax after the initial discomfort of meeting strangers. The little house was quite comfortableinside. The two cultures blended well, mixing Hawaiiantapa cloth, gourds, and artifacts with Japanese idols, statues, and silk screens.

Kuliano Naihe was a jovial man and easy to like. Heentertained them throughout the afternoon with Hawaiian chants and songs, accompanying himself on the ukulele. His wife Kikuko was very quiet, staying in the background. Jared explained to Corinne that it had nothing to do withtheir presence. It was just her way.

They ate a delicious meal in the back yard, where amagnificent sunset of red, orange, and purple hues lit the sky below them. *Laulaus* were made of pork wrapped intaro tops, which looked like thick spinach but tasted much better. The *laulaus* were steamed in a large calabash, first wrapped inti leaves to protect them. The meat was tender, with a unique taste from the taro tops. Of course, poi wasserved too, and fresh papaya and unusual little mountainapples. Like nothing Corinne had ever eaten before, they had a soft, thin skin and one large brown seed in the mid-dle.

Once the sky darkened, Kuliano lit a fire in the back yardand began to sing again. Jared, in no hurry to go, leanedback against a colvillea tree. Its tremendous bunches of red-orange buds, like clusters of grapes, hung from the tips of branches down around them. Corinne sat near him, enjoying the music and the company.

"How long have you known Kuliano and Ms wife?" sheasked casually.

"All my life," Jared answered. "You met Leonaka, myforeman, or so he told me."

"Yes."

"Kuliano is his father. Leonaka and I grew up together, more like brothers than cousins."

"Wait a minute, Jared. When you say cousin, you meanit only as a term of friendship, don't you?"

"No. The Naihes are my distant cousins by blood."

"But they're Hawaiian."

"You noticed," he said playfully.

Corinne found herself quite confused. "Would you mindexplaining?"

"Leonaka and I have the same great-great-great-grand-mother, Leimomi Naihe. So you see, I do have someHawaiian blood, though little of it is left. Do you want tohear about it?"

"Yes."

"Leimomi was a beautiful young woman who lived on Kauai, the first island landed on by Captain Cook in 1778. You've heard of Cook, haven't you?"

"Yes."

"Well, he was considered a god when he first came, andthe Hawaiians, a friendly and free-spirited people, couldn't do enough for him and his crew. Leimomi gave herself toone of the English sailors, a man she knew only as Peter.

He sailed away, not aware that she would soon bear hisson. She had a male child she named Makualilo.

"Leimomi later married one of her own people, and bore him a son and two daughters. Her husband accepted Ma-kaulilo and raised him as his own. But the boy grew upfeeling that he was an outcast. Cook's visits ended inbloodshed, and there was much resentment of the white man for quite some time. Makualilo was too fair-skinned, a constant reminder of the disliked white men, who con-tinued to visit the islands.

"In 1794, when he was only fifteen, he sailed for themainland on a whaler. Five years later he returned withan infant son, born to him by an American prostitute whowanted nothing to do with the child and would have soldit if Makualilo had not claimed the boy."

"That's terrible!"

Jared glanced at her, then continued. "Makualilo broughtthe baby, Keaka, to his mother. She raised him on theisland of Oahu.

"But he didn't stay in the islands. In 1818 he sailed to England, and then on to Ireland. There he married, and in 1820 Colleen Naihe was born. Keaka settled in Ireland. Colleen was raised there, and in 1839 she married a Frenchtrader, Pierre Gourdin. A year later my mother was born."

Jared's voice softened as he began to talk about hismother. "Ranelle spent her youth in France. In 1850 shesailed with her parents to San Francisco."

"Wasn't that when gold was first discovered there?"Corinne asked.

"Yes. But they had no luck there, and Pierre was atrader at heart. They took to the road and travelled acrossAmerica for three years, finally settling in Boston, where they opened a small store."

"That's where Ranelle met my father?" Corinne venturedtentatively.

"Yes. She felt she couldn't stay in Boston after yourfather broke their engagement. Her parents were no longer living, and, since the Civil War was imminent, she felt shewas better off leaving the States altogether. She knew shehad relatives here, though distant ones, and she came hereto find them. She found Akela and Kuliano, who also knewthe story of Leimomi and her first son, Makualilo. Akela and Kuliano are descendents of Leimomi's other children.

"Ranelle taught school until she met my father and they married. And you know the rest."

"So you're mostly English and French, with just a littleIrish and even less Hawaiian."

"Does the Hawaiian blood bother you?"

"Why should it? And I think it's nice that such a com-plicated story has been passed down from generation to generation." She paused, then asked, "Do you still hate myfather, Jared?"

"The feelings I have for Samuel Barrows have been with me for a long time, Corinne."

"In other words, you do still hate him," she stated with a frown. "And me?"

"For quite a while you and your father were one andthe same to me. That's why I felt no compunction about using you to get at him."

"And now?"

"I don't hate you, Corinne." He hesitated, and she couldfeel his tension. "But I hate what you did when you camehere."

"But—"

She started to profess her innocence again, but stopped. It would only lead to an argument, and the day had been too nice to end it that way.

"Shouldn't we be getting back?"

Jared shook his head. "It's too dark now. We'll waituntil morning."

"You mean spend the night here?" Michael had alreadymissed his afternoon feeding. "But we'll be missed, Jared. Florence will be frantic with worry."

"They won't miss us for one night. Akela will knowwhat happened. When I come up here, I usually

spend thenight."

"I want to go back now, Jared. It's not that late," sheprotested.

"Go ahead, then," Jared shrugged. "But when you missyour footing and tumble down the side of the mountain, don't expect me to come to your aid."

"That was uncalled for," she said tartly.

"Then be reasonable, and stop fussing. There's nothingback at the house that can't wait until morning." Hegrinned then, and pulled her up against his chest. "Unlessyou're thinking about that walk on the beach I promised you."

"I was not!"

"No?" he crooked a brow, his teeth flashing in the fire-light. "Just the same, you'll still have that walk, if nottonight, then tomorrow night. But right now, I know a nicelittle spot a little farther up the mountain where we can—"

"Jared, stop it," she said, giggling even as she pushed toget out of his warm embrace. "We've already frolickedtoday."

"As I recall, you took an active part in that frolic. Andthat was only the appetizer. I'm ready for the main course."

"You can be crude sometimes."

He laughed and began to fondle her breasts.

"Now stop it." She tried to sound angry but failed. "Be-sides, what would your cousin think if we just disappeared?"

"Kuliano will laugh and remember his younger days." Helooked down at her devilishly. "He might even join usthere."

"Jared, you are incorrigible!"

He rose, pulling her up with him. "Come on." One armwrapped around her waist, he lifted her face with his free hand and brushed her lips lightly. "I can't seem to get enough of you."

Corinne put Michael from her mind, knowing that Florence would take good care of him. At the moment, only Jared mattered.

Chapter 33

THE sun was high overhead as Corinne walked along the beach, kicking at the hot sand with her sandaled feet. She smiled, thinking of that morning. She and Jaredhad walked into the house to find that

no one had missedthem. Michael was happy with his diet of solid food.

It had been such an enjoyable time away. Jared was notthe charmer she had known in Boston, nor the enraged hus-band she had known recently. He was himself—relaxed, easygoing, a pleasure to be with. And what pleasure she had had last night, when he made love to her, slowly, sensually, prolonging the ultimate until neither of themcould bear it anymore. He was a magnificent lover, this husband of hers.

"Hello, ma'am."

Corinne looked up to see a tall, barrel-chested manwaving a white straw hat at her from about ten yards away. He started to approach her. She watched him warily, realizing she had walked a good distance away from Jared's property.

'The name's John Pierce," he said, stopping a few feetfrom her and flashing a smile. "You must be the newMrs. Burkett."

"Yes, but how did you know that?"

"Heard tell that Jared found him a beautiful little womanin Boston, a real society girl. That must be you, cause Iain't seen anyone as pretty in a long time."

"Well—thank you, Mr. Pierce," Corinne said hesitantly, wondering what else he had heard about her. Probablyeverything. Would she ever live down the sordid reputation she had built for herself?

"Call me John, my dear. I'm your nearest neighbor of any consequence. Been meaning to pay Jared a visit, butjust can't seem to find the time." He paused, wiping hisbrow with a checkered handkerchief. "I expect he's in thecity?"

"No. He came home just the other day. He's over check-ing out his vegetable fields right now."

"You don't say," he returned thoughtfully. "It's not likethe boy to get out this way in the winter season."

Corinne smiled. The "boy," indeed! John Pierce lookedto be in his late forties, with brown hair and long brownside-whiskers that were graying. He seemed a nice enough man, and certainly friendly.

"Perhaps you would like to come back to the house withme?" Corinne offered. "Jared should be back for lunch by now."

He looked thoughtful, almost wary. "No—no, but per-haps another time."

"Well, I had better be getting back before Jared missesme."

"He keeps a close eye on you, does he? Well, who canblame him, with such a pretty wife."

"Good day to you."

Corinne turned and started back. She felt his eyes onher as she trudged through the warm sand. Her faceflushed as she realized the double meaning in his lastremark. Of course he knew about her. Everyone did.

"Hold up a minute, Mrs. Burkett."

Corinne started, for he had come up behind her silently. "Yes."

"You wouldn't happen to know anyone might like a little spaniel pup, would you? One of my dogs whelped four a couple weeks ago and they're ready to be given away. I gotme five dogs running about the place already."

"I don't think so."

"You're the first one I asked. You could have the pickof the litter."

She hesitated, picturing Michael playing with a littlelong-eared spaniel. He was a bit young right now, but he could grow up with the dog.

"As a matter of fact, I do know someone who wouldadore a little puppy."

"Good! My house is just right over there, behind thosepalms. The pups are in a shed out back. It would justtake you a minute to come and pick one out."

Corinne nodded and followed behind him. Through thetrees she was soon able to make out an old, peeling, ram-shackle house. The yard leading down to the beach washardly a yard at all, with very little grass, but an abundanceof sand and dirt. It wasn't exactly a homey place, and Corinne wondered if there was a Mrs. Pierce.

"Right in here." He held open the door to a storage shed and waited for Corinne to step inside.

Sunlight filtered in through cracks in the ceiling and wallsand dust motes swirled riotously, as if the shed had notbeen entered for months. There was the rank smell of mold and mildew and Corinne held her breath.

"Where are the puppies?" She turned around, but the door slammed shut in her face. She stared at it stupidly for a moment. "Mr. Pierce?"

No one answered. It took another few seconds for the confusion to wear off and uneasiness to set in. Corinne stepped over to the door, but there was no handle on the inside. She pushed gently, and when it didn't budge, sheused more force. At last she threw her shoulder into it, but it still remained firmly shut.

Fear was beginning to take hold now. "Mr. Pierce! Where are you?"

There was no answer, and she started pounding on the door with her fists. "Let me out of here! Do you hear me?"

John Pierce must be crazy, she thought wildly. She turnedback to look around the shack for something to use to getthe door open. All she could see were old crates, twowheelbarrows, and a pile of wet dirt. She searched in andaround the empty crates, but could find no tools. She did discover one thing though. There were no puppies in this shed. What the devil had she gotten herself into?

Malia turned back from following Corinne after she left the beach with John Pierce. Her lips curled smugly as she hurried home. She had been prepared to provoke anotherscene with Jared's wife, and now she had something to tell him. Corinne and John Pierce—ha! Jared would be livid. He would not be so quick to forgive his erring wife thistime.

She found Jared in the back yard, rinsing off under thepump their father had made so that the sand would notbe tracked into the house. It was hooked up to a huge rainbarrel on the other side of the trees.

"Did you go swimming?" Malia called, wonderingwhether he had seen Corinne.

"Just a quick dip to wash off. The storm gave the fields a good soaking. It's quite muddy over there."

Malia waited until he released the water pump and grabbed a towel hanging over a branch on the lichee tree. He was wearing only a pair of shorts and she saw that hehad lost a good deal of his bronze tan. Too long awayfrom the beach, away from home, ever since their fatherdied. Malia resented that. She missed the swims and ridesthey used to take together, and the attention her brother had given her.

"Did you want something, Malia?"

"I was wondering if you knew where your wife is," shesaid in a tone that made Jared go tense.

"Isn't she in the house?"

"No, she's with John Pierce."

"Oh?"

Jared's calm response infuriated her. "She met him on thebeach and went with him to his house. Doesn't that botheryou?"

"Why should it? I may not like John very much, con-sidering his obnoxious determination to get our land, buthe is our closest neighbor." Jared looked at his sister. "It's time Corinne met our neighbors."

Malia's eyes flashed angrily. "You talk as if she will livehere permanently."

"Maybe she will. Who knows?"

"I don't understand you, Jared. How could you forgiveher after she made a cuckold of you?"

His eyes narrowed. "Where the devil did you learn sucha Word?"

"I read a lot," she said defensively. "With no one my ageout here, there is nothing else to do. Naneki was the only friend I had, but your wife drove her away!"

"Naneki chose to go back to Kahuku," Jared said, un-perturbed. "It was her decision. And as for my forgivingmy wife, that is none of your business, Malia. I will thankyou to not mention it again."

"You don't care, then, if she still consorts with othermen?" she demanded. He was treating her like a child.

"John Pierce?" Jared laughed at the absurdity of it"Don't be ridiculous, Malia."

She chafed. "I saw them together! I saw her flirt withhim and entice him. If you think they're sipping tea rightnow, then you are a bigger fool than she made of you in Honolulu!"

Jared's eyes turned a stormy gray as he watched Maliarun into the house. He looked down the beach, but therewas no sign of Corinne. Damn Malia for planting suspicions in his mind.

Jared waited only an hour before he couldn't stand itanymore. He saddled a horse, preparing to ride up thebeach road to Pierce's. He had worked up a fine head ofsteam during that hour, imagining the very worst, yetfurious with himself for doing so. He was not prepared to find Johen Pierce trotting up to the stable just as he was mounting his horse. Jared eyed the older man suspiciously.

"What are you doing here, John?"

"I've come about your wife."

"Has something happened to Corinne?" Jared asked inalarm.

"No, no, nothing like that," John Pierce assured him, looking ill at ease.

"Where is she, then?" he demanded. "I understand shepaid you a visit today."

"You know, it's not a very nice thing you've done tothat poor girl."

"What the hell are you talking about?"

"It's well-known why you brought her here, Jared. Therumor is that you keep her under lock and key. I wassurprised when I met her out walking earlier, but not sosurprised when she asked my help."

"Your help?"

John hesitated a moment. "She wants me to take her to Honolulu."

"What?"

"Your wife seemed terribly upset," John said quickly. "She—she said she couldn't stand the restrictions youplaced on her. For that matter, she said she could not bearliving with you."

Jared's eyes narrowed. "What else did she say?" heasked, with deadly control.

John looked at Jared nervously. The idea of holdingMrs. Burkett had come to him on the beach. He had actedimpulsively. Now it was too late to do anything but seeit all through.

John cleared his throat. "Your wife promised me a gooddeal of money if I would take her to the city."

"And did you agree?"

"Not yet," John replied. "I told her I would have tothink about it first."

"What is there to think about? The woman is my wife. She married me of her own free will." Jared took a stepcloser. "I'll tell you now that if you interfere, you willregret it."

John moved his horse back. He was sweating profusely, but not from the heat.

"Now see here, Jared." John tried to sound indignant. "There's no need for threats. I see your side of

this."

"Then what are you doing here?"

"Well now, I also see your wife's side. I mean, the littlelady seemed quite desperate, desperate enough to pay what-ever I asked. It would be downright ungentlemanly of meto ignore such a plea."

"You mean it wouldn't be to your advantage," Jared said sarcastically. "Just what are you getting at?"

The time was at hand. "I thought you and I might make deal. Although I would like to help the little lady, she is your wife."

"And you would like to help yourself as well, is thatit?" Jared asked coldly.

"I didn't create this situation, it was dumped in mylap," John said defensively.

"What do you want, Pierce?" Jared demanded, his pa-tience growing thin.

"Well, you know I've always wanted this little piece ofland you have here, my boy. And I'm still willing to pay you double what it's worth if you will consider parting with it now."

"Let me get this straight," Jared said softly. "You willreturn my wife to me if I sell you my land?"

"That's right."

"And if I don't sell the land, then you'll take Corinneaway where I can't find her?"

"Right again," John beamed.

It was such a good plan! Why hadn't he thought of itsooner? Of course, once the wife was returned, she would explain that he had locked her up, that she hadn't asked his help at all. But it would be her word against his, andhe would own the land by then, so what did it matter?

"Where is my wife?"

"Come now, you don't think I would be fodl enough todivulge that information, do you?" Then John addedquickly, "She's not at my place, if that's what you'rethinking. We're Wasting time. What's your answer?"

"You amaze me, Pierce. Did you think I would agreeto this blackmail?"

"Don't you want your wife back?" John asked, his con-fidence ebbing.

"Not particularly," Jared replied in a deceptively casual tone. "Not if she is so desperate to get away from me."

"But—but—" John stammered, unprepared for this .turn.

Jared laughed, though the humor didn't reach his cold gray eyes. "You seem confused, Pierce. Didn't my wife tell you she was only here on a temporary basis?"

"No, she didn't," John said sourly.

"Well, she's welcome to leave, since that's what she wantsto do. And if she will pay you to take her to Honolulu,that's fine too. You might as well get something for yourtrouble. And, that way, I won't have to take her."

"You really don't care, do you?" John asked incred-ulously, shaking his head.

"I'm sorry to disappoint you, but no, I don't give a damn anymore what she does. I wash my hands of her."

"But she's your wife! Tell you what, I'll give you a day or two to think it over."

"Suit yourself, but I won't change my mind. And by the way, my wife has a servant here. You're welcome to comeget her before you leave for the city."

Jared turned to ride his horse back into the stable. Onlywhen he heard John Pierce riding away did he let his true feelings surface. In the quiet of the stable he let out a bellow of rage that shook the rafters and frightened thehorses into bucking against their stalls.

Chapter 34

LEONAKA sat across the kitchen table from Jared, clasping a cool glass of rum punch between his largebrown hands. It was late afternoon, and he had only just arrived from the city. His welcome was not what he hadexpected. The only one to show him any warmth wasMalia, who alone was cheerful in a household of gloom. Even Akela, Leonaka's great-aunt, had only said a few words to him before she went back to banging pots andpans.

"It didn't take you very long to get here," Jared com-mented.

Leonaka smiled now, encouraged that his friend hadfinally said something. "When I am offered a week's vaca-tion with pay, I'm not going to sit around and think aboutwhether to take it."

Leonaka expected a rejoinder, but none was forthcoming. Finally he could stand it no more.

"What in damnation is going on here?"

Jared couldn't meet Leonaka's imploring gaze. He get up and stalked from the room without another word. Leonaka turned to Akela for explanation.

"His wife gone," Akela said, showing her own angerand disappointment.

"What you mean, gone?" Leonaka asked, slipping intopidgin English, «s he always did with Akela. "Where shewen' go?"

"That John Pierce come herethis morning, say Kolinaask him take her to Honolulu, say she pay him plentymoney. He hide Kolina so Ialeka no can find her."

"What?"

Akela grunted. "You ask me, I say that no-goodhaolelie!"

"Who? Pierce?"

She nodded. "Kolina happy since Ialeka come home thistime. They no fight. I watch them. I say to myself, isgood, they will have good marriage. They just stubborn, no yet ready admit they love each other."

Leonaka looked skeptical. "Maybe you just see what youhope to see, huh, Aunty?"

"You ask Ialeka!" she snapped. "You ask him if thingsnot better between him and his wife these last days." Then she paused. "No, mo'better you no ask him now. Right now he mad like hell."

"And what if Pierce's story is true?"

Akela shook her head stubbornly. "Kolina not run away without herkeiki."

Now Leonaka was truly surprised—and hurt as well."Ialeka and me used to tell everything about each other. Now he keep everything to himself. He no tell me about his wife, he no tell me she give him*keiki.*"

"He no tell you about the keiki because she tell him the keikinot hers, but belong to herwahine servant."

"So you only suspect—"

"I know!" she cut him off emphatically. "I tell Ialeka, but he no believe."

"This is too complicated." Leonaka sighed. He got upand walked to the door. "Is Ialeka just going let her go?"

Akela finally let a grin cross her lips. "He say he nocare, but I know better. That's why he so mad."

Corinne sat on the wet earth with her back proppedagainst a crate. She was exhausted and her hands were blistered and filled with splinters from trying to pry open the boards in the wall that had cracks wide enough to get her fingers through. She had failed. Though the shed wasold, it was sturdily built and she didn't have any tools atall.

She had wracked her brain all afternoon trying to figureout why she was here. The only conclusion she had reachedwas that John Pierce was a madman. If that was true, thenshe had more to fear than just being locked up. Her lifemight be in danger.

All matter of horrors came to mind. Her imaginationwent wild over the different ways We might try to kill her.

Each murder she envisioned was more gruesome and terri-fying than the last.

When the door to the shed finally opened, Corinne was nervous wreck.

Rigid with fear, she stared up at the man. She was utterlyunprepared when he said, "There's no point in

keepingyou locked up. You've no place to go anymore."

She had to struggle for the courage to ask, "What—what do you mean?"

"Your husband doesn't want you back, madam."

The anger in his voice frightened her more than Mswords did. "You spoke to Jared?"

"I went to make a deal with him. I told him I'd bringyou hack if he'd sell me his land. But his land means more to him than you do."

What he was saying sank in slowly, and finally Corinnerealized that she wasn't facing a madman after all. Shewas facing a plain greedy crook who had held her forransom.

But that ransom wasn't going to be paid. Her fear was gone instantly, replaced with hot anger. She got to her feet,

"I'll have you put in jail for this!"

"No, you won't," he said harshly. "No one's going to be-lieve I kept you here by force. It's your word against mine. And your reputation is no good, Mrs. Burkett."

"Jared knows you kidnapped me!"

He laughed. "Don't be absurd. You came to me to helpyou get back to the city."

"That's a lie!"

"Yes, but it doesn't matter because your husband be-lieved it."

Why would Jared be so quick to believe that?

"Now what?" she asked herself softly. And suddenly sheknew the answer. Pierce had left the door open, andCorinne simply dashed through it and, picking up herskirts, ran as fast as she could run.

She knew exactly what she was going to do. She wasn'tfrightened anymore. She was so angry that she hardly felther own fury any longer. The fighting between her and Jared had gone on long enough. In the last few days, every-thing had changed between them. Yet here was this repulsive fellow informing her that Jared believed shewished to leave him.

It was too much. She was sorry for the wrong she'ddone her husband, but when was he going to remember the good about her instead of the bad? When, if not right now?

Corinne ran on, having forgotten all about John Pierce.

Chapter 35

LEONAKA found Jared sitting on the beach, bathedin the red glow of sunset. He sat staring pensively atthe ocean, so wrapped up in his dark thoughts that hewasn't even aware of Leonaka until the big man spoke.

"I can remember finding you like this many times after your mother died," Leonaka said hesitantly. Jared didn't even look up. "You want to talk about it, Cousin?"

"No."

"We used to share all things," Leonaka sighed. "What has happened to us?"

Jared finally looked over at him. "Shouldn't you be let-ting your father know you're here?"

"Is that your way of telling me to mind my own busi-ness?" Leonaka asked.

"Look, Leo. There's nothing to talk about. I got myselfinto a deplorable marriage that isn't worth discussing, and I would just as soon forget it."

"If your marriage is so deplorable, why are you soupset?"

"Who said I'm upset!" Jared growled.

"You're not?" Leonaka raised a brow.

"All right," Jared said testily. "I am a little upset. Butnot because she's gone," he added quickly. "I would have let her go soon, anyway."

"Would you, Ialeka? Maybe she is in your blood al-ready," Leonaka said quietly. "Maybe she is the womanyou must have to be happy."

"That's ridiculous," Jared replied adamantly. "But evenif it were true, she wants no part of me. She proved that well enough today."

"Perhaps you gave her cause? You have a violent temper," Leonaka pointed out. "I know this. Does your wifeknow it too?"

Jared's eyes grew mournful as he remembered how ter-rified Corinne had been the night he struck her. Was thatwhy she had left at the first opportunity? Was she stillfrightened of him? But no, a woman terrified of her hus-band .could not put on a performance of such willingcompliance and keep it up for a couple of days.

"Corinne has seen my temper and she has one to match it."

"Ialeka," Leonaka began earnestly, "if you want her, go after her. She is your woman. I think you love her, and— I only met her once, but isn't that your wife?"

Jared turned quickly and stood up as Corinne approachedthem. Elation hit him first, but the old anger and bitternesssoon took over.

"Did you forget something?" he asked sardonically. Hewas taken completely by surprise by the stinging slap shedealt him.

"By God, you had better have a good explanation forthat," he growled menacingly.

Corrine was exhausted from running, but she found hervoice. "Explanation? I hate you—that's explanationenough! But if you want more, there's the little fact thatyou abandoned me to that horrible man next door."

"You went to him for help."

"You fool!" She cut him short. "Didn't it occur to youto doubt the word of a-man who had made you an unsavoryproposition? I know what he told you and it was nothing but lies!"

"So you say," Jared replied and turned away from herin disgust.

Corinne grabbed his arm and managed to stop him."Don't you dare walk away from me!" she shouted at him.I've spent the afternoon locked in a damp, dirty storageshed, thinking all the time that Pierce was a madman andwas going to kill me. I worked my hands raw trying to getout of there, but I couldn't."

"Is that the best story you could come up with, Co-rinne?" Jared asked with heavy sarcasm. "What reallyhappened? Did Pierce refuse to help you after I turneddown his offer?"

"Oh!" She grabbed her skirt and started to the house, but stopped again and swung around to face him. "I didn'task John Pierce to take me away from you, Jared." She marvelled at the way she was able to bring her voice under control. "When I met him on the beach, he said he hadpuppies to give away. Thinking of Michael, I went with himto pick one out. Once I was in the shed where the puppies were supposed to be, he slammed the door shut on me. I didn't find out why until he let me out."

"And you expect me to believe that?"

She clenched her fists. "I don't care. But since I know Pierce lied to you, I want to know if he lied to me as well. He told me that your land meant more to you than I did, that you didn't want me back. Is that so?"

"Yes, that's what I told him." Bitterness kept him from explaining why he had said so.

A long silence fell while Corinne fought to swallow thepainful lump in her throat. She had hoped it wasn't true. Pierce had lied to Jared, why couldn't he have lied to hertoo? But he hadn't. "I see," she said evenly. "In that case, you may arrange for someone to take me back to the citytomorrow."

Jared watched Corinne walk away, and heard the patio door open and close. He stood there silently, fighting hisown emotions.

"What if she was telling the truth?"

"She wasn't," Jared replied gruffly.

"But what if she was?" J^eonaka persisted, forcing Jared to listen. "It would mean that she had the chance to askPierce to take her away, but she didn't ask. It would meanshe didn't really want to leave."

Jared turned abruptly and walked off down the beach. His friend watched him go.

It was late. Corinne sat in Florence's room on the narrow bed, while Florence worked her needle on the

splinters in Corinne's hands. She had told Florence the whole story while she fed Michael. He was sleeping now. Florence had already agreed to give up her room for the night, sayingthat she would use Naneki's room, which was empty.

"Law, will you look at the size of these blisters," Flor-ence clucked.

"Just drain them and get it over with," Corinne saidtiredly.

She felt depleted of strength and sick with resignation. Akela had brought her a large meal, but she couldn't eat. Her stomach churned. She would be going back to the city,then back to Boston. Wasn't that what she wanted? The answer didn't come readily. It didn't come at all.

"I just don't understand Jared," Florence remarkedangrily. "You mean to say he still didn't believe you, even after he saw the condition of your hands?"

"He didn't see them, Florence. But even if he didbelieve me, it wouldn't make any real difference. He ad-mitted that he didn't want me back."

"That was probably just his pride talking," Florencereasoned.

The door opened without warning and they both turned.Jared stood in the doorway, his hand still on the door-knob. He didn't say anything, but just stared at Corinnewith an inscrutable expression.

Florence broke the silence first, her tone indignant. "Nowlook, Mr. Burkett. It's not seemly, you coming into alady's room without knocking. And you've got no businessin this room a'tall."

"Fd like to speak to my wife privately, Mrs. Merrill. Would you please leave us for a few minutes?"

He had just come in from the beach, after spending hourstrying to sort out his feelings. He was certain of only one thing. He wasn't ready to let Corinne go.

"You stay right where you are, Florence," Corinne saidwhile she kept her eyes on her husband. "I have nothingmore to say to you, Jared. And the only thing I want to hear from you is what time I should be ready to leave in themorning."

"You're not going anywhere—not yet, anyway," Jaredreplied in a quiet tone. "That's what I want to talk to youabout."

Corinne was incredulous. "You mean you're not going totake me back?"

"No."

"Why?"

"Because I said so," he replied childishly.

"Why?" she demanded again.

"Never mind why, damnit!"

Michael started crying and Corinne rushed to him. "Yousee what you've done with your shouting?" She

glared athim furiously.

"You shouted first," he reminded her. He took a fewsteps into the room. "Leave him to his mother, Corinne.We're not finished yet."

"Oh yes we are," she replied, turning her back on Mmand soothing Michael against her breast

"You had best leave now, Mr. Burkett," Florence statedfirmly, standing solidly between husband and wife. "Coriwill be sleeping here tonight. That's her own choice, andI will thank you to respect her wishes."

"And I would adviseyou not to interfere," Jared toldthe older woman sharply.-

Florence didn't back down. "After the deplorable wayyou have treated my Cori today, I'm not about to turn aside and let you abuse her further. What she told youwas the truth."

"Mrs. Merrill, you would undoubtedly believe anythingshe told you," he replied coolly.

"You insult my intelligence, sir, and you seem to be lack-ing any of your own," Florence said stiffly. She heard Co-rinne's gasp at the impertinence, but she continued any-way. "You were nothing short of a fool to doubt Cori'sword when the truth was right there in her hands. I re-moved nine splinters, Mr. Burkett, and there are also fiveblisters. You can see for yourself. Tell me how her hands could have come to that condition if not in the way sheclaimed?"

Jared was no longer looking at Florence, but at Corinne,who stood fa.dn%Iwsxl «%ais., MfchasH \&. bat arms- Hk ev,e&narrowed as he brushed passed Florence and strode overto Corinne.

"Let me see your hands."

"No."

He didn't ask again but grabbed one hand and turnedit palm up. There were cuts and abrasions and two of theblisters Florence had mentioned. A grimace passed overJared's features and deepened when Corinne yanked herhand away. He looked up at her slowly and met her fierygreen eyes.

"Corinne, I'm--"

"Don't you dare say you're sorry! Don't you dare! It'stoo late for that." Michael started crying again. "Will youleave now, Jared? Just leave me alone!"

Jared turned quickly and left. This was not the timeto make amends. Outside the room he stopped, his shoul-ders slumping. Would she ever forgive him for doubtingher, for saying he didn't want her back when that wasn'tthe truth at all? How could he have let things get so messed up? Would they never believe each other aboutanything?

Chapter 36

CORINNE settled back in a wicker chair. Michael wason a large rug in the center of the patio where shecould keep an eye on him. A tiny brown puppy was sniffing around him and making the baby squeal with delight.

The pup had been an unexpected surprise. He was just amongrel, or poi pup, as the Hawaiians called dogs of mixed breed. But he was darling, with floppy ears and ashort tail that never stopped wagging. Jared had foundhim for Michael, or so Akela had said.

Corinne hadn't seen Jared. He had been gone all morn-ing, returning with the present. It was his way of makingamends, she supposed, his way of letting her know he wassorry for not believing her story. But it was too late forthat. Her heart was hard once more, tightly sealed so he couldn't hurt her.

Voices from the kitchen drifted out the open window to the patio. Florence was there, helping Akela make tarohiscuits. Florence's curiosity about the islands was never- quenched. She was constantly grilling Akela with questions. Corinne listened with only half an ear to the history lessonin progress.

"There were maybe sixteen Kahunas in old days beforemissionaries come."

"But I thought you said the *Kahunas* were like priests, and every community had one," Florence interrupted.

"Yes, they were *Kahunas* who spoke with gods. I talking now about other *Kahunas*, men who knew history, othermen who read stars and tell future. Have *Kahunas* for heal-ing and magic. All things important rested in hands of these wise men."

"And to think you were called savages," Florencelaughed. "It sounds rather civilized to me. It must have been very peaceful back then."

"Was good life, but not so peaceful. We have many wars, just like rest of world."

"There, you see! You reallywere civilized."

Corinne could imagine Akela grinning. "With each newking, lands were given to favorite chiefs of new ruler. This uproot the old chiefs and sometimes make civil war. Bad thing, civil war. Kalaniopuu, the old king who ruledwhen Cook came to islands, was king because of such awar—when the rightful heir, Keaweopala, was murdered."

Corinne shut out the voices when she saw Leonaka crossing the backyard, coming up from the beach. Hedropped the long board he was carrying and came into thepatio. He wore only shorts, and these were wet. He smiledwhen he saw Corinne.

"We meet again."

"Yes, it looks that way, doesn't it?" Corinne returned hissmile. "How are you?"

"Enjoying my vacation while it lasts." His eyes weredrawn to Michael on the floor and he came over to him and squatted down for a better look. "So this is the baby." Corinne watched as the giant young man scrutinized her son. Leonaka put out one long finger and Michael latched onto it and giggled as he tried to shake it.

"When are you going to tell your husband the truthabout this little fellow?"

Corinne gasped and nearly jumped out of her chair. Leonaka saw her frown and stood up.

"I'm sorry. It's none of my business. I won't mention itagain. I came up here to ask if you would like to learnhow to surf."

He had dropped the subject of Michael as quickly ashe'd brought it up, and Corinne let it go at that. She silently cursed Akela and wondered who else she had told.

"It's nice of you to ask, Mr. Naihe, but I must decline." There was a slight note of stiffness in her voice.

"We're going to be friends, so you call me Leo. And youcan't come to Hawaii without getting your feet wet at least once."

"No, I couldn't."

He frowned. "I suppose you never learned to swim, livingin a cold city?"

"As a matter of fact, Fm a good swimmer," Corinne an-swered, and a smile came to her lips. "I learned when I was child and went with my father to the shipyard. When he was busy with the workers, I went out into the street and found other children to play with. At first they were shybecause my father owned the shipyard, but after a whilethey taught me all their games. We used to swim under the docks—Florence never could understand why my hair was damp when I got home, because I never told anyone. Theywould have stopped me. One of the kids, Johnny Bixler— he must have been about eleven—took me under his wing. I learned quite a lot from him."

Corinne suddenly laughed. Why on earth had she toldhim that? She hadn't thought about little Johnny Bixler fora long time. She used to wonder what had become of that,tough kid who had taught her to swim, swear, and use a knife during that one wild summer when the harbor became her fascination, and her playground.

Leonaka was grinning at her. "So you took up with agang of street toughs, huh?"

"Heavens, I was only ten. And it was only for one sum-mer. But you know, I never forgot the freedom I had thatyear. It was marvelous."

It was also what had made her determine to be inde-pendent all her life, Corinne reflected. But for some reason, that didn't seem too important anymore.

"Since you know how to swim, you have no excuse for not learning how to surf. The waves are good today," Leo-naka encouraged. "Jared and Malia are both surfing."

So that's where Jared was—out playing. Corinne felt her anger(rising. So he had dropped off the puppy, thinkingthat would pacify her, and had then gone off to surf with- out giving her another thought.

"Well?"

Oh, how she wished she could show Jared that it didn'tmatter to her, either, that they were at odds again.

"I'm afraid I don't have anything I could wear into the water."

"Nonsense," Leonaka scoffed. "My aunty can get you asarong from her sewing chest."

Corinne reddened at the thought. She shook her head."No."

Leonaka shrugged. "That's too bad. Jared said I wouldn'tbe able to get you into the water, but I thought you hadmore daring."

Corinne stood up instantly, never one to ignore a chal-lenge. "Please give me a few minutes to change. I wouldbe delighted if you would teach me how to surf."

Leonaka grinned as Corinne left the patio, callingFlorence to come watch the baby. Jared hadn't said any-thing to him about Corinne not wanting to swim. In fact,he hadn't said more than two words all morning.

It was too bad about the trouble John Pierce had caused. But what better way to make a truce than for Jared tosee his beautiful wife in a wet sarong? Let desire bringhim to his senses and realize what Leonaka already knew— Jared wouldn't be complete without this woman.

Corinne blushed as she peered at herself in the mirrorover the dresser. With the sarong, she might as well notbe wearing anything at all. Her arms, shoulders and half her legs were bare. And the rest of her shapely curves wereoutlined in vivid detail.

"I just can't wear this, Akela."

"Why?"

"It—it shows too much."

Akela shook her head with humor. "You see Malia wearsame thing. Allwdhine wear that to swim," she chuckled. "Even me. This not Boston, Kolina. You stay Hawaii, where we have fun."

Corinne grinned.

"Good thing you no wear breast wrapper no more," Akela was saying as she took Corinne's clothes to hang up." Or the sarong no stay up so good."

Corinne swung around with rounded eyes. "I don't wear any such thing!" she snapped, wondering at the same time how on earth Akela knew.

It was true. She didn't have to wear the binder anymore. She still had ample milk for Michael, but it was under con-trol now and her breasts didn't leak.

"Why you no tell Ialeka the truth, Kolina?" Akela askedreproachfully. "I see where your friend put the breastwrapper after she wash clothes. She put them in your room,not hers. I could show Ialeka, but I keep quiet. You haveto tell him."

Corinne bit her lip. Deciding to trust the other woman, she said, "Don't you see? Jared is better off not knowing. I'm going back to Boston eventually, with Michael. Jaredwill never see either of us again."

"You wrong, Kolina. Ialeka not let you go. And oneday he will know you lie about Mikaele and he be

plentymad. Mo'Better you tell him now."

"I swear there's just no point in talking to you!" Corinnesaid in exasperation.

She picked up a towel and left her bedroom. The womanwas impossible. Would she never give up?

Leonaka was waiting for her in the back yard. Corinneput Akela from her mind and decided to enjoy herself. Riding the waves would certainly be something to tell her friends about back home.

Jared and Malia were both still in the water. Corinnekept her eyes averted from her husband as she listened to Leonaka explain what she had to do.

"Perhaps you should watch for a while first," Leonakasuggested, wondering now if he hadn't been a bit hasty in pushing Corinne into it. The sport wasn't without risk.

She shook her head adamantly, her long golden hairfloating about her waist. "Let's go."

It took Corinne about an hour to get the knack. Shewas afraid at first that she might have forgotten how toswim after so many years, but that came back. And ridingthe waves on a sleek long board seemed easy too, with Leonaka behind her calling out support and instructions. Jared had left the water and was sitting on the beach watch-ing her progress. That made her determined to master the sport. She would show him what she could do.

"I'm ready to try it alone."

They were far from shore, each treading water and hold-ing onto the board.

"Are you sure, Kolina?" When she nodded, he added, "Ride the first few waves lying prone until you get used to the board."

"I will, teacher," she grinned and climbed on top of theflat board.

Malia was only a few feet away, sitting confidently onher board. She caught a big wave and rode it expertly toshore.

Corinne gritted her teeth, scowling. Damnation! Maliawas showing off!

"Don't mind Malia," Leonafca was saying. "You will surfas good as her soon."

I will do it now, Corinne vowed to herself. She wavedto Leonaka as her board started moving toward shore. Shehelped it along, paddling with her arms on each side offit, gaining speed. Finally she felt it was time, and inchedherself very slowly to a crouched position. Slowly, shestraightened her legs with one foot forward as Leonaka had shown her.

She made it! Her spirits soared. She was riding the waves, just as the ancient Hawaiians had done, as well as Jaredand Malia. But Corinne's triumph was short-lived. Herbalance deserted her and she tumbled sideways, plunging into the surf. Then just as she broke the surface, sputteringand coughing, another huge wave rolled in from the sea, crashing down upon her. The current pushed her towardthe shore, scraping her along the ocean bottom in the pro-cess.

Corinne fought to reach the surface again, but she wastangled in her own hair and in seaweed. Stronger

currentskept pushing her down, until her lungs were on fire. Just when she couldn't stand it anymore, strong hands yankedher to the surface and she was crushed against a hardchest and lifted out of the water. She coughed spasmodical-ly, gulping air. Her eyes burned from the salty water and she kept them closed as tears mixed with salt. Her wholeleft side was on fire.

"You crazy fool! What the hell were you trying to do?"

Jared! So he had saved her.

Jared didn't put her down on the beach, but carried her.all the way to the house. Corinne managed to wipe her eyeswith one hand so she could see, and as soon as Jared entered the patio she protested.

"Put me down, Jared, this second! There is nothingwrong with my legs."

He didn't answer.

She started to squirm, but Akela and Florence rushedout of the kitchen to demand what had happened. Jaredexplained as he passed them, and Corinne's pride was doub-ly crushed. What a fool she had made of herself!

Jared laid her down on his bed, then stood back andlooked at her. "Are you all right?"

"Of course I'm all right!" she cried. "You didn't haveto carry me all the way up here."

Akela came into the room then with a jar of ointmentand Jared took it from her. "Ill do it."

"What's that for?" Corinne demanded and started to situp, but moaned and eased herself back down slowly.

When Jared lifted her left arm she grimaced, seeing the red welts all over it. Her left leg, too, was bright red. Andher cheek was burning.

"You took a pretty bad scraping, but this mixture will take the sting away and the red should be gone in a fewdays. If you didn't have that sunburn, it wouldn't be so bad. You're too fair to stay in the sun that long, especially inthe water, where the reflection is intensified."

He was right, of course. The rest of her body was justas red, though without abrasion on the right side.

"I can do that," Corinne said as he sat down on the bedand started to rub the ointment on her arm.

But Jared held the jar out of her reach. "Would youjust be still and let me take care of you."

Corinne leaned back and closed her eyes, grudgingly let-ting him have his way. His fingers were gentle as they mas-saged the ointment into her arms and legs. She suddenlyfelt very sensual. His every touch was a caress that tookaway not only the pain, but her anger as well.

He turned her over. She sighed. But when she felt hersarong being loosened, she tensed.

"What are you doing?" Corinne demanded, the moodbroken now.

"You'll catch cold if you stay in that thing much longer," Jared explained, and there was humor in his tone

whenhe added, "Not that you don't look adorable in it."

She looked around and caught him grinning. "I can un-dress myself, thank you."

Jared shrugged and stood up. "I was only trying to help, Corinne."

"I can well imagine what you were trying to do," she an-swered tartly.

"Would that be so terrible?"

She caught her breath. Did he really think yesterdaydidn't matter?

"Making love is not going to make everything all right.Last time was different, Jared. I thought you cared then,but now I know you don't."

"If I didn't want you, I would have let you go home along time ago. Don't you see that?"

"Wanting and loving are not the same."

"What do you want from me?" he shouted. "I only said what I did. to Pierce because he told me that you couldn't stand living with me any more. I didn't mean it, Corinne."

Corinne stared at him with wide eyes. What had Flor-ence said? "It was only his hurt pride talking." Was thatso? *Don't believe him*, a tiny voice whispered. *He'll only* hurt you again.

"Why should I believe anything you say, Jared?" Co-rinne asked softly. "You didn't believe me when I told youI hadn't really slept with other men. Don't ask me to be-lieve you when you wont believe anything I say."

"Corinne, I'm sorry. What more can I say?"

She got up, crossed to the bathroom, and closed the dooron him. With the click of the lock tears sprang to her eyes. It would have been so easy to forgive him, to make loveand call a truce again. But she never again wanted him to hurt her. She had been hurt too much."

"So why does itstill hurt?" she whispered brokenly.

Chapter 37

IT was an absolutely beautiful morning. The sea, deepblue and shimmering, formed a perfect background forthe flowers in every imaginable color. The sun was warm and welcome, not hot as it would be later. Even so, Co-rinne wore a wide straw hat over her golden curls as shestrolled through the fragrant garden. She was wary of thesun now, after getting burned so easily. Her skin had turnedbrown and then peeled a few days ago. But it was smooth again now, and she had a light golden tan.

Corinne stopped by a gardenia bush and picked a fat, velvety white bloom to place in her hair. She smiled, think-ing of the bouquets of gardenias that Jared had broughtto her room each day.

Corinne was finding it very difficult to stay angry withJared. He was so generous and considerate. He didn't push her or even make any overtures, but he was obviously try-ing to make amends.

"Kolina!"

Corinne looked toward the road and saw Leonaka stand-ing between two of the coconut palms, waving at her. Then he shook one of the trunks until a coconut felt. She laughedas he jumped out of the way, then scooped up the fallen coconut and brought it to her.

"For thekeiki," he grinned.

"And how is he supposed to eat that with only two teeth?" She laughed, her green eyes sparkling.

"Just tell Aunty to make a coconut pudding. I guaranteehe will love it."

"Thank you," Corinne said, and took the heavy fruitto cradle in her arms. "Are you looking for Jared?"

"No, I spoke with him last night. I came to get myhorse and say good-bye to you."

"Your vacation certainly went by quickly. Well missyou."

"You'll have to tell Jared tor finish your surfing lessons,"Leonaka suggested.

"Well, I don't know ..." she began.

"He will be glad to," the big Hawaiian assured her. "Hewas put out about my having you out on my board. Hethought you should have been*on his."

"Did he say that?"

"He didn't have to." Leonaka and Corinne started to-ward the stable. "I know Jared. I know his moods and I know what he feels even before he, as stubborn as he is,realizes it." Softer, he added, "I know thathe loves you, Kolina."

Elation hit Corinne, but she forced it away from her. This was only Leonaka stating his opinion. She knewbetter.

"It's nice of you to say so," Corinne said quietly.

Leonaka smiled knowingly and bent to kiss her on thecheek. "You will hear him say it one day, and then you will have no doubts. *Aloha, Kolvaa*. Be happy."

He disappeared into the stable. She stood for a moment, looking after him, then turned slowly toward the house. Jared met her at the door.

"So there you are!"

"Were you looking for me?"

"Yes. Here, give me that." He took the coconut fromher. "I thought you might like to go on a picnic.

You'vebeen past Waimea Bay, but you haven't seen the valley. Some of the most beautiful plants on the island are there."

"How far is it?"

"Far enough that we'll have to ride."

She smiled. "I would love to go, and I'm sure Florencewill, too. How soon would you like to leave?"

"Hold on. I meant just the two of us."

"Why?"

"I wanted to be alone with you for a while," he saidsoftly.

Corinne slowly shook her head, her eyes locked withhis. It was too soon. She simply didn't want to be alonewith him yet. "I don't think so, Jared."

"You mean you won't go unless you're chaperoned?"

She nodded and he sighed. "Then by all means, invite thewhole household. We'll leave as soon as everyone is ready."

Waimea Valley was breathtakingly lovely and like noth-ing Corinne had ever seen. The entrance to the valley wasbordered by high rocky cliffs, with huge banyan and otherlush trees fronting the cliffs. A little way into the valleywas a creek. Corinne and Jared, on horseback, rode besidethe creek, while Akela, Florence, and Michael rode in theopen carriage. Malia had rudely refused to come, but thatdidn't dampen Corinne's spirits. She was determined toenjoy the outing.

Jared had been right about the beauty of the plants. There was quite a variety of trees, short and tall, sandal-wood, kukui nut, and the giant monkey pod, not to mention mango, guava, papaya, and breadfruit. But the flowers out-shone everything. Every color was there. From the bright orange-yellow of the kalamona shrubs to the exotic purpleginger plant, the valley looked like a painting.

They rode only as far as the carriage could go, and thenAkela unloaded a large basket she had filled with food. Jared started a fire to roast a chicken and yams. Then hesettled back under a banyan tree to watch the women cook. Akela had included her delicious taro hiscuits and a banana pie she had made for lunch. Corinne poured lemonade from big jug for everyone, then announced that she would take the job of keeping Michael out of mischief. He wasn't crawling yet, but the little devil certainly managed to getaround and into things. Everything that found its way into his little hands went straight into his mouth. Corinne al-most screamed when she saw he had found a dead cricket.

Jared couldn't help laughing as he watched Corinne try to get the insect out of Michael's fist without actually touch-ing it herself. She finally succeeded, then put the boy onher lap and cuddled him.

Jared sobered, seeing how natural she looked with thechild. The baby didn't mean anything to him, so he hadnever really paid much attention to him. But Michael cer-tainly meant a lot to Corrine. She fussed over him morethan Michael's own mother did. And it was absurd that the baby was sleeping in the same room with Corinne. He had wondered why Florence didn't move the child in with her.Granted, Naneki's room was small, but still...

Akela motioned Corinne over to the fire and she tookMichael with her, unwilling to put him down again afterthe incident with the insect.

Jared sat up impulsively and called, "Bring him overhere, Corinne."

She turned around very slowly and stared. She didn't move, but held the boy against her breast.

Jared's brow furrowed. "For God's sake, I won't hurthim."

Very slowly, Corinne walked to him and then reluctantlyhanded Michael over. She stood before Jared for severalseconds before finally walking away. Every few steps, she peeked over her shoulder at him.

Michael squirmed in his lap and Jared laughed. "Youmust be mighty special, little fella, to have my wife wrapped around your little finger. What's your secret?"

Michael seemed surprised by the deep voice and lookedup at the man who was talking. Jared sucked in his breathas he looked at Michael's eyes. They were bright lime green, exactly the color of Corinne's eyes. Why hadn't he noticedthe eyes before?

The more he looked at Michael, the more thoughtscrowded in on him. He could see now why Akela was sosure the baby was Corinne's. It was the eyes. Obviously, Florence's husband had had green eyes. It was an unusual shade, but hardly rare.

Jared was satisfied with that conclusion. To reassurehimself, he- considered the child's age. He would be sixmonths now, even though he looked small. Five months?

Jared quickly calculated and his eyes darkened to asmoky gray. If the child were really only five months old,he could have been conceived on the night they'd been inthe gambling house. But if that were so, it would mean Co- rinne had left for Hawaii almost immediately after the child was born. The baby would have been too young to travel.

Angrily, Jared. shook the suspicions from his mind. Hechided himself. Corinne would not lie to him about hisown child.

Michael was climbing up Jared's wide chest. Face to face,he warily reached out and touched Jared's cheek, thengiggled. The sound was infectious and soon the baby set-tled down and confidently laid his head on Jared's shoulder. Jared was touched more than he cared to admit. God, what he wouldn't give to have such a son! Those eyes haunted him. And the black hair, just like his own. He quickly resolved to write to the one person who could layhis doubts to rest. He hated to ask the man for anything, but Samuel Barrows would know if his daughter had had ababy. It would take at least two months to receive an an-swer, but that would give him an excuse to keep Corinnea little longer. For now, he would forget about it. It would do him no good to brood about it.

"Come on, I've got something I want to show you."

Jared's voice brought Corinne's eyes open. She had beenlying in the shade, listening to all the different bird songs around her. She sat up now and stared up at Jared. "What?"

A smile curled his lips. "If I told you, then it wouldn't be a surprise. Come on, I gave Michael to his mother and told the others we would be back later."

"I don't really care for surprises, Jared," Corinne saidhesitantly.

"You'll like this one. Come on." He offered his hand and pulled her up.

"Where is it?"

"A little way up the valley. There's a trail, so we cantake the horses."

"We won't be gone long, will we?"

"No."

They set off, following the creek. It widened in places, and divided in others, joining again on its path to the bay. The cliffs weren't as high here, and the landscape wasmuch denser, like a jungle.

The farther they went, the more the valley narrowed and the louder the noises around them became. Therewere many more birds in this thicker part of the forest, and even the running creek sounded louder.

Suddenly Corinne saw why. The valley ended abruptly before them with a tall concave rock wall that formed an almost perfect curve. And right in the center was a breath-taking waterfall, at least forty feet high, that cascaded into a large green pool of sparkling water.

Jared had been watching her delighted reaction, and she

finally looked at him and smiled. "It's absolutely beautiful."

"I wish you could see it in the spring, when the royal

poinciana and orchid trees are in bloom. The ferns are even

greener then, too."

He helped her down from her mount and they walked over to a flat blanket of fine grass. Jared stood behind her, breathing in the fragrance of her hair.

"It's like an Eden here," Corinne remarked. "Yes, and just as private. Would you go for a swim witfcmer

Corinne shied away. "I couldn't."

"It's just the two of us, Kolina. Are you afraid I'll take advantage of you?"

Shewas afraid of that, but she wouldn't admit it. "Ididn't bring anything for swimming."

Jared grinned. "You didn't come prepared, but I did."He walked over to his horse and opened a satchel tied tothe saddle, pulling out the sarong Akela had given herfor surfing. "Will this appease your modesty?"

"You had this all planned, didn't you?" Corinne saidwith amusement.

He tossed the sarong at her. "I knew you'd enjoy a swim. And I promise not to peek while you change."

Corinne stood behind her horse to disrobe. It was just hot enough to make the round pool look inviting.

With her sarong tied in place, her clothes thrown overthe back of her horse, Corinne jumped into the water, notwaiting for Jared. He had gone off to cut some vines andwas surprised to hear her splash. She surfaced quickly and glared at him. "Did you know this water was like ice?" He chuckled. "It usually is." "Why didn't you warn me?"

He was taking off his shirt. "You might have changedyour mind. But it's not so bad once you've dunked your-self completely."

"I suppose so," she conceded grudgingly. After swimminga bit and warming up, she moved closer to the edge of the pond. Jared was just stepping out of his pants, revealing shorts beneath. She grinned mischievously. His attention was on what he was doing, so the splash she sent his way caught him by surprise.

"Hey!"

Corinne squealed with laughter and immediately set offwith quick strokes for the opposite side of the pool. She heard him enter the water and turned around to see him coming straight for hen He was a much better swimmer, with years of practice in the ocean, and before long he grabbed her foot.

"So you want to play, eh?"

He had both her feet now, and turned her over on herback, making it difficult for her to stay afloat.

"Jared, let me go." She couldn't help but giggle. "I just couldn't resist doing that."

"Well, I can't resist doing this."

And he raised her feet until her head submerged. Then he let go of her, and when she broke to the surface, she sawthat he was swimming rapidly away from her.

"Coward!" she called after him. They were acting likechildren and she enjoyed it thoroughly.

Jared swam toward the falls. He climbed up on the rockyledge beside it and sat down. He motioned for her to join him, but she shook her head, floating in the center of thepool, watching him.

"Can you dive?" he shouted, but she shook her headagain. "Want to give it a try?"

"No, thank you," she shouted back.

Jared stood up and faced the solid rock wall. The cliffslanted upward. Corinne watched in amazement as hestarted to climb up beside the roaring falls.

After he had gone about ten feet Corinne becamealarmed. "Just what do you think you're doing?" she shouted. He didn't answer. "Jared?" Still he said nothingand continued on his way. "You fool, you're going to get hurt!"

He turned then and boyishly threw her a kiss, thencontinued his climb. Finally reaching the top, he stood arrogantly right in the center of the falls. And then hespread his arms and propelled himself away from the tumbling water, diving gracefully, beautifully, into the pool.But he didn't surface, and Corinne became frantic as theseconds passed. She didn't know how deep the pool was.He might have hit his head on

something.

When his hands grabbed her waist and pulled her underthe water she wanted to scream. They surfaced together andshe quickly wiped the water from her eyes and glared athim.

"That was stupid! Absolutely childish!" Corinne snapped, her heart still racing. "You could have been killed!"

Jared grinned, still holding on to her waist. "You were really frightened for me, weren't you?"

"Of course—" Then she caught herself. She refused toadmit it. "—not."

"That wasn't the answer I wanted to hear."

He dunked her again and she came up sputtering and grasped his neck.

"So it takes torture to get you in my arms, eh?" Jaredchuckled.

She wriggled until she was at arm's length, then broughther feet up, planted them against his stomach, and pushed away from him. She knew she hadn't hurt him. He was toofirmly built. But she did reach the edge of the pool before he could catch up to her.

She climbed out, ready to quit while she was ahead. Jared let her go, swimming by himself while she lay inthe grass and let die sun dry her off.

The day had turned out to be quite enjoyable, more than Corinne would have guessed. Were it not for those fewagonizing moments at the picnic, it would have been per-fect. God, how terrified she had been when Jared had asked for Michael! It was the first time he had showed an interestin the boy. What if he had seen what Akela saw? But ap-parently he hadn't noticed the resemblance.

And Michael had actually been reluctant to leave Jared. It almost broke her heart to see how naturally they took toeach oher. Oh, why couldn't it have been different? She could have had a blissful life with Jared. She really lovedbeing with him when he was the way he had been today. And she loved his lovemaking. She could not deny thatto herself anymore.

But it really was hopeless, she knew that. There was just too much between them, too many things that neither couldforgive in the other.

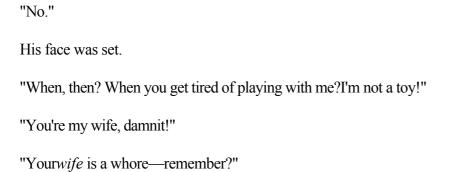
She lay there musing wistfully, and didn't hear Jaredmove quietly out of the water and come to sit beside her. He took her hand, slowly and tenderly.

"We've had a truce today, you and I. Haven't we, Ko-lina?"

"What good is another truce?" she sighed, near tears."You know we can't stay together. You've said you'll never forgive me, Jared, and I'm tired of trying to convince youof my innocence."

"Don't bring that up again, Corinne."

"You see? You're too pig-headed to even listen to myside. I want you to let me go, Jared. There's no reason for us to remain together anymore."



She watched his eyes turn slate-gray and instantly re-gretted her taunt. He reached out and grabbed her shoul-ders.

"Yes, I remember. It eats away at me every single dayof my life." He stared hard into her face for a second, then abruptly released her and stood up.

"There was a time—" He would not let himself dwellon their wedding night. "—when we were able to enjoy eachother even though there was anger between us. Why can'twe enjoy each other any more? Why do we always haveto reopen old wounds?"

"Everything's different now," she said brokenly.

"Since when?"

"Since—"

Oh, God! Since I fell in love with you!

She turned her face away from him and finally allowed the tears to fall. She sobbed openly. She loved him. Butshe couldn't tell him. Never, never would he know he had that much power over her.

"You didn't answer me, Corinne." He knelt beside heragain. "Why does it matter now?"

She stumbled to her feet and ran for her horse.

"Will you answer me?" Jared had come up behind her, but she wouldn't look at him.

"Stop being so damn childish." Anger was unmistakablein his voice.

She turned and met his eyes. "Will you allow me the privacy I need to get dressed?" Understanding that she wouldn't answer, Jared turned and left. Corinne quicklydressed and mounted her horse. She started back down thevalley without waiting for him. She no longer noticed the beauty all around her. Tears blinded her.

Jared was cruel without realizing it, arrogant, and much too proud. But didn't those used to be her own traits? Wasshe paying for her own sins? Sins she saw in the man sheloved?

She was still shocked by the sudden realization. She lovedJared, but that love could only make her miserable.

Chapter 38

THE next morning, after feeding Michael, Corinnedressed with particular care, choosing a frilly morning gown of soft yellow, which made her eyes seem almost golden. She tied her hair loosely with a matching ribbon. Yellow was one of her best colors.

Satisfied with her appearance, she went to the bassinet and kissed Michael, then went to the kitchen. Akela wasthere alone, shredding the coconut Leonaka had shakendown yesterday morning. She looked up and smiled.

Corinne came over to the table and asked casually, "Have you seen Jared?"

Akela looked back down at what she was doing. "Hegone, Kolina."

"Oh? Did he say what time he would be back?"

"He no be back today. Not tomorrow either, I think.Don't know when."

Corinne felt her heart sinking. "Don't you know? Where did he go?"

"Back Honolulu."

Corinne's shoulders fell and she asked hesitantly, "Didhe say anything before he left, Akela? Did he leave mea message?"

Akela shook her head. "I sorry, Kolina."

"Not as sorry as I am," Corinne whispered. Shocked, sheleft the room. She moved through the day like a sleep-walker.

Jared entered his offices on King Street and went direct-ly to the safe next to his file cabinets. He withdrew twolong, slim boxes and one square box from his coat pocket. He put them in the safe and locked it. He had returned to the city too late yesterday to make the purchases, buthe had gone to his jewelers the first thing this morning.

In a long box were gleaming white pearls for his sister. Presents always cheered Malia, and her mood needed adrastic change. He was sure the pearls would improve Malia's disposition.

In the same way, he hoped to please Corinne. For herhe had been more extravagant in purchasing hundreds of the finest opals in long double strands.

Jared had also bought her a solid gold heart on whichhe had asked the jeweler to inscribe, /would marry youagain, and without regret. He knew what that meant. Would she understand the depth of his feelings? He prayed that she would, and that they could begin all over again. Was it possible?

There was an abrupt rap on the door and Jared lookedup to see Russell Drayton enter the room. Jared realized that he shouldn't be as surprised as he was. Why had heassumed Drayton would be long gone by now?

"So, you finally decided to show up again," Russell be-gan.

Jared was too amazed at the man's rudeness to speak for a moment, but at last he demanded, "What are you doinghere, Mr. Drayton?"

Russell was standing directly in front of his desk, glaringat him. "Corinne's been missing for a month and I finally figured out that you have her hidden somewhere—I want toknow where," Russell said, placing his fists on the deskand leaning forward. "And it's no use denying it. I want toknow where she is."

Jared smiled, but it wasn't a warm smile. "And you really expect me to tell you?"

"By God, you'd better, Burkett!" Russell shouted."You've ruined too many 6i my plans. I'm going to makesure you don't interfere again."

Jared was actually becoming amused. "Maybe you have forgotten that Corinne is my wife."

Russell sneered. "She can't stand you, Burkett. She'll thank me for making her a widow."

Too late, Jared saw the gun Russell pulled from his coatpocket. He expected to hear an explosion, but there wasn't one. He realized that Russell was planning on savoring histriumph.

"So you're not the spineless coward Samuel Barrowsthought you were, eh?"

"Hardly." Russell was glad for a chance to clear himself."That was the only kind of man Corinne would show aninterest in, so I played the role. She will meet the real me once we're married."

"If she'll marry you."

"Oh, she will. She may not love me, but I'll convince herthat she needs me. It's really too bad my aim was off when I shot at you at the church. It would have saved so muchtime if you had died then, and I would have had Corinne's money a long time ago. Speaking of money, I'll take what-ever you have here. The landlord came around a few days

Jared let his words sink in. The man was broke. He was also the scoundrel who had tried to kill him the day of his wedding. Jared cursed himself for passing that incident off as an accident, meant for someone else.

But right now he had to stall Russell and manage some-how to get the bottom drawer of his desk open. He kepthis own gun there and would feel a lot better with his handson it

"I'll have to disappoint you again. I'm afraid I don't have but a few dollars on me."

"Don't try that with me." Russell scowled. "There's al-ways money in a safe, and you have a large one right be-hind you. Open it."

"There's nothing there but business papers," Jared said calmly. He couldn't afford to leave his desk. "Contracts, account books, that sort of thing. No money."

"Show me, damnit!" Russell growled impatiently.

Jared got up and slowly opened the safe. Russell hadfollowed him around the desk and now motioned him to Open the safe door wide so he could see inside withoutgetting too close to Jared. There were the boxes Jared hadput in earlier, two stacks of business documents, and, onthe bottom shelf, two stacks of petty cash amounting toless than a hundred dollars.

"I thought so," Russell snarled. "Hand it over."

Jared took the money out, but he held onto it, stillkneeling, while he closed the safe.

"Being careful even though you're about to die?" Russellchuckled as he waited for Jared to straighten up. "Maybeyou don't think I mean business? But you'll see. Now Iwant to know where Corinne is."

"And why should I tell you, when you plan to murderme anyway?"

Russell grinned. "You're right, of course. No matter. She'll be back in the city as soon as she learns of yourdeath. Now hand over the money."

Jared extended his arm, and when Russell reached forthe money, he dove straight for Russell's feet, lifting themout from unSer him. The thinner man was stunned by the fall and that gave Jared time to yank the gun from his hand.

Jared stared at the weapon for several moments, itching to point it at Russell and fire. The urge was almost over-powering, but he fought it.

Russell watched Jared as he debated whether or not touse the gun. His eyes bulged with terror, his gut turnedsour. But finally Jared tossed the gun aside, grabbed Rus-sell by his coat, and pulled him up. He drove a ramrod fist against Russell's nose, knocking him down again. Russell scrambled to his feet, realizing the man had decided to killhim with his bare hands. His nose was broken, and he didn't duck quickly enough to escape the next blow. He felthis jaw snap, and then a fist slammed into his middle and ribs cracked.

He moaned as he tried to get up, stumbled, landed onhis face, then tried again. Finally Russell was on his feet, but two viselike hands were around his throat, and though he fought with all his might to break the hold, he couldn't. Lights shot through his eyes and oddly, he thought of Godjust before he died.

But he wasn't dead. He was in a broken heap on thefloor and a giant stood over him with a rope in his hands.

"I'm not going to kill you, Drayton, but I will if I ever see your face again."

His wrists and feet were bound and through a mist ofpain he still heard that cold, merciless voice. "I will giveyou a free ride to the docks, where you will be dumped onwhatever ship is leaving first. You can work off your pas-sage, cause I'm not feeling that generous."

Russell was picked up and thrown over Jared's shoulder, then taken out of the office and dumped in a carriage. Icygray eyes bore into his.

"Consider yourself lucky today, Drayton—I really wantedto kill you." And then, "Don't ever come back. The mo-ment you set foot on this island I'll know it and you'll bea dead man."

The carriage took off. Russell believed the threat. Hewouldn't be back, not ever. He wanted Corinne's

moneyand had expected to get it for quite some time. But no fortune was worth that kind of risk.

Naneld returned to Jared's north shore house, fully in-tending to remain there. Florence had to leave Naneki's room and return to her own, which forced Corinne backinto Jared's. Naneki did not like Corinne's presence in Jared's room, not one bit.

Corinne assumed that Jared had sent for his mistress. Itwasn't improbable. He had probably given up on Corinneafter their last encounter at the waterfall, and wanted hismistress to warm his cold bed.

Naneki fell into a routine, spending time with Akela in the kitchen. But most of her time was spent with Jared'ssister. The two became inseparable, and Malia acquired anew, superior attitude.

Then strange things happened that Corinne couldn'tmanage to ignore. Food occasionally made her sick, whileno one else was affected. She couldn't help but wonder about that. And then one evening, when she returned toJared's bedroom, she found a large centipede crawling out from under the bed. The size and ugliness of the poisonouscreature made her scream and run from the room.

Fortunately, Michael was still with Florence. Akelacame running in with a broom and killed the creature, and at Corinne's insistence, searched the room. There were threeothers, one in Corinne's bed. Corinne didn't sleep that night.

She might not have questioned one centipede, for Akelasaid they did sometimes sneak into the house. But four?And all in her room?

It took a long' time before Gorinne could enter her roomwithout going over it thoroughly.

Time passed and she grew even more miserable. Whydidn't Jared send her a message? But there was no wordfrom Jared. It was as if he had forgotten all about her and his north shore home. What was keeping him in Honolulu?

Chapter 39

Corinne had become quite good at surfing. She had gotten into the habit of going out every morningwhen the waves were reasonably high, and going back to the house as soon as Malia and Naneki brought their boardsinto the water.

She had begun to openly dislike Malia, though she real-ized it was Naneki's influence that had turned Jared's sisterinto a shrew.

One bright, clear morning Florence brought Michael out to watch his mother surf. Corinne smiled at him sitting on the beach, slapping at the sand. He was over six months oldalready, and so adorably chubby. Michael was the light of her life.

She was writing again to her father, but she had yet toreceive any mail from him, and knew it would be morethan a month before she could expect any. She had toldhim about her dilemma. She'd mentioned nothing aboutbeing a prisoner, for she knew her father would come to rescue her if he knew that. But she told him that she hadfallen in love with her husband. He was, after all, her parent. Could he help her?

Probably not.

Lost in her thoughts, Corinne had not noticed whenMalia and Naneki entered the water. But their giggling beside her drew her attention and she grimaced. She lookedto the beach and saw that Florence was still there with Michael. Noelani had joined them. That was one suspicionCorinne no longer harbored. Akela had assured her thatthe little girl was not Jared's daughter. She told Corinne about her daughter's husband, Peni. It was sad that the girlhad lost her husband after so short a time, but her wanting Jared made it hard for Corinne to sympathize for long.

She waved to Florence and started paddling to shore.

Through the corner of her eye, she saw that Malia was go-ing to catch the same wave. Corinne didn't pull back. Shehad a nagging suspicion, but she was fed up with Malia's pranks.

The two stood up at about the same time, but then Maliastarted crowding her, cutting purposefully toward Corinne'sboard. When the two boards hit, Corinne lost her balance and tumbled to the right. The surf took her straight down and then something struck her from behind and she was no longer aware of the ocean, the sun, and the sand.

Someone was crying. It sounded so pitiful. Not the sobsof a child, but a young woman crying. Who? Corinnestarted to open her eyes, but a stabbing pain shot throughher head and she clamped her eyes shut against it. The painthrobbed viciously. She thought surely she would faint, butshe didn't. Through a haze she still heard the sobbing, andnow voices that she recognized.

"I've never seen anything so surprising as the way thosetwo surfboards collided." That was Florence.

"Which boards?" Corinne recognized Akela's deep voice.

"Why, Cori's and Malia's," Florence answered. "Whenthe boards hit, Cori fell off to the side and Malia tumbledbackwards, away from the large wave they were riding. And then one of the boards shot straight up in the air and, God! I was terrified when I saw it coming down right where Cori had fallen. When I didn't see her come up, I startedright in after her, but it was Malia who pulled her to the surface. She probably saved Cori's life."

"I—I didn't mean for her to get hurt," Malia sobbed.

"Of course not, dear," Florence soothed her. "It was an accident."

"I wonder!" Akela growled darkly.

Corinne was so surprised by the anger in Akelals voicethat she managed to open her eyes a little. The two olderwomen were standing at the left of her bed, facing Malia, who stood on the right, sobbing, with her head in herhands. Akela pointed an accusing finger at the girl.

"You go too far this time, Malia! You make me shame, cause I raise you. But you no learn right from Aunty!"

"What are you saying, Akela?" Florence whispered, shocked.

"Not accident. Malia not have accident in water. She rideboard all her life."

"I didn't mean for her to get hurt!" Malia was cryinghysterically again. "I only meant to frighten her!"

"She maybe die, and why? Because you jealous of your brother."

"My God!" Florence gasped.

"And I think maybe this not first time, huh, Malia?" Akela went on, voicing Corinne's half-realized suspicions. "I no like believe you put those centipedes in Kolina's room. I say, no, my Malia not that bad. But I wrong!"

"Naneki said—there would be no danger." Malia triedto catch her breath. "That's why we found the largest oneswe could, so she would be sure to see them."

"Auwe!My own daughter help you? You both need the stick against your backside. This terrible thing!"

"We only wanted to scare her so she would leave!"

"She leave? Your brother the one keep her here."

"What?" * i

"You hear good, Malia! She want to go, but he no let her."

"But she is not good enough for Jared. She—"

"Malia, you blind just like Ialeka!" Akela snapped. "Canyou no see Kolina not bad?"

"That's right, Malia," Florence spoke up. "Cori was sofurious with your brother that she planned the wholecharade before we came to Hawaii. I told her not to do it, but she was very headstrong back then. It was all an elab-orate ruse to make people think—she was a—" Florencepaused, still unable to say the word. "—an immoralwoman."

"She took men to her room."

"Yes. She got them drunk, and then sent them home withpromises for the next time. But there were no next times because she never saw the same man twice. The only manshe's ever been with in—in that way—is your brother."

There was a silence and then Malia said weakly, "She told me, but I didn't believe her."

"Your brother wouldn't believe her either. That's thetragedy."

"Jared must actually love her then if he still wants tokeep her even when he thinks—"

Florence sighed. "I believe so, yes, but no one reallyknows what's in his mind."

"I'm so sorry." Malia started sobbing again.

"Mo'better you tell Kolina that," Akela said gruffly.

"I will. I didn't understand. And I never meant for herto get hurt."

"It's all right, Malia," Corinne whispered from the bed.

The three faces turned to her. "So you're awake?" Flor-ence said.

"So it seems."

"Don't try to get up. YouVe got a pretty mean bumpon the side of your head, but that seems to be the onlyinjury. You don't hurt anywhere else, do you?"

"No."

"I sent for doctor. He live Haleiwa, so be a while yet fore he come," Akela said.

"That wasn't necessary," Corinne protested.

"Of course it was. You gave us all quite a fright," Flor-ence said sternly. "I don't know if I'll let you do any more surfing."

"Don't be ridiculous. It was an unusual . . . accident." They all fell silent. Corinne looked at Malia. The girl was standing with her head lowered, afraid to face her. "Itreally is all right, Malia. I've been awake for quite a while and heard everything. And as far as I'm concerned, itwas an accident. We will forget it."

Malia looked up sheepishly. "I'm so sorry, Corinne."

"I know. Maybe we can be friends now."

Malia smiled faintly, then turned away and left beforeshe started crying again.

Akela started after her. Soon, Corinne turned to Flor-ence. "You have got to do something for me if the doctorsays I have to stay in bed a few days."

"Of course, dear."

"Tomorrow, get Akela to take you to the nearest store. There were a few stores in Wahiawa, remember? Or maybeAkela knows if there's one closer. Anyway, I want you to buy Jared a Christmas present for me. Something reallyspecial."

"And just what am I to use for money?"

"Take my rubies—no, the diamonds are more valuable. Take all of them, the necklaces, rings, the bracelets."

"Cori, really! Those diamonds are worth a fortune!"

"For God's sake, I don't care about the money. And youwon't be able to get what they're worth anyway. But what-ever you can get for them, spend it all. This is Michael's first Christmas. Get him lots of toys, and some clothes ifyou can find readymade. He's outgrowing things so quick-ly."

"As if I hadn't noticed!" Florence chuckled.

"And get something for Akela and Malia, and—oh, finda little something for Naneki and her daughter too—Christ-mas is no time to be carrying a grudge. And don't forget yourself. But make sure you get a perfect gift for Jared."

"I've never bought anything for a man before."

Corinne frowned. "If only we could get to the city. Lookfor a ring maybe, or a—a sailboat!"

"Cori!"

"No, I don't suppose you would find one in Wahiawa.Oh, I don't know. Just find something special. It's got tobe a gift he will like."

"I'll try, dearest. Now you rest."

Florence shook her head as she closed the door. It hadbeen ages since she had seen Cori so excited. Who wouldhave guessed she would have fallen in love with the veryman everyone thought she. hated?

Chapter40

JARED sent word to the house, that he wanted to give Christmas*luau*, and preparations kept everyone busy all week long. After the two days of bedrest the doctorordered, Corinne joined in the work. Everyone pitched in to help, including the men who worked in Jared's fields. Kuliano brought a cart filled with bananas down from thehills.

The pig was delivered on Wednesday, a mammoth ani-mal yet to be slaughtered. The fish and pineapple arrivedFriday in two wagon loads, with kegs of beer in a third large wagon. Extra chickens were brought in, and coco-nuts were gathered from up and down the coast, alongwith seaweed, which would be eaten raw. Corinne was astounded by the mountains of food.

Long, squat tables were brought out of the stable and leaned, to be set up and covered with ti leaves on Christ-mas morning. Huge pans came out of the storehouse. The cooking began on Saturday, the day before the luau. All of the fish, opihi, crab, squid, and salmon, would be servedraw, but it still took hours to cut up and prepare the fish, especially the lomi salmon, which was marinated with chopped onions and spices. The chicken boiled all day long. The pineapple had to be cut, then packed in ice. Corinne helped make haupia, the coconut pudding that would be served as little cakes.

What was most fascinating, though, was the cooking ofthe pig. This was started early on the day before the *luau*. Akela supervised the men who dug a hole for the backyard oven. Wood was placed in the bottom of the pit, then stones were piled on top, and a fire started. After the stoneswere hot and the fire died down, hot stones were placedinside the pig, and the carcass, already wrapped in fragrant

Corinne was Just in the way there with so many already helping. But where else could she go to avoid Jared? Andthen Malia poked her head inside.

"Aunty, come take a rest," Malia called excitedly. "Ko-lina, come, Ialeka's home!"

Jared appeared in the doorway and their eyes met. Buthis expression was unreadable. She still didn't know how he felt. And then Malia grabbed his hand again and pulledhim tsward the living room, and Akela was pushing Co-rinne out of the kitchen after them. Florence and Michaelwere already there, gazing at the little pine tree.

"Whose idea was that?" said Jared, looking at the tree.

"Kolina suggested it," Malia supplied. "It's nice, isn'titf"

"A tree? In the house?"

"Oh, stop being so gruff," Malia chided him. "I like itand we're going to have one every year from now on."

"And where did that come from?" He pulled the saddle out from under the tree.

"That's for you, from Kolina."

Jared straightened up slowly and looked directly at Co-rinne. His expression was clearly readable—hard and ac-cusing. What had she done wrong? His look brought tears to her eyes and she ran from the room.

A few moments later Jared strode into their bedroom.

When he saw the tears, he said, "Why in damnation areyou crying?"

She tried to pull away, but he held her fast. "I don'tknow why I'm crying. I thought you would enjoy the Christmas tree, but you didn't. I thought you would likemy gift, but you don't. And you've been gone well over a month, but you didn't even come to say hello to me whenyou arrived."

After a long silence, he said softly, "I didn't come to youbecause I wasn't sure whether you wanted me to." Jared'stone surprised her. "And I do like the saddle." Abruptlyhis voice grew cold again. "But it's the finest leather I've even seen and that's expensive. I want to know how youpaid for it."

Suddenly what he was thinking became clear to her. Shegasped. "Do you really trust me that little?"

"I know you didn't have any money, Corinne, because I have your money. How did you buy that saddle if not—n

"Don't you dare say it, Jared!" She stopped him furious-ly. "Don't you dare! For your information, Florence foundthe saddle for me because I was bedridden. Are you going to accuse my maid now of bartering herself? Your mindruns to the gutter!"

He flinched at her words. "What do you mean, you were bedridden?"

"Don't change the subject, I beg you!"

"Answer me!"

"It was nothing. I had a small accident and ended upwith a bump on my head, that's all."

"And you're all right now?" He was obviously relieved.

"Yes, but why this sudden concern for my welfare afterwhat you just accused me of?"

"For Christ's sake, what was I supposed to think? I knowyou didn't have money because I took yours out of the bank before you came here."

"I sold some of my jewels," she snapped. "I have morethan I need, anyway."

Her words were like a physical blow and Jared paled. "My God! Corinne, I'm sorry."

She was too hurt to be mollified. "No, you're not! You'drather think I sold myself! I wish now that I hadn't partedwith my diamonds, even though I didn't care at the time.I only wanted to buy you something nice. I guess I'm a big-ger fool than you are, Jared Burkett."

"Confound it, Corinne, how was I supposed to know? Inever would have dreamed you would part with any ofyour jewels. You wouldn't wear any to the gambling house for fear of losing them. I thought your jewels were important to you."

"They were once, when my father controlled the pursestrings. But I'm rich now. I don't give a fig about thejewels I have. I can always buy more."

He let her go and turned away with a strained expression. He left the room and returned quickly with a long box, which he tossed on the bed.

"It's just something I thought you would like. But Imade a mistake. We had the same idea—I'm just sorry they both turned out so disastrously."

Jared left the room and Corinne walked hesitantly to thebed and opened the box. Brilliant opals gleamed up at herin a rainbow of fiery colors, and tears sprang to her eyesagain. Very slowly, she took off her ruby necklace and putthe opals on. Then she clasped them in her hands and brought them up against her cheek. They were cold againsther skin.

"Oh, Jared, why do we have to have these stupid fightsall the time?"

The day had started out so badly. But it was Christmas. She would make the rest of the holiday better. Thinking of Michael and the presents he had yet to open, her spiritsbegan to rise.

Chapter 41

DRINKING and eating went on all day long, and theguests kept coming. Many went swimming, and there was even a little surfing competition. Corinne met so many people that it was impossible to remember names. She wasgiven*lei* upon*lei* until she was nearly buried under thefragrant wreaths and was forced to take most of them off.

A group of Hawaiians with string instruments played continuously, a steady flow of beer keeping them happy. Everyone was very gay, and Corinne found herself laughingconstantly. The actual feast, where

everyone sat down toeat together, didn't begin until late afternoon. Nearly all ofJared's friends were there, hut Corinne didn't feel awk-ward. Many looked at her curiously, wondering about herand Jared, but she didn't let it bother her.

The food rated unanimous praise and Akela beamed proudly. Corinne tried everything, and surprised herself byenjoying some of the raw dishes. The chicken long rice wasdelicious, but it was the *kalua* pig that Corinne couldn't seem to get enough of. She went back three times for more of the tender, shredded meat.

Jared sat next to Corinne at the table, but they said al-most nothing to each other.

The drinking and merriment continued after the feastJared moved on, but Corinne stayed at the table with Flor-ence and Michael. Hawaiians loved children and Michaelwent from lap to lap, getting enough cuddling in one dayto last him several months. Leonaka joined them for awhile to watch Malia and some of the younger girls dance the hula. They wore skirts made of shredded ti leaves and leisaround their heads and necks. The instruments used for hula dancing were gourd drums and coconut rattles. After sunset, an entertainment in itself, tiki torches wereset all around the yard and the luau went on. Some were still swimming, others surfing by moonlight, and Corinnediscovered that aluau was an all-day, all-night affair.

While Corinne was watching the surfers, a slightly olderwoman sat down next to her and introduced herself as Dayna Callan. A few years younger than Jared, she wasquite lovely, with light brown hair and blue eyes. Corinnewas flustered, wondering what to say, when suddenly Daynasurprised her.

"I suppose you've heard that everyone thought Jared andI would marry?"

It took Corinne a moment to answer. "No, I hadn'theard—"

"Oh dear, I am sorry. You must think I'm terrible tojust blurt that out, but I thought surely you must have known. I only meant to get it out of the way, in case youfelt uneasy talking with me."

Corinne tried to find her wits. "Did—had Jared askedyou to marry him?"

Dayna smiled. "Heavens, no! Ours was more or less asilent understanding. He always put off asking me. And frankly," she lowered her voice, "I dreaded the day he would."

"I don't understand."

"You see, I grew up with Jared. My family had a beachhouse up the coast and we spent half ofvevery year outhere. Jared and Leonaka were like my brothers. Can youimagine the prospect of marrying a man you think of as your brother?"

"So you didn't want to marry him?"

"No. I was relieved when he returned from the mainlandand told me about you. I believe I'm the only one he con-fided in. In fact, he told me all he had done. He was miser- able after he returned, and I am sure he regretted his be-havior. When the stories reached him about you, I knew hewas frantic with jealousy. He tried to hide his feelings, butI knew."

For the very first time, Corinne felt a hot embarrassment because of her charade. "You must think I'm a horriblewoman."

"I really didn't know what to think. But you see, I knewwhat Jared had done, so I couldn't blame you. And besides, it was only rumor, and one has to be skeptical where rumors are concerned."

"Jared wasn't."

"Well, Jared often reacts with pure emotion instead ofsense. I knew the moment I saw you that you couldn'thave done what they say. But Jared doesn't have a woman's intuition. And jealousy can distort one's thinking."

"You have to care in order to be jealous," Corinne re-plied.

"Exactly." Dayna emphasized the word and smiled. Shegazed directly at Corinne.

Corinne understood. "I'm certainly glad I met you. Ionly wish it had been sooner." She smiled wistfully andsighed.

"Has Jared been difficult?"

"Oh, it's not so much Jared's behavior. It's the constantdoubts and suspicions. I guess I'm prone to jealousy, too."

Corinne's eyes moved to Naneki, who was dancing solo now, and Dayna followed her gaze. The Hawaiian girl was dancing beautifully, seductively. Her attention was entirely on Jared, who was standing nearby, watching her.

"Oh dear."

Corinne turned back to Dayna. "What is it?"

The other woman was frowning. "I assumed Naneki hadgiven up on Jared, but I see she hasn't"

"She was his mistress, wasn't she?"

"Well, yes, for a while. But that was before he married you. I would have thought—well..." She trailed off.

"Jared and I aren't a honeymoon couple," Corinne said.

Dayna faced her squarely and said, "I must be rude nowand ask you something that is none of my business. Doyou love Jared?"

"Yes."

"Well then, you will have to fight for him," Dayna re-plied, a twinkle in her blue eyes.

"What do you mean?"

"You're a very beautiful woman, Corinne. If Jaredknows you want him, he won't look elsewhere. Anotherwoman wouldn't have a chance with him."

"Do you really think so?"

"Of course. Why don't you start now? Go get his attention away from Naneki. It's late, and no one would thinkit odd if tiie two of you retired soon." Dayna winked and Corinne blushed.

"What about you?" Corinne asked, hoping she would seeDayna again. "Will you be leaving soon?"

"Heavens, no. One of the best parts about a*luau* isfinding a place to bunk down for the night. Just about everyone stays until morning and then helps clean up."

"I didn't know that."

Dayna laughed. "You'll have people sleeping all over you'r house, and in the stable, too," she smiled. "Now goon. I'll see you in the morning before I leave. You canmeet my escort, Mark Carlton, then."

Corinne left the table and approached Jared slowly. Shestill didn't know what to say to him. She nervously fingeredher necklace, then realized she had the perfect excuse tospeak to'him.

"Jared." It took him several moments to take his eyesoft Naneki, but he finally turned to her. "I wanted to thankyou for the opals. They're beautiful."

"If you like them, I'm glad. If not—" He shrugged as ifto say he didn't care.

"I do like them, Jared," she said quickly, and added,"Honestly."

He took her arm and walked her to the bench swing, afew feet away. Oh, why was she so nervous?

"The opals suit you," Jared said casually without lookingat her. "They compliment your coloring. You have picked up quite a tan while I was gone."

"I'm sorry if you don't like it."

"Oh, but I do. Your skin has darkened, but your hair haslightened. You look very exotic now."

"Is that good?"

"Good Lord, woman, nothing could hurt your beauty. Are you just being naive, or are you fishing for compli-ments?" Corinne's chin rose perceptibly and Jared chuckled. "Don't get your dander up. I was only teasing."

She relaxed and decided to broach the subject that had worried her so often of late. "Why did you stay away solong?"

He glanced at her curiously for a moment, but thenlooked out over the ocean.

"There was some trouble with the hotel job. One of my workers nearly lost a leg in a bad fall. I couldn't very welltake off with him laid up in the hospital, not knowingwhether he would lose the leg or not."

"Is he all right?"

"Yes. He'll have a limp the rest of his life, though. Afew other things kept me in the city after that."

"What?"

"It's personal, Corinne."

She drew up. "You mean because of me?"

"No, damnit," he said with exasperation. "If you must know, I was looking for John Pierce. He and I had someunfinished business."

"Did you find him?"

"He's left the island."

"For good?" she asked.

"Apparently," Jared said, frustrated. "I also learned thathis land is up for sale." Then his tone lightened. "Butenough of that. Akela tells me you helped quite a bit withthe*luau*. I appreciate it. Things must have been prettyhectic around here all week."

"I enjoyed it."

"You must be tired after such a long day."

He was looking at her again with those piercing blue-gray eyes. Was he asking her or telling her?

"I'm ready for bed."

She smiled. "I am, too."

They bade good night to their guests and went inside. Walking through the patio was difficult. Children had al- ready been bedded down there on the big rug and the sofas, and a few adults, too, were already sleeping. Jared led herover and around little bodies and big ones, and when they reached the top of the patio stairs, they saw that the livingroom was already filled.

The corridor to the bedrooms was quiet and empty. Florence had gone to bed much earlier with Michael. Maliahadn't lasted long, either, excitement having caused her tobe up at dawn.

Jared stopped at Florence's door to bid Corinne goodnight. He had decided not to press her. He had made aterrible blunder that morning, a stupid blunder, and he wassure Corinne was still angry. But Corinne went on to hisroom and entered. Jared stared after her in surprise. Shewent to the dresser and lit a lamp, then removed the gardenia from her hair, breathing deeply of it before putting it down.

Jared came into the room slowly, watching her. "Youmoved back in here?"

She glanced at him demurely. "I hope you don't mind."

"No, of course not," Jared answered, wondering how onearth he would get through the night without touching her.

Corinne went on nervously as she took off her necklace. "Naneki is back. She has been since you left,

so there areno extra rooms. And I don't think Florence and I would be too comfortable sharing her small bed."

"Corinne, I said I didn't mind," he interrupted. "Any-way, you belong in here."

She turned away from him, moving her long hair aside."Would you unfasten mymuumuuT'

He started to unfasten her gown and slowly her slenderback was revealed. Her neck was so tempting, he wanted to lean forward and caress her with his lips, to taste hersilken skin. Would she jump away from him and be en-raged? He kept his control and then turned away and be-gan undressing.

Corinne crossed to the closet and stepped out of hermuumuuand her underthings. Naked, she took a long time searching for a nightgown, hoping Jared would at least lookat her. Finally she could stall no more, and withdrew a dark green negligee of luxurious satin.

Corinne turned towards Jared before she put the gown on, and found him staring at her as if mesmerized. Shesmiled to herself and averted her eyes. Ever so slowly, sheslipped the gown over her head and pulled it down.

Jared stood motionless as he watched Corinne walk en-ticingly to the bed and slide under the covers. Didn't she know what she was doing to him? She was tempting himbeyond endurance.

"Aren't you coming to bed, Jared?"

Corinne's voice was seductively sweet, and he realizedhe hadnt moved for several minutes. He tore away the rest of his clothes and walked over to the bed.

"Confound it, woman, do you know what you're doing to me?" he demanded harshly. "I can't stand it anymore!"

She was silent. Then slowly she wrapped her armsaround him and laid her head on his chest.

Corinne thought she would die with wanting him, with the need to have him drive into her, claim her. It was theonly assurance she had that he felt something for her, evenif it was only desire. She tore off her gown and tried to pull him down with her, but he held her back.

"No,*dndi*," he said huskily. "I want to savor you. God,how I've longed for you, dreamt of you." Slowly, hepushed her down and lay down by her side with one legover hers, possessively.

And then he began to torture her with sweet, exquisitekisses that drove her wild. His lips pressed hers with tenderpassion, while his hand scorched her skin. Her body de-manded release, but still he prolonged the delicious torture. At last she could bear it no more and grasped his hot, steel-like shaft and urged him to her.

Jared groaned at her touch and moved on top of her. "Oh, my Kolina—" he breathed.

He buried his lips in the curve of her neck at the sametime he buried his throbbing manhood within her. In only seconds Corinne was swirling, spiraling upward to the cli-mactic moment of explosion. Her fulfillment was completebecause Jared joined her in that instant of bliss. The shat-tering moment was theirs together.

Corinne sighed deeply-when Jared moved to her side and pulled her close. No words were spoken, but none wereneeded.

Chapter 42

Corinne woke late to discover that she was alone. She dressed quickly and made the bed lovingly, re-membering each moment of what had happened there the night before. She picked up the clothes Jared had left lying on the floor. They were a mess. He hadn't even bothered to empty his pockets. She laid some coins and loose piecesof paper on the dresser, then pulled a small box from an-other pocket. It was a jewelry box, and she couldn't resist opening it. The solid gold heart that gleamed up at her was lovely. Slowly she read the engraved inscription.

Corinne quickly closed the box and put it back in the pocket. Then, quickly, she replaced the other items in the clothes and hung them up. He mustn't know she had seenthe necklace.

She was trembling. What did it mean? /would marryyou again, and without regrets.Of course he regretted thefirst time. But now? Without regrets. Could it mean heloved her?

"Then why didn't he give me the heart necklace?" shewhispered to herself.

The answer was obvious. He had changed his mind. Itwas only lust that had prompted the inscription. Not love. He had realized that he didn't love her. Therefore, he wasnot planning to give her the gold heart.

Corinne spent the rest of the day waiting for Jared toapproach her. But there were guests to attend to, and hewas kept constantly occupied.

After dinner, when Jared went out to the stable, Corinnegot a shawl and went out to the backyard. She sat in thebench swing, hoping Jared would join her when he finished. It wasn't too long before she heard him cross by the frontof the house and enter there. Akela would tell him she was

out back. It wouldn't be long now. But he didn't come, and finally she went to seek him out.

Jared put the heart necklace in his pocket and smiled ashe left the bedroom. He had hoped to find Corinne there, but then assumed she had gone for a walk. He waited for her in the living room. It was peaceful, their guests having departed long ago.

Jared grew impatient when Corinne didn't return. Hepaced the room, then opened the front door and stood there gazing out at the bright moon. It reminded him of that long-ago promise he had made her, of a walk on the beach, and the added promise of making love under the stars, withmoonlight shining down on her.

Then he smelled the strong fragrance of gardenia behindhim, the bloom Corinne always wore in her hair. Herarms slipped around his waist and Jared smiled and turnedto capture her lips. But the lips parting beneath his werenot Corinne's.

Jared drew back, his eyes growing dark. "What are youdoing, Naneki?"

She pouted. "Well, she not only one who can wear thegardenia. Why you no come to me anymore?"

"I am married now, and my wife is more than enoughwoman for me."

"She no good."

"That's enough, Naneki," Jared said coldly, pushing heraway from him.

"You love her then?"

"Yes, damnit, I love her!" Her hurt expression made himsoften his tone. "Look, Naneki, I told you long ago to finda husband. Why don't you give Leonaka a chance? Hecares for you."

"Leonaka?"

"Yes, didn't you know?" When she shook her head, hecontinued. "That's because you never gave him any en-couragement. But he loved you even before you married Peni."

Her face brightened. "Leonaka good, strong man."

"Yes, he is."

"I think I take him*laulaus* tomorrow. That encourage him, huh?"

Jared laughed. "It certainly will. Now go on to bed."

Jared should have been hurt that Naneki could transferher affections from him to another so easily, but he wasn'tHe loved Corinne. He couldn't stand waiting any longer, and he left the house to find her. He would tell her howmuch he loved her.

But Corinne wasn't outside. She was locked in their room, crying on the bed where just last night she had foundsuch joy. That was all gone now, and would never return. Why did she have to come in when she did, and see Nanekiand Jared embracing? Corinne had felt her heart wrenchedfrom her, and without waiting to see any more, she had run to the bedroom and locked herself in.

She was a fool ever to believe in happiness. The lovebetween Jared and Corinne was a thing of the past.

Jared returned to the house after a futile search outsideand went to their room. It was locked.

"Corinne?"

"Go away, Jared."

He shook his head, baffled. "Open the door."

Corinne jumped off the bed and came to the door so he could hear her clearly. How dare he come to her afterjust leaving his mistress?

"I told you to go away, Jared. Last night was a mistake, and it's not going to happen again."

"What in damnation has got into you?" he roared in dis-belief.

The anger in his voice made her answer, "I've come to my senses, that's what! I had forgotten how much I hateyou, but I won't forget again."

God, it wasn't true—it wasn't! But it was better if hethought so.

Tears flowed again, just when she thought she hadspilled them all. "I do mean it, Jared. You can have your room back in the morning. Tonight—go sleep with yourmistress! I don't want you, but she certainly does."

"Corinne—"

"No!" she stopped him. "I've had enough, Jared. Youeither take me back to the city in the morning or I'll walk!"

Jared backed away, bewildered and furious. Then angertook over completely.

Twice. She had made an utter fool of him twice. She hadalways hated him and she always would. There would notbe a third time. He would take her back to the city. Hewould escort her right to a ship. He would see that she goton it. To hell with Corinne!

Chapter 43

JARED went to summon Corinne. The carriage was waiting and a cart was attached to carry the luggageto the harbor. In a very short while Corinne would walkout of Ms life. He ought to be glad to be rid of her and the rage she inevitably caused him. But he didn't feel glad. He felt lost.

The baby's cries drew Jared to Florence's room. He knew he would find his wife there. Both women were trying to soothe the child at the same time, obviously without suc-cess.

Jared shook his head as he came into the open room."If everything is packed, ladies, I'll start taking your thingsdownstairs."

"Not now, Jared," Corinne answered curtly withoutlooking his way.

"Well, it will have to be soon. Your ship leaves in aboutthree hours."

"I don't care about the damn ship!" She turned to him. Her eyes were wide. "Michael is sick."

"You know there won't be another ship until the four-teenth."

"Whenever," she said absently and turned back to Mi-chael.

"Have you sent for a doctor?"

"I was just going to go," Florence answered.

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"Nonsense," Jared replied. "Your place is with yourchUd. I'll send Soon Ho."

He started to leave the room, but Corinne stopped him." Jared. I want Dr. Bryson. Michael knows him. And tellhim it's an emergency."

Jared frowned. "Where is his office?"

"On Alakea Street."

"Very well," he replied. "But I want you to come down-stairs with me. With both of you fussing over the boy, you're probably frightening him."

"No, I'm staying here."

"Go on, Corinne," Florence said sternly, with a meaning-ful look.

"All right," she agreed reluctantly. "But only until thedoctor comes."

After Soon Ho was sent on his way, Jared joined Corinnein the living room. "You look as if you could use a drink," he offered.

"I could, thank you."

She sat on the edge of a chair, clasping her hands inher lap and keeping her eyes on the stairs. Jared watchedher as he made the drinks. She seemed terrified.

"The boy will be all right."

"Of course he will."

He handed her the glass and noticed her hands trem-bling. "What's wrong with him?"

"We don't know. He's burning with fever, and he wontstop crying."

"That could be any number of minor things, Corinne," he tried to reassure her.

"It could also be serious!" she snapped. "I'm sorry, Jared. I'm just worried about him."

"I can see that."

Corinne lapsed into silence and Jared watched her. Hewanted to soothe her. Damn, he wanted to offer her hislove.

"Corinne, there is no reason for you to leave on thefourteenth, or ever." She wasn't listening to him, but tothe crying that continued upstairs. "Did you hear me?" - Finally she glanced his way. "What did you say?"

"I said there is no reason for you to leave. You canstay here."

"With you?"

"Yes."

Her eyes focused on him now. They were a darkemerald. "And share you with Naneki and God knows howmany other women? No thank you."

"Share me?" he asked in surprise. "I haven't had an-other woman since I married you."

"Spare me, Jared," she said bitterly, and her eyes dark-ened even more. "I happen to know differently."

"What?"

"I saw you!" she shouted, all the pent-up pain and angercoming out. "You and your mistress kissing!"

Jared stared at her several moments, but then it all be-came clear to him. He laughed. "That was nothing. Shecame up behind me that night, but I thought it was you. I kissed her without looking, but stopped as soon as I knew I didn't have you in my arms."

"I don't believe—" Corinne jumped up when Michael'scries grew louder.

She ran to the stairs, but Jared stopped her. "I don'twant you up there, Corinne."

She tried to yank her arm free, but he held her fast. "Stop it, Jared. He needs me."

"Don't be ridiculous, Corinne. Florence can take careof him."

"I want Michael."

"If it's serious, then you could get sick as well. I won'thave it."

"I don't care what you'll have!" Her voice rose franti-cally. "Now let go of me!"

"Corinne, stop it!" Jared said harshly. "All that boyneeds is his mother. My God, you've become obsessed with that child. Can't you see that?"

"Obsessed!" she screamed and started crying. "Yes, I'mobsessed. Because Michael is my baby! Doyou understandnow? He—is—mine!"

Jared released his hold so suddenly that she stumbled. She didn't stop to see the pained look on his face as sheran up the stairs.

He is mine—Jared heard her scream again over and over in his mind. Not "ours," but "mine," she had said. It didn't occur to him that she was simply upset. No, this proved what he had once suspected. •*

The baby was Drayton's, all right. That was the only possible explanation for Corinne's keeping the truth fromhim. If the child were Ms, Corinne would have told him the truth.

Corinne fell back in a chair and sighed deeply. She wasexhausted and looked it.

"Here, I think we can both use some of this." Florencecame into the room with a bottle and two glasses.

"Did you see Dr. Bryson out?"

"Yes."

"You know, I don't understand why I did it." Corinnesighed. "After all the trouble and the lies to keep Michaela secret from Jared, I just screamed the truth at him. Andit wasn't even necessary! There was no danger. Michael wasn't seriously ill at all."

Dr. Bryson had been amused when he discovered thatthe "emergency" was teething. Michael was simply cuttingmolars.

"Don't worry about it, Cori. It's time he knew, anyway."

"Don't say that, Florence." Corinne shook her headfrom side to side. "What if he tries to keep Michael now?"

"You have more money with which to fight him in courtif it comes to that. But I don't see why you two just don't settle your differences."

"It's too late for that," Corinne said quietly. "I couldn'tlive with him, knowing he doesn't love me—not even a little bit.",

"Who says he doesn't?" Florence asked huffily.

"I do." Corinne sat up and moaned. "Oh, I wish wehadn't missed that ship today."

"There will be another, if you're really set on going."

"Yes, but what's going to happen in the meantime? Whatam I going to say to Jared when he demands to know why I kept the truth from him?"

"You tell him the truth, that's all."

But Jared stayed away all that night. Nor did he return the following day. Corinne waited nervously, frightened of a confrontation, but wishing to get the inevitable sceneover with.

But Jared stayed away from the house until the four-teenth. By then, Corinne had given up hoping.

Chapter 44

WE certainly didn't pick a good day to be leaving thisisland."

Corinne tamed, putting on her bonnet. "Why? It's anice day."

"Haven't you been reading the papers, Cori?"

"Whatever for? News is too depressing."

Florence shook her head. "There has been nothing buttalk of revolution."

"You mean war?"

"I don't know. But there seem to be a good many peopleon Oahu and all over Hawaii who want to get rid of themonarchy. It will all come to a head very soon. And today is important."

"Why?"

"Queen Liliu—Oh, I just can't pronounce the name. She's planning to throw out the present constitution and introduce one of her own. The foreign citizens here, most-ly Americans, are set against that. It's all a test of strengthbetween the revolutionaries and the monarchists—and be-tween the foreign settlers and the Hawaiians."

"Then it's a good thing we decided to leave early today. We can take a roundabout way to the harbor and stay well clear of Iolani Palace."

"You're still not going to wait a little longer to see ifyour husband will come home?"

Corinne didn't hesitate before answering. "No. It's beena week. He's either too angry with me for keeping Michaela secret from him, or he just doesn't care."

"I can't believe he doesn't care, Cori."

"I can. I know Jared better than you do. Now let's go."

She picked up her gloves and purse, and left the room toget Michael. The luggage was already in the cart. Afterperfunctory good-byes to Akela and Malia, they set out for the harbor with Soon Ho driving.

Before long, another carriage came bounding afterthem. Both carriages stopped. Corinne tensed when she sawJared. He left his carriage and approached hers.

"I didn't think you would be leaving this early. I almostmissed you."

He was so casual about it! "Why did you bother?"

"I came to escort you to your ship. There may be troubletoday. Already people are fired up in the streets—a bunchof hot-heads."

"We know about the trouble, Jared. We had planned to go around the palace."

"The trouble is everywhere, Corinne. There will un-doubtedly be street fights."

"And you're worried about me?" she muttered sarcasti-cally.

He didn't answer. He ordered Soon Ho to take his car-riage home, while he climbed up on theirs. Corinne sim-mered silently. Jared hadn't said one word about Michael. He must have seen the child on her lap. Not one word! Why had he come? Probably to make sure that she left.

The streets were more crowded than Corinne had everseen them. There was a great deal of noise, mostly shouting. People were running in the direction of the palace, and Corinne spotted several weapons. She became frightened, then, especially for Michael, and put him down on the floorof the carriage. Then she began to worry about Jared, sit- ting high up in the driver's seat, in plain view. He hadn't even brought a gun, although he'd known what was hap-pening. Just as she was wondering why he hadn't, shots rangout from in front of the carriage and Corinne screamed. The carriage stopped slowly, and Corinne screamed agains she watched Jared slump over on the seat.

She jumped out of the carriage and climbed up to the driver's seat. When she got there, Jared was sitting up,breathing heavily. "Are you all right?"

"I only got a little dizzy," he replied roughly. "I'm fine."

But she saw the blood on his side, and her heart stopped."You've been shot, Jared!"

"It's only a nick."

"I don't care, I'm taking you to a doctor."

"I don't want a doctor."

But he swayed as he spoke, and she grabbed the reinshe had dropped and started to Alakea Street.

Luck was with them. Dr. Bryson was at his office and hehelped Corinne get Jared inside. She refused to leave theroom while he examined Jared, but stood by helplessly, anxiously watching the doctor probe his wound, while Jared tried to hide his pain.

Dr. Bryson peered over his shoulder at her. "Why don'tyou wait in my outer office? This will take a while."

She shook her head firmly. "Not until I know he's going to be all right."

"I can assure you of that right now. The bullet has notdamaged any vital organs. It's just a matter, of removingit. H&'ll be as good as new in a week."

"Very well," she said, not wanting to get in the doctor'sway.

But Jared sat up, his face a stony mask. "Never mindwaiting, Corinne. You go on and catch your ship."

"Don't be ridiculous, Jared!" she cried* "I can't leaveyou like this."

"You will, damnit!" His voice rose harshly. "I'm not go-ing to be responsible for your missing your ship. Youwanted to leave today—just get out of here and do it!"

She thought he would say something about their son be-fore she left. "What about Michael?" she ventured.

Jared closed his eyes against the pain and anger. Love for Corinne was driving him crazy. And she was mockinghim with Drayton's child! She must surely loathe him! Jared said coldly, "You take your son and get out of mylife. Go back to Boston where you belong. And you damn-well better get a divorce this time, Corinne, or by God Iwill!"

She turned blindly and ran from the office. So! His own son meant less than nothing to Jared.

Jared slumped back on the examining table, drained. It had taken all his strength to tell her to go when he reallywanted to beg her to stay.

"Don't you think you were a bit harsh with her?"

Jared opened his eyes and stared at Dr. Bryson. He had forgotten the man was in the room.

"It was necessary."

"You mentioned divorce. I don't understand. Ithought—"

"Yes," Jared interrupted sharply. "I understand. Youthought she was Mrs. Drayton. But you see, she's my wife, although the baby you treated is Drayton's child. It's a very... complicated story," Jared finished wryly.

"Well, well." Dr. Bryson was thinking rapidly. "This ex-plains a lot. You're the 'Jared' that pretty woman cursedup and down when she was giving birth. I never did under-stand why, if her husband was called Russell."

After a pause, Jared asked, "How would you know? Corinne had her child in Boston. Were you there?"

"I don't know what misconception you're under, Mr.—"

"Burkett," Jared supplied impatiently.

"Mr. Burkett. Your wife delivered her child here on the island. I saw her the first time in December before last, shortly after she arrived, and regularly after that until she delivered in June. At her request, I even had a family readyto adopt the child."

Jared sat up abruptly. "My wife arrived here in August of last year!"

Dr. Bryson did not wish to argue with such a large andbelligerent man, wounded or not. He shrugged. "If you sayso."

Jared scowled. "But you say otherwise?"

Dr. Bryson nodded hesitantly.

Jared shook his head as if that would help him to under-stand. "You said she gave birth in June. When in June?"

"I can check my records for the exact day, but I believeit was in the middle of the month."

Jared calculated guickly. "You mentioned an adoption. She didn't want the child?"

Dr. Bryson frowned, remembering. "She certainly didn't.It was unnatural the way she seemed to hate that unborn baby. I never could understand it."

Words came back-to Jared, words of long ago. "I cer-tainly wouldn't keep a child of yours."

"What did Drayton think about the coming child?"

"Well, that was puzzling too, since he was the husband, or so I'd thought. He didn't want the baby either. Now Iunderstand about that situation. Why, they didn't evenshare the same room, not even after the birth."

"How would you know?"

"I was called on often enough before and after the birth.

This was all happening too quickly for Jared. "Whydidn't she give the child up?"

Dr. Bryson chuckled. "That was Miss Merrill's doing."

"You mean Mrs. Merrill?"

"Oh dear, is she married?"

"Never mind," Jared replied curtly. "Go on."

"Well, Miss Merrill convinced me that Mrs. Burkettwould regret giving away the baby* She said she was ob-sessed with other things and wasn't thinking clearly."

Jared grimaced. He was the other thing. She hated him so much that she couldn't bear to keep his child.

"Are you all right? I really should be getting that bulletout."

"It can wait a bit more. I want to know what happened."

"Well, Miss Merrill and I arranged it so that Mrs.Burkett was left alone with her new baby for a while. Thatwas all it took. It was love at first sight, you might say. Irarely see mother love any stronger."

Jared sighed and lay back on the examining table. Hewas hurting badly. It was time to remove the bullet.

Just before the doctor administered pain killer, Jared re-alized everything fully. My, God, I have a son!

Chapter45

CORINNE'S homecoming had been pleasant in oneway. Her father was waiting for her when she steppedoff the train in Boston, and his delight in Michael washeart-warming. From the moment of their reunion, Sam-uel Barrows doted on his grandson.

Corinne had been to a few parties in the two weeks sinceher return, and to teas and other social functions that Lauren had dragged her to during the days. She didn't mind. It kept her busy so she couldn't dwell on Jared toomuch.

The gossip about her reasons for leaving the city werenow considered misinformation, for Lauren let it be knownshe had been living happily with her husband all this time, and was only in Boston for a visit. Lauren had acquired a great deal of sophistication and was now able to handlenearly everything with aplomb.

Corinne went along with her cousin's lie, because it was easier than telling the truth. But people's curiosity causedher much pain. Naturally, questions were asked about the exotic, fascinating island she had been living on. Corinnewas barely able to hide her melancholy when she de-scribed Hawaii.

Corinne was saying, "You've never met a more friendlyand fun-loving people than the Hawaiians." She sighed.

How was it possible that Hawaii had become her homein such a short time? Why, she had spent her whole life inBoston, walked among its stately homes, played on BostonCommon, watched the rowers on the Charles River, andfed the ducks on Jamaica Pond. But all these things now seemed like old, outgrown friends. Boston just wasn't her home any longer.

Would she ever stop expecting to see the bright flowers of Oahu? Would she stop hearing in her mind the rushing waterfall she and Jared had seen that day? Would she eversee a Boston sunset without being disappointed?

It was her turn to entertain, and seven women, oldfriends, sat in her parlor sipping tea before the fire. Laurenand her mother were there. Heavens, how her cousin hadgrown up while she was gone!

"You must be eager to return, Corinne," one of thewomen remarked. "I certainly would be. We really didn'texpect you to come home so soon."

"Well, my father hadn't seen Michael yet and he couldntget away to visit us there."

"Your husband must have been reluctant to let youleave," Mrs. Hartman commented. "Look at the extrememeasures he took when you were married."

"Extreme measures?" Corinne asked.

Lauren leaned forward and grinned. "I hope you don't mind, Corinne, but I confided to Mrs. Hartman why yourhusband put that outlandish notice in the newspapers be- fore he left. I told her that it was his way of making sure you followed him without delay."

Corinne was astounded by Lauren's ingenuity. "Yes,well. .." She groped for words. "My husband has a ratherdry sense of humor."

"I can't imagine my Harold doing something like that," said Mrs. Nautily.

"Nor could we," Lauren laughed.

Corinne smiled. Harold Nautily was a timid man, agood five inches shorter than his large and imposing wife. He never said anything to his wife except "Yes, dear." Be-fore Jared, that was the type of man Corinne had thoughtshe wanted!

"How is that adorable little boy of yours, Corinne?" Mrs. Turner wondered.

"Michael is fine, though he's had a slight cold ever sincewe arrived."

"Nothing serious, I hope."

"No. It's just taking him a while to get used to the colderweather."

"That's understandable, since he was born in theislands," Mrs. Hartman said. "I'm sure he will be glad to get back, and you too, of course."

"Yes," Corinne whispered, her eyes on the floor.

She wondered what she would say to these women whenit became apparent that she and Michael wouldn't be re-turning to Hawaii. Lauren and her father both knew whatan effort it was for Corinne to pretend she had a happymarriage and a devoted husband waiting for her to return. But no one knew the real depth of her misery. Not evenFlorence. How long would she have to bear this aching pain before it began to fade?

The knocker sounded on the front door and Corinnesaw Brock pass the open parlor door on his way to answerit.

Lauren smiled regretfully at Corinne. "That will be Cynthia. I ran into her yesterday and she said she wouldtry and stop by. It looks like she's here."

Corinne grimaced. She dreaded the catty questions Cyn-thia would ask. Cynthia had probably never forgiven Co-rinne for snaring Jared.

Just as Corinne was bracing herself for Cynthia's ap-pearance, Brock came to the doorway, looking quite putout. And then Corinne saw why.

"Well, heavens me!" Mrs. Hartman exclaimed. "It seemshe couldn't wait for your return after all, Corinne."

Corinne stood up very slowly, hearing only the pounding of her heart and nothing else.

"Corinne? Corinne?"

She turned toward her aunt, but didn't really see her.

"Well, it looks as if you're as surprised as we are! Shameon you, Mr. Burkett. You have rather too much flair for drama."

Jared tore his eyes away from Corinne and turned on hismost charming smile. "It was a spur-of-the-moment deci-sion, Mrs. Ashburn. But you're quite right. It was most in- considerate of me."

"I think we should be going, ladies." Lauren motionedto the other women. "I'm sure these two have missed each other. The honeymoon must not be over yet."

She winked at Corinne, who barely noticed. What was Jared*doing* here? And then suddenly she and Jared were alone and panic rose to choke her. Michael! That's why hewas here! He had come to take Michael away from her!

"Hello, Corinne."

She sat down again with as much composure as she couldmuster and her hands gripped in her lap to keep them fromtrembling. "You—you look well, Jared."

She imagined that she was as white as the china tea cupsleft scattered on the tables. She plunged into talk so hewouldn't notice her nervousness. "I hope your wound hashealed."

He shrugged. "After a week it was only a minor discom-fort. It's just an ugly scar now." He grinned. "Would youlike to see it?"

"No!" she gasped.

How could he be so calm, as if they hadn't parted inanger? As if it were perfectly natural for him to be sitting here in her house, halfway around the world from Hawaii?

Corinne lowered her eyes. "What happened after I ftft? Was there a great deal of fighting?"

"Hardly. It had to be the most peaceable revolution inhistory."

"And the queen?"

"She no longer rules," Jared said with a touch of bitter-ness. "There is a provisional government now, under the American flag. And men were sent to Washington to peti-tion for annexation."

"How did that happen?"

"January 14th, the day you left, Queen Liliuokalani wentahead with her plans to abolish the constitution. She triedto force her cabinet to sign her new constitution, but they wouldn't. A Committee of Safety was formed, made up of some of the most prominent men on the island, and given the power to keep order. They took possession of the gov-ernment building and issued a proclamation that the mon-archical system of government was abolished."

"Just like that? By proclamation?"

"They had the majority of the citizens behind them," Jared answered. "The queen was made a prisoner in her palace quarters and the American flag was raised." Jared sighed. "It was a sorry day for a proud people."

"You sympathize with her, don't you?"

"Perhaps she did overstep her bounds, but to me she isstill the queen. It's ironic, but it's only been a little over ahundred years since Hawaii was discovered by foreigners.

That's a remarkably short time for a culture to become lost to other civilizations."

"It's not completely lost."

"Perhaps not," he agreed, then rose and gazed at herintently. "You haven't asked why I'm here."

Corinne turned away. "To be honest, I'm afraid toknow."

He looked pained. "You have nothing to fear from me, Corinne."

"Don't I?"

Jared gazed at her thoughtfully, then joined her on thesofa. "Are you afraid I have come for Michael?"

"Yes," she whispered.

"Is that why you didn't tell me the truth about him?"

"Yes." She looked at him with wide eyes. "Is that whyyou're here, Jared? Because if it is, I won't give up myson. You would have to kill me first."

"Ourson," he corrected her gently. "And I would never take him aVay from his mother."

Her eyes opened wide. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes. He moved closer to her, but she still moved awaydiffidently. He sighed. "I have a letter from your father inmy pocket."

When she remained silent, still fidgeting nervously, hewent on. "It arrived a few days after you left Hawaii. Itwas his answer to the one I wrote him ... asking about Mi-chael. He explained everything."

"He had no right!" Corinne began angrily.

"You had already told me, Corinne," he reminded hergently.

"Yes, and you said nothing! Nor did you say anythingthat last day!"

"I was still getting used to the idea," he lied.

He wasn't going to tell her of his suspicions about Dray-ton. She wasn't going to know how foolish he had been.

"It was a shock to learn I had a son," he continued." And that you had kept it from me."

"Jared, I—"

"No, I know why you did. Your father's letter helped, and I already knew a good deal from Dr. Bryson."

Corinne blushed and looked around the room, unable tomeet Jared's gaze. "You have to understand that I hatedyou then, Jared. I was obsessed with hating you, or I could never have done what I did."

"I know. Just as I was once obsessed with hating yourfather. I hope we have all learned from this. I don't blame your father anymore, and I will tell him so while I'm here.I know now what cruelty hate can drive people to."

"What are you saying, Jared?"

He reached out to take her hand. "I know you hated mewhen you left, Corinne, and you probably still do. But if ittakes me the rest of my life, I'm going to make you love me instead."

Her eyes began to fill. "Why?"

"Why?" he echoed. "Because I love you, damnit!" Nowthat the words were out, he was able to say softly, "Yes, Ilove you, more than I ever dreamed possible."

Corinne shook her head slowly, wanting to believe him, yet still afraid to. "You're saying you love me regardless of what you think I did?"

"I knew months ago that I loved you. And yes, regardlessof what I thought. I was going to tell you that Christmasnight, but you shut me off again."

Her face brightened. "Then what you told me aboutNaneki was true?"

He nodded. "I wasn't sure you even heard me."

"I heard, only I didn't believe you."

"I can hardly blame you for that, as often as I'vedoubted you."

"Oh, Jared, I love you too!"

And she threw her arms around him. If she had her way, she would never let him go again.

He cupped her face in his hands and looked deeply intoher eyes. "Do you mean that?"

"Yes! Oh, yes! And I swear I'll never lie to you again. You will never have cause to doubt me again."

"God, what fools we've been." Jared sighed and held her closer. "The misery we have caused each other!"

But then he felt Corinne stiffen and push away from him."We are still fools, Jared." Her face held utter desolation. "It would never work. You will never forget what I did—what you think I did. That will always be there betweenus."

He got up and walked to the window. "Corinne, I knowthe truth now,"

She froze, "What truth?"

"I paid a visit to a few of your ex-lovers."

She groaned. "Did they lie, and give you explicit de-tails?"

Jared chuckled. "On the threat of being torn limb fromlimb, they gave me the truth."

"Really, Jared?"

"Each story was exactly the same. I didn't need to seemore than a few in order to convince myself."

Suddenly helaughed. "My God, you certainly had a clever scheme." Then he sobered. "It was too clever, for you fooled me completely, I'm sorry to say. Can you forgive me for be-lieving you capable of that?"

"Now that you mention it," she began, her eyes darken-ing. But before she could build her fury, he quickly moved to the sofa, grabbed her, and kissed her deeply.

When Jared released her, her anger was gone and he wasgrinning devilishly. "That is a sure way to avoid a fight.Ill have to remember it in the future."

She smiled up at him, her eyes sparkling. "Never mindthe future. You started something right now and you'llhave to finish it, my love."

He crooked a brow. "Is your father home?"

"No."

"Then what are we waiting for?"

Chapter46

THE ship glided along smoothly in the water. Theywere only a few miles from home and Corinne stood on the deck with Jared, waiting for the first sight of land.

This voyage to Hawaii was nothing like the first one hadbeen, with Corinne in her cabin, sick and miserable.

This trip had also been spent in the cabin—but withJared, who kept her occupied with loving. She was secure in her happiness, and in the knowledge that she was justwhere she belonged.

Jared wrapped his arms possessively around her and pulled her back against him, hugging her tightly. "Are youglad to be coming home?"

"You know I am."

"Dayna will be thrilled to see you." He chuckled, remem-bering the stormy encounter he had with her before he leftfor Boston. "She treated me to quite a spectacle when shefound you had gone. She called me thirty-two different kinds of a fool for letting you go."

Corinne laughed. "I liked Dayna the moment I met her. We'll have to have her and her doctor friend over for din-ner soon. I believe she's a bit in love with him."

"Yes, I know. We'll have to invite them to the wedding."

She turned in his arms and gazed up at him questioningly.

"Invite them to their own wedding?"

"No, to ours," he murmured. 'Will you marry me again, Mrs. Burkett?"

Corinne touched the golden heart she wore around herneck. It was warm from her skin.

"Without regrets?"

"Yes. Neither of us meant our vows the first time. I wantto say them again, Kolina, and this time there will be nodoubts—no regrets."

"I'll marry you a hundred times if that will make youhappy," she said seriously, her green eyes intent on his.

He chuckled. "Like you promised me a dozen children to make up for missing Michael's early months?"

"Yes. You know I'll give you anything you want, as longas you keep on loving me."

"I'll never stop loving you, my Kolina. And one morewedding will do. One—to last us forever."

There was a distinct throat clearing going on behind themand they both turned at once to see Florence standing therewith Michael. "Someone wants to join you two."

Jared laughed and took Michael from her. "He let youknow that, did he?"

"He did," Florence said. "He noticed the island andwanted to show you. See?"

Michael was pointing to the long stretch of land sudden-ly in view. He was bouncing excitedly. "See!" he echoed Florence.

They all laughed. "Say 'home' now. Home?" Jaredprompted.

Michael looked at his father, his lime-green eyes shiningbrightly like his mother's. Then he looked back at theisland. "See!" he beamed.

"He's certainly made a better seaman than I've been," Corinne said, laughing. "I was hoping I would be the firstto notice land, but he beat me to it."

"He did indeed," Florence remarked, suppressing herlaughter. "It's a wonder you notice anything when thathusband of yours is around."

"And that's the way it had better stay," Jared said inmock sternness.

Seconds later, after the word should have been forgotten, Michael chimed "home," and Jared squeezed him proudly. They all turned toward the island. Diamond Head crater with its stately beauty came well into view. And further in-land, they could see the majestic Koolau mountain range.

Jared pulled Corinne closer. Together, with Michael be-tween them, they sailed home to Hawaii. Home. A wordas wonderful as family, which the three of them were now.

And as beautiful a word as love.

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