



MURDER AT THE BRITISH LEGATION

A Noah Sherman / Sam Hokua Mystery Novel

by

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Revised Second Draft

Chapter 1

Noah Sherman jerked like a trout on the hook when his cell phone erupted in the small hours of the morning and banged his large head on the oak headboard of his bed. Thunk! Instead of seeing stars, it was more like planets. He was going to have a bump the size of Mauna Kea tomorrow.

"Goddamn!" said Noah.

The little cell phone blared out a Sousa march Noah had downloaded on a whim only days ago - at full volume. After flopping around for a few moments, he found his glowing phone on the night table and opened it, stopping those damned trombones. Ah, blessed silence.

"Who the hell is it?" he yapped into the phone.

While Noah's various senses and bodily functions checked in, he began to understand that someone was talking to him. For God's sake, it was Dave McCord, the jackass executive editor at the Los Angeles

Times who had laid Noah off a year ago. Currently, ranting like a madman.

What, thought Noah, still not concentrating on the words, what does this bastard want, waking me in the dark of the night? Noah squinted at the clock in his bedroom, 3:08 AM. Give me a break!

"Dave? Listen, you woke me from a deep sleep. Whatever you were saying, you'll have to start again. You know, it's three AM here?"

Although Noah received a good severance package from the Times, he ended up with a pittance, after taxes, the divorce and the move to Hawaii. He hadn't really saved much, and his pension from the Times wouldn't account for his utilities, let alone his whole budget. Then the market crash of 2008 caught him in its net along with all the other little fishes. He wasn't broke, but he was hurting.

Making money as a freelance writer - especially from a remote location like Hawaii - was very difficult compared to the security of a staff job, and it didn't suit Noah's temperament. He didn't like going out and marketing himself every month like a used car. Feature writing for the big magazines was a young guy's game, anyway. They could rave all night, then get up and chase the story all day. They would work for crappy wages because they were still single. They were on the make, their glory days still over the horizon.

So, a hermit with a laptop, Noah was writing a long, sprawling novel about love and betrayal in the time of Napoleon and watching his savings dwindle even more. Someone could have saved Noah the trouble. Told him that Tolstoy had already done the deed, called it

"War and Peace." A light read for a day at the beach.

The thing that kept him going was that he was able to sit down and write at length and in detail, using the amazing collection of facts, trivia and oddities that were rolling around in his head. Two decades of reporting on human foibles and failings is good training for a novelist. So is a lifetime of voracious, unstructured reading.

What Noah got from McCord is that the L.A. Times needed him. They had no Hawaii bureau anymore and there was a hot story on the wire tonight about the murder of a young British diplomat in Honolulu.

"He was dispatched - get it?" McCord said withn a chuckle.

McCord wanted two thousand words on his desk by noon the next day. Noah laughed at the guy. "Go screw yourself."

"All right," McCord said, "I'll get you a free-lance rate of \$2500, plus per diem and expenses. But send me something later today? How about that?"

Noah hesitated. He knew damned well that he was going to do it for the money. But if he could make McCord suffer, just a little, it would be worthwhile.

"Ahhhh, I don't know," he drawled. "Why don't you take it off the AP wire?"

"Pressure from Chicago. They think we take too much off the wires now and that's why readership is dropping."

"You've got plenty of reporters there, why not use one of 'em?"

"Noah, I can't even get anyone on the ground in less than eight hours from this end. You can be there at dawn and working. Look, I'll

throw in a thousand dollar bonus when the story is wrapped. What do you say?"

"Yeah, I'll do it."

"All right. You're on the clock immediately. I'm going to e-mail you the clips I have so far and your credential. Get over to Honolulu and start cranking. Oh yeah, find yourself a photographer and bill us."

"Yeah. That would be great, Dave. See ya'." Noah shut the phone and stood very still, in the deep stillness of the Hawaiian night. Was that surf, or the laughter of the Gods he heard booming in the distance just now?

Take your pick.

Chapter 2

When Captain Daniel Fong of the Honolulu Police Department saw Robin Hernandez walk into the crime scene with that FBI

identification hung around her neck, he couldn't help but whistle under his breath. So, this was the hot-shot the Bureau shipped out here, he thought. She was cute, no doubt of that. At a distance, she could be mistaken for a wahine, an island girl. The straight, black hair was the same, the bronze complexion, the wide mouth and the slight slanting of the almond-shaped eyes. She was plenty sexy in a snug, Navy blue pants suit and lavender blouse - and those high heels! Robin had a reputation as a tough and relentless investigator with a brilliant mind and her own unorthodox way of doing things. That's why the FBI sent her to the middle of the Pacific ocean.

Fong thought about running away, but at 295 pounds he wasn't built for running and it was too late now anyway. Robin had collared one of the troopers at the edge of the crime scene and the traitor was pointing right at him. Fong scowled and turned away, even as he heard the beat of her two inch heels coming closer. The scent of Chanel No. 5 arrived a split second before Robin herself.

"Excuse me, are you Captain Fong," asked a clear, alto voice?

Fong turned and looked the Latina right in the eyes. "I'm Fong. Aloha."

Robin extended her hand and Fong shook it. She smiled without showing her teeth - which were sparkly white, but wide and thick. This made her self-conscious and hesitant to smile fully, so she was often accused of being a dud.

Robin was looking around, over each shoulder. "Hello, I'm Special Agent Robin Hernandez with the FBI. Did someone puke here?"

"Yeah. The girls who found the body got sick into a planter when they realized the guy was dead."

"Too many drinks with the little umbrellas?"

"Agent Hernandez, I don't see how the Bureau has any jurisdiction here. This is local and we're on top of it."

Robin smiled without showing her teeth. "We're not claiming any jurisdiction, Captain. But the victim was the nephew of the Duke of Malmsey and we've had an unofficial request from Whitehall to..."

"Whitehall?"

"The British Government. They've requested that the Bureau keep track of the investigation. We won't step on your toes, but I've got an authorization to review all evidence and reports generated."

"Not much to review yet," Fong said.

"I know you're busy, Captain, but could you bring me up to speed?"

"Yeah, sure. Some time around midnight the vic was hit from behind with a blunt object, one of my guys said they thought it was a Hawaiian war club, but that's kinda farfetched."

"Why?"

"Because anybody can get a stick and duct tape a big rock to one end of it. Or buy a baseball bat. The real war clubs belong to the kahunas today, and they only use 'em for ceremonial stuff. Or in museums. We'll let the Medical Examiner rule on that one."

"This building behind us, the Princess Kamamalu, was broken into last night and the British Legation's display area in the lobby was vandalized - so, maybe burglary too. We're working that angle and

I'll let you know."

The neglected Princess Victoria Kamamalu Building was located at the corner of Richards and King streets. It looked like the uneasy joining of two different structures at the same address. There was a long, low office block with endcaps of black lava rock and lateral rows of dark-tinted windows, then a slim six-story office tower abruptly rose out of the lower building, slightly left of center. It wasn't ugly, just peculiar. All right, it was ugly.

A fading coat of flesh-pink paint on the building's flanks did little to improve it. Many prime tenants had abandoned ship to newer, sleeker high-rise office buildings just a few blocks distant.

"The British Legation has offices on the fourth floor," Fong continued, "and a display area in the lobby. They are a long-term tenant, been here as long as anybody remembers. The vic worked for the Legation as an aide. He looked-out for British businessmen in the Pacific area. Played a lot of golf, if I got it right. Name of Sir David Hamilton - British citizen. Twenty-eight and single."

"Display area? What's that mean," Robin asked?

"It's kind of a little museum. Some junk, some good stuff."

"Could the war club have come from there?"

Fong sidestepped that one. "So, it looks like a straight-up violent crime. Unplanned. The vic was here by himself late at night. Maybe came out to have a smoke. Maybe robbers happened on the vic and decided to take him out. A hard blow to the head. Evidence says that he was killed on the spot, not dragged from inside. His pockets were

emptied and we're scouting the vicinity for discards from the wallet or other items."

"How big a radius?"

"About a half mile. You want more?"

"No, Captain. Just asking. Now what about the coconuts?"

"The what...?"

"The two coconuts that were found next to the body."

Fong could feel the acid reflux kicking-in. It started as a bitter taste at the back of the throat and by the end of the shift he'd be breathing fire. "There were no coconuts, Agent Hernandez. There were two kukui nuts, which the vic may have been using as worry beads. You know? Like those ball bearings Bogart had in a movie? People sometimes do that in the Islands."

"Oh, kukui nuts."

Robin could thank her boss, "half-Shel", for that one. Special Agent in Charge Sheldon Margulies was one of those nimrods at the Bureau who kept failing upwards. If he was any worse at his job, he'd be the next Director. Unlike Robin, who had been sent to Hawaii because she drew too much favorable press for breaking up a terrorist cell, Margulies was shipped out because he bungled a hostage situation and got six people killed. For that he was promoted and put on a plane.

Margulies called Robin just after one A.M. and told her he'd assigned her to this vital case - and then got the details wrong. Robin tried to focus on what Fong had said. The kukui were known as

candlenuts - because of their waxy, oily interior. They were about the size and color of small chestnuts.

"Yeah. They were right next to the vic, down here." Fong pointed to a traditional chalk outline of the victim's body near one of the planters at the north end of the courtyard. There were two small circles next to the outline of the left arm. The body itself had been bagged and taken away by the coroner's people some time ago. From the look of the arms and legs, Robin thought the vic had been tall and slim, perhaps athletic. He may have been meeting someone and had walked part way to greet them. Then he suffered a solid blow to the skull, something that would do the most damage to the brain. Mean. "The victim was how old," Robin asked?

"Twenty eight. Went to Oxford. Not an 'A' student, they tell me."

Robin thought that the family must have very strong connections, to get an FBI agent out of bed before sunrise, half way around the world.

Fong broke her train of thought. "Let's go inside," he said. "And there's broken glass in there, so..."

"I'm not exactly barefoot."

"No, ma'am. This is the side door we're going to. The main entrance to the building is up the street a ways. It was all locked up so we know the robbers came in and out this way."

"Was the building door propped open," Robin asked?

"When my team arrived, it was shut. We think the robbers let the door close so it would look more natural from the street."

They crossed the driveway and walked up a few concrete stairs, to that side door. As they went into the Princess Victoria Kamamalu Building, Robin stopped and looked around. "No security cameras?"

"Not a one," Fong said. "This is an older building. And since we have a fairly low crime rate, the owners aren't in a panic to spend that kind of money. They probably will now."

The lobby was a tall atrium with two glass walls and a terrazzo floor. The street side of the building was paneled and the back wall held the elevators for the tower. The main entrance was down at the other end of the lobby, a pair of large glass doors - solidly locked. Robin walked over and tried the doors herself; they didn't budge.

The lobby measured about fifty by a hundred feet and a large portion, more than half the space, was glassed-off as a separate display area. Inside that area was a motley collection of Hawaiian artifacts, some from the recent, plantation era, some several hundred years old. Some pieces were in cases, some on pedestals. Several were museum quality, some little more than dusty scraps of dried leather and fibers.

The plate-glass door to this area had been shattered but it looked like nothing had been vandalized inside the display - it seemed too small to call it a museum. And it wasn't a gift shop either, since they only sold a few postcards. There was no tagging, no graffiti, no damage except for the glass door.

"Captain...?"

"Yes ma'am?"

"Have you noticed something unusual about the floor?"

"If you're telling me that the floor has been swept up, trashing a good source of evidence, then yes, ma'am, I am aware of it. The old lady who does the clean up for this lobby isn't due to arrive for a few hours. So it looks like the robbers did their own clean up. I've never seen anything like it. Our bad luck."

"Captain, I'd like to offer the FBI Labs assistance in obtaining forensic and trace evidence from this material. Would you be agreeable to that?"

"Sure, Special Agent. Knock yourself out."

Robin smiled without showing her teeth. With that attitude, they would never wrap up this case. And Robin didn't play that way.

Chapter 3

A growing clash of voices from the edge of the crime-scene announced the arrival of Lord Clapham, the Legation's Cultural Director and Legate. Clapham looked very old-school in his expertly tailored black suit with gray wescot from Saville Row, mandatory umbrella and leather dispatch case. He was tallish, had a bit of a pot belly and a perfectly trimmed, RAF mustache riding on his stiff upper lip. Seeing Captain Fong, the obviously disturbed peer made straight for him.

"I've been led to believe the FBI is here. Any truth to that?"

Fong nodded toward Robin and she moved to join the two men. As Robin stepped up, she held out a hand.

"Hello, Special Agent Robin Hernandez. I'm the FBI liaison but I'm only here as an observer - this is Captain Fong's case."

Lord Clapham took Robin's hand and shook it firmly.

"How d'you do. Thomas Lord Clapham. Charmed, of course. I'm the Cultural Liaison to Her Majesty's Government and head of the Legation. Sorry to meet you under these unfortunate circumstances. And this ungodly hour. Oh please tell me that the Logbook is unharmed!"

Robin could only defer to Captain Fong. She shook her head.

"Captain Fong will know. I've just arrived on scene."

Fong scrunched up his face and looked over at Lord Clapham. "No problem, Lord Clapham, it's right over there - good as new."

Robin put a hand on Fong's rounded shoulder. "Perhaps someone...?"

Lord Clapham took up the challenge. "Right. Captain Cook's Logbook. We have a major fragment of Captain Cook's original logbook from HMS Resolution when he discovered the Hawaiian Islands in 1778. It's quite valuable and a piece of important shared history between the Hawaiian people and Her Majesty's Government. Thank God it's all right. I see they've swept up the broken glass. Good-oh."

He immediately walked away, striding over to a display case that housed a weathered old book, its yellow pages stained from careless use and the long passage of time. The book was leather bound with the kind of embossed, dark cover that certainly looked like it came from

the late 18th Century.

Lord Clapham peered into the case to check on the valuable contents. Satisfied, he took a step back and examined the case itself. Nodding slightly, he returned to where Robin and Captain Fong stood.

"Looks bloody perfect. Untouched, I should say. Thank merciful God. Was anything actually taken?"

"We are working a list, an inventory from one of your people, and then we'll know what may have walked."

Fong waved to one of his detectives, a tanned caucasian with red hair. The man was checking a list on a clipboard, but he broke off and walked over to Fong and the others.

Without waiting for the man to get all the way there, Fong said, "This is detective Delaney. He's been checking your inventory against what's in the area. What you got, Delaney?"

The redhead twisted one lip and shook his head. "Not much, Cap. So far, the only thing that's missing is this #172... uhhh... 'Bones of Lono'. Far as I can tell, that's all she wrote."

"Oh," said Lord Clapham, with a sinking sound in his voice. "Then those Hawaiians have made good their threat."

Fong scowled, his face darkening like a storm cloud. "What threat? What Hawaiians? I don't recall you informing us that any threats have been made."

"Yes, Captain. I understand your confusion. We didn't report it because it seemed like a paper-tiger, a hoax, a je-ne-sais-quoi."

"Could you speak English for a minute. What threats?"

"Over the last several years, we have received letters from some native Hawaiians, kahunas, who take exception to our collection of artifacts. They claim that these items, most of them anyway, belong to the Hawaiian people and should be returned. And there is one item that was mentioned specifically, the very same 'Bones of Lono' that were taken in this crime spree. They insisted that we return them for burial in Hawaiian soil."

"Wait a moment, Robin interjected, "I thought Lono was a Hawaiian God, an ancient God. Are these his bones?"

"Not exactly," Lord Clapham replied. "This one was a King of Hawaii going back a few hundred years. Lonoikamakahiki is his full name."

"A real man?"

"Quite real."

Fong was still looking sour. "Maybe if we had the bones of Henry the Eighth over at the Ala Moana, you folks would want them back?"

Clapham took a long time to get the pained expression off his face. "Yes, Captain. I suppose we would."

"What about the victim, Mr. David..."

"Sir David Hamilton."

"Yeah. Sir David. What was he doing in the office at midnight?"

"I'm sure I don't know. And I'm not evading your question. Sir David was a business development officer and he often entertained clients - dinner, a night on the town, bit of skirt, that sort of

thing. He may have come in to make some notes after a meeting or dinner - one has no way of knowing. Now, if you'll excuse me, I want to check on my offices upstairs. Captain. Special Agent." After a nod to each of them, Lord Clapham walked stiffly over to the bank of elevators and pressed the up button. The steel tip of his umbrella beat a tattoo against the shiny terrazzo floor as he waited.

Robin glanced over at Captain Fong. He was still looking angry about something. "Captain, will you excuse me?"

"Yeah, sure."

"Captain...?"

"Yeah, what? Am I pissed off - yes. At you, no. This stuffed shirt, Lord Clapham, wants to lay the murder off on Hawaiian nationalists. He doesn't get that the British are keeping the bones of a Hawaiian king on display like it's a damned science project. No wonder the kahunas are unhappy. Now I have to make them suspects in this buggah murder. Ah, hell."

Fong turned away from Robin and walked toward his men. He pulled them into a huddle and was talking quietly as Robin walked back out to the courtyard. She walked up to the cordoned-off area where the body had been found. She stood there, imagining that she was the victim; what did he see and hear in his last moments? He had walked into the courtyard for a smoke. Did he sense danger? Was anyone here to greet him? Were the murderers known to the victim or not?

So far, the only clue that had any potential were the two kukui nuts. She needed to know why the vic had them and what they meant.

For the moment, she was going to zoom over to the office, jump-start her day and get that container of evidence on its way to the mainland.

Coconuts, thought Robin.

You had to love the FBI.

Chapter 4

The night air on Oahu smelled of tropical flowers and jet fuel as Noah stepped off a small, commuter plane. He had a hastily packed bag of clothes in one hand, a briefcase in the other with his laptop and supplies. As Noah jogged across the blacktop toward the terminal at Honolulu International, a light fog swirled in from the ocean.

Back in the 1950s, good-looking wahines heaped free handmade flower leis on tourists as they came off the planes in Honolulu. Today, a single lei goes for thirty to a hundred dollars. But they are still made by hand and still beautiful.

On the walk out to the taxi stand, Noah thought maybe he should buy himself a lei - the better to blend in. Funny. He was here on business and the sooner he could get this story written and sent off, the better. He had been on edge ever since his cell phone razed him like a dark and evil alarm clock. Noah thought, my head still hurts

like hell from that bump.

The Times had set Noah up with a little room in the Coconut Palms, an older inn on Hotel Street - about a mile from the crime scene. He planned to dump his bag there and make a few phone calls to get started. When he walked into the motel, there were several faxes waiting for him. One was a list of employees at the British Legation, a Who's Who entry on the murdered man, a brief wire story about the murder, Noah's working press credential from the Times and a list of several photographers he could use.

He called the photographers first. The number one name on the list was currently in Thailand, his message said. The second guy was booked for a month shooting bikini layouts, according to his angry girlfriend. But the third guy, Sam Hokua, was available. He answered the phone like he was always up at 5:30 A.M. and sounded smart, despite the jokes and surf slang. Sam worked for a reasonable rate, and he was in Honolulu this morning. Noah agreed to meet him and talk about the job.

His next call was to the front desk at the British Legation. They were closed but had a special phone number for emergencies. Noah called it and it rang through to a cell phone.

"...could stand each other... Hello, British Legation, how may I help you?"

"Yes, my name is Noah Sherman and I'm writing a news story for the Los Angeles Times about a murder at the legation."

The voice was a cultured alto, skilled in that BBC English that

made everything it said sound intelligent and reasonable, no matter how daft it might be. But more than that, Noah recognized an underlying sound, the purr of a jungle cat, the heady register of a naturally sexy woman.

"Yes, how may I help you?"

"I'd like to speak to your press attache."

"Certainly. However, it is after hours now and we couldn't do a thing till later this morning. I'm usually in at eight, and I'd be happy to schedule you then."

"There's no chance I could talk to him tonight?"

"Really, I'm afraid not."

"And your name is...?"

"Christiana Honore, Office Manager at the Legation. You will want to speak with Lord Clapham - he's the Cultural Director and Legate, we don't actually have a Press Attache, you see. We're not an Embassy, after all, just an humble little Legation."

"Nice to speak with you, I'm Noah Sherman - L.A. Times."

"Charmed."

"What time should I call?"

"Lord Clapham doesn't get in before 9:00. Call at 9:30 and I can probably put you right through."

"I can't call tonight?"

"No, I'm sorry. Be fair, he's under a lot of stress tonight. He was very close to Sir David." Her voice quavered, "He's simply not taking calls right now."

"And what number should I be calling?"

"Call the Legation switchboard, that will be me."

"Well, great. I'll talk to you later, then. Oh, hey, wasn't the scene of the crime right next to your building?"

"There is a courtyard at the building," her voice got tight and troubled again. "...they found him. I'm sorry... I'm not supposed to be talking about this, especially with the press. Lord Clapham can tell you everything you need to know, I'm sure. Cheers."

And she rang off.

Noah flashed his watch. It was almost time to meet Sam Hokua, the photographer. Noah unfolded a map of Honolulu on the desk in his room; it looked to him like he was staying in the local Chinatown. Sam had suggested the Golden River Restaurant for their meeting, a little place at the end of King Street, where it crossed the river. Several blocks away, open 24 hours.

As Noah headed outside, he smelled the fishy, spicy smell of Asian cuisine and realized that he was hungry and low on energy. He walked past the Oahu Market, with its big bins of fresh food, fish and Asian specialties. The market was large and must have covered a square block. Vendors and farmers were setting up their stalls and local chefs beginning to haggle over the catch of the day. Noah crossed King Street. Some of the store-fronts were empty. Noah saw a melancholy, hand-lettered sign saying, "Out of our business." The recession had even reached this far and damaged the once thriving economy of Oahu and the Islands in general.

Occupying a corner location, the little Golden River had large windows and Noah scouted the inside. He noticed a short Hawaiian man sitting at a rear table intently reading the Honolulu Reporter. Ahhh, there was a camera on the table. This had to be Sam whatshisname. As Noah walked in, a little brass bell fixed to the door tinked and the short man looked up from his newspaper with a huge, bright smile. As Noah walked over to him, the man began speaking.

"Aloha, I'm Sam Hokua. And you're Noah, right?" The short man stuck out his hand and Noah shook it. The man's grip was strong and firm. Even his fingers seemed muscular. Noah smiled in return.

Sam was wearing a subdued Aloha shirt, linen trousers and fisherman sandals with no socks. Noah guessed that Sam was about five feet six inches tall and must have weighed about 140, with the smooth muscles of a longtime surfer. He had the flattened nose and jet-black hair of a native Hawaiian. There was a bald spot like a monk's tonsure on top of his head, and there were some lines at the corners of his eyes, but Sam's age was hard to figure. Thirty-five? Forty-five... fifty-five? As long as he could keep up, it really didn't matter to Noah.

He gestured Noah into the chair opposite him. At that moment, Noah noticed the camera sitting on the table was a Leica M8, a serious photojournalist's rig - worth close to ten thousand. Noah felt a surge of relief. The guy was a pro after all. This was simply not an amateur's camera.

"Tell me something about yourself, will you?"

"I never did belong to the boy scouts, yeah?"

"Tell me how you got started taking pictures."

"Buggah big surf."

"Sorry...?"

"Used to be a competition surfer," Sam said quietly. "But I got tired of seaweed in da shorts. My friends help me get started, yeah? They gave me a camera, a little camera - not this one. And I was ova' on the beach when a cruise ship full of malihini - that's tourists - catch on fire, so I took all kinda pictures. Some of them got published and made big money, choke money. I stuck wit' it. Done pretty good. I take lots of pics for the Island newspapers and some big magazines as a stringer. Like, when the President come to Hawaii, I'm workin' round da clock. That about it, yeah?" Sam looked down at the table top.

Noah nodded his big head. "I was a career journalist. Two Pulitzer prizes for reporting. Then, I'm forty-five years old, they lay off half the editorial and city staff. Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out. Newspapers are suffering all over, but I was a star player, you know?"

"Where you from, man?"

"Big Island, now. I moved here from Los Angeles. Divorced and laid-off in the same year. I needed a freaking change."

"You like it on Hawai'i?"

"Yeah, sure. Paradise. What's wrong with that? Anyway, the old boss calls me to write a story about this murder. They don't want to

use copy off the AP wire and show the whole world what jerks they are." Noah pushed his chair back and was poised to stand up. "So, let's get started."

"Yeah but look man, you in the Islands now. We gonna have a quick meal here and take a cab down to Richards street - be there in no time. Man, you won't believe the roast pork here."

"We have a deadline tomorrow and I need to get moving..."

"Can't take a good picture till later. Then, early, we get into the Legation and really work hard, yeah?"

Noah remembered how hungry he was. "I could go for roast pork," he said.

Sam liked spicy food and asked for a certain hot pepper that made the old Chinese waiter smile and nod. When the food arrived, he carefully put his Leica into a backpack on the seat next to him. They were silent despite a lingering curiosity about each other. Sam found an empty cab just a half-block from the restaurant.

Chapter 5

Honolulu at dawn. Not many people on the street. Hookers and outcasts. The unwashed and unloved. Trouble in paradise. Tourists were dead asleep now, knocked out by a day in the tropical sun. Noah was surprised by how much of Honolulu looked like it was stuck in the 1940s, the World War II era. Buildings were mostly two stories - except for the recent skyscrapers - and had a colonial look about them. Quaint. The leftover fog covered it all in a hazy wrapper. Postcrads from paradise.

Noah looked out the side window of the cab, twisting his head to see taller buildings while Sam read over the wire story that the editor had e-mailed to Noah. Sam grunted twice as he was reading and pointed to something in the story. Noah had the impression that Sam was singing to himself in a very low voice, but it was masked by the endless chatter on the cab's two-way radio.

They had traveled about a mile down Hotel Street when the cab took a right hand turn onto Richards and then pulled over to the curb in front of the Princess Victoria Kamamalu Building. Noah handed the cabbie a twenty and waved away the change.

The map had shown the location of the Legation's building directly across the street from the Iolani Palace grounds, but Noah didn't get the openness and "old Hawaii" feel of the place until he was standing

there. He took in a humid breath and looked around. The Iolani Palace, a Victorian-inspired sandstone mansion, was home to the last Kings and Queens of the Islands. The Palace was now in the middle of a large park in downtown Honolulu, with a low companion building that might have been a military barracks off to one side.

Sam's voice broke the silence. "Crime scene up here in da courtyard."

Noah nodded and followed as Sam walked up a driveway. Part of the courtyard was blocked off by yellow crime scene tape. It was a dark, chilly place at dawn, poorly lit and strangely quiet. The area had clearly been worked over and not even a gum wrapper remained to lend it a human touch. The remaining wisps of fog gave the courtyard a surreal, dreamlike look. A man had died here for unknown reasons. Could they possibly question his ghost?

Sam took a smaller digital camera out of his backpack and began shooting in every direction. The smaller camera had a powerful flash and each burst of the strobe illuminated a big ball of fog, while etching sharp shadows on the ground.

Meanwhile, Noah crossed the driveway and went up to the side door of the Princess Kamamalu Building and looked into the lobby. Inside was a long, open room, an atrium, really. Taking up a large part of the lobby was a glassed-in area that looked like a small museum - mostly old artifacts that reflected Hawaii's colorful past.

"Sam?"

Sam straightened up and came over to where Noah was staring

through the door.

"What is that, Sam, a gift shop?"

"Ho! It's a buggah little museum where the Brits keep Hawaiian stuff. Very old stuff. Whatchamacallits. Some go all the way back to Captain Cook. They got a book from da' ship they say worth a couple million to collectors. That what they say, anyways."

"Two million dollars?"

"No man, pounds."

"And it wasn't taken in the burglary?"

"Can't tell, Noah. Report don' say so, yeah?"

Noah grasped the door handle and tried to open the door. No good; it was soundly locked.

"No security guard on duty?"

"Might be some guy eating chips up on the eighth floor and watching TV. But no buggah guard station in the lobby."

Noah looked around, peering through the door into the corners of the lobby. Sam was right. No sign of a guard desk anywhere.

"All right, Sam. Let's look at the scene."

They turned and walked from the brighter area near the door into the dimness of the courtyard. Sam's eyes darted back and forth. His body language grew tense and alert as they walked to the back of the courtyard, where the yellow crime scene tape twisted and stretched in the rising breeze.

"Noah, I can shoot this now, but it gonna look a lot better in full daylight."

"Sure. But take a few shots just for reference. I want to reconstruct what happened last night. I'm feeling that there's something out of whack here. A man is killed, there's a break-in that's connected... and the robbers left a million-dollar item behind and took some old bones..."

"Maybe they ran off after they killed this guy," Sam said, pointing at the classic white chalk outline on the ground, showing where the dead man had been found."

"Maybe...", Noah said.

Sam shrugged. "I just take da pictures."

Now it was Noah's turn to give Sam a long stare. "Then take some."

"No worries."

Sam took a series of photos of the crime scene, most of them close ups. Each time his camera went off, a brilliant, blue-white light ball filled the dark, misty courtyard. After Sam had taken his snaps, they turned to walk out onto Richards Street when a voice came out of the foggy darkness.

"Freeze right there. Stretch out your hands."

Sam and Noah instinctively stepped closer together as protection against their unseen foe. A moment later the large form of Captain Fong emerged from the mist like an orbiting planet and, on seeing Sam, lowered his 9mm Beretta automatic.

"Ho! Sam Hokua. What da hell you doing here, and who's the haole?"

"Jerry, you want to shoot me for somethin' do it now and get it over. Or put that t'ing back in your pocket and we can talk like men.

This here is Noah Sherman from the Los Angeles Times. He won dat Nobel Prize, twice."

"Pulitzer," Noah said quietly.

"Listen, Hokua," the police Captain started off. "All I asked you is what going on. And you still ain't told me. So, sing."

"Noah gonna write this story, and I'm gonna take the snaps. We out here getting our feet wet, having a look around. Can't talk to nobody till business hours, so we just checking it out. Nothing wrong with dat, yeah?"

Fong snapped the 9mm back into his shoulder holster. He turned to Noah. "You got some ID?"

"Absolutely." Noah fished out his driver's license, his old press card and the new credential from the editor at the Times, and handed them to Fong. The overweight detective examined them carefully in the beam of a pocket flashlight and then nodded. He handed the papers back to Noah.

"This is a crime scene, you know? I get a report from a black and white that somebody creepin' in here, taking pictures. Sounds suspicious, yeah? I came down to see who."

"Press business, that's all," Noah said in a non-committal way.

Fong looked at Noah. "You, mister Nobel Prize. You got credentials and I'm good with that. But this guy?" He pointed at Sam. "Don't pay him till you got your pictures in hand. That's all I got to say. Oh, and don't goof around with the scene, you hear me Sam?"

"No way, Captain. We just here to have a look-see, and then we

gonna come back later. Betta' light for the pictures, yeah?"

"I'm leaving a man here to keep you honest." Fong turned and pointed to a uniformed cop, who then walked over to the entrance of the courtyard and stood guard as Fong plodded out the opposite way, to Alakea street, where his unmarked was waiting.

Noah gave Sam a nudge. "Let's get the hell out of here."

Sam nodded. "I was thinkin' the same thing. Delicious Kona coffee just up the street."

Noah smiled broadly. "Now you're talking my language, partner."

Sam's eyes flicked at that last word. But he smiled and gave a jaunty wave to the cop standing at the entrance to the courtyard. As the cop looked away, Sam reduced the waving hand to just one finger. Noah saw it and no translation was needed.

Chapter 6

Noah sent a preliminary story to the Los Angeles Times at 7:00 AM Hawaii time. It was short and used a couple of Sam's strobe pictures

of the crime scene and ran on page two, but it gave the paper something fresh to print. Today, they would finish the thing off, say 3000 words, and Noah could get back to avoiding his novel.

At 8:00 AM, Noah dialed the local YWCA. "Hello, this is Father David Yustace, I'm calling to offer counseling to the girls who found that dead body yesterday. Do you think they might be interested?"

The receptionist wasn't sure. "I don't know, Father. I think you should speak to them directly. You never know if someone wants to talk or not, do you?"

"Thank you, my child. Would you give me their names?"

"Yes, Father. It's Linda Floss, and Debbie Hugins. Two good, Christian girls. I can't give room numbers, but I'll put you through if you like?"

In fifteen minutes, no longer posing as a priest, Noah had talked the girls into a meeting later that morning. This was more like it. Noah could almost see the elements of this story come together. Another day and I'll be back home and the Times will be out of my hair permanently, he thought, wrongly.

At 9:30, he dialed the number for the British legation and waited while it rang and rang. He entertained the thought that they might have closed down for mourning when that purring voice answered.

"Good Morning, British Legation."

"Yes, hello. My name is Noah Sherman - am I speaking to Christiana Honore?"

Yes, Mr. Sherman it's Christiana. How are you today?"

"I'm fine, thanks. Now how about letting me speak to Lord Clapham?"

"We're a bit shorthanded this morning..." A phone rang somewhere near her. "Pardon me, but I must answer that. Don't hang up."

And she was gone. Gilbert and Sullivan was the music-on-hold. Noah hummed along, "I am the very model of a modern..."

"Mr. Sherman?"

"I'm still here."

"One of our staffers hasn't come in this morning and it's bedlam this end. I will be able to connect you with Lord Clapham, but give me a minute, all right?"

Noah was about to say something when Gilbert & Sullivan returned. The music was a bit silly for Noah's taste, and something snarky about the lyrics had never appealed.

"Mr. Sherman? I can connect you to Lord Clapham now."

"Thank you, Mrs. Honore."

"It's Miss Honore - not that it matters; you cannot call me Christy till the second phone call."

"This is the second phone call."

"Don't correct a lady, if you please. Now hold for just a moment. Alright, cheers..."

"Hello," Noah said. No voice, no response. Dead air.

"Hello, this is Lord Clapham."

"Ah, Lord Clapham. My name is Noah Sherman. I'm writing for the Los Angeles Times..."

"Oh, dreadful paper..."

"... and I need to speak to you about the recent murder of Sir David Hamilton. Is this a good time to talk?"

"Not in the least. Firstly, we're shorthanded this morning - the late Sir David's secretary has not come in and is not answering her phone. Everything is topsy-turvy, I'm afraid. Could we not speak tomorrow?"

"Lord Clapham, I'm sorry, but this is a news story and it's going to get a lot worse for you before it gets better. Perhaps you could tell me what you know and I'll be on my way?"

"Out of the question right now, I'm afraid."

"Lord Clapham, I need to file a story today. May I see you in person later this morning?"

"Yes, of course. Meet me at the legation at 13:30?"

"Couldn't it be any sooner?"

"Afraid not. It's a chaos here now. I'll tell Christiana to add you to my schedule. If that's all...?"

"I'll talk to her myself. She doesn't have all my phone numbers. And thank you, your Lordship."

"Cheers," he said as Gilbert & Sullivan came back on the line. The tempo had speeded up and the modern major general was spitting out his lyrics like a machine gun.

"Hello, Mr Sherman; it's Christiana again. Lord Clapham wants to put you on his schedule. One thirty today, if that suits."

"Could we make it any earlier? I have a deadline."

"Sorry, no."

"Who is it that's missing from the office today?"

"Ah, it's Margaret Lackley, Sir David's secretary. She was very devoted to Sir David - quite fond of him, actually. She is probably in bed with a pot of tea and the phone unplugged, crying her eyes out."

"Could I have her address? If she's able to talk, I could speak to her right away - get some background and details of Sir David's job. I know it's probably against policy, but I won't be hard on her and I'll go easy on the death aspect."

A quiet pause.

"Mr. Sherman, I understand your need to be timely, but I'm afraid I can't give out an employee's information. But I can give you her full name as it appears in the phone book - if you take my meaning."

"Thank you, Miss Honore." Noah dug a pencil out of his pockets and wrote the name near the top of a notebook page. Margaret Lackley. He was already reaching for the phone book.

"Thanks again, Miss Honore. I'll see you at one thirty."

"Yes and please remember that it's ..."

"Crazy there... Yes. A reporter is comfortable with upheaval."

"I wish I was. Or perhaps not. Until later, then."

"Yes, goodbye."

Noah poked a number into his cell phone and stood still while it rang. Sam answered on the third ring. Noah told him to get dressed and meet him at the Princess Kamamalu Building courtyard in fifteen

minutes.

"What's going down," Sam asked?

"I have the names of the two girls who found Hamilton's body at the legation. We're going to meet them, then we talk to Lord Clapham, and we'll get a look at the crime scene in daylight - can you meet me at the Legation building right away?"

"I'll be out the door in one minute, yeah?"

Noah put the phone on its cradle and looked around. All he needed were a pair of sunglasses and his notebook to rule to world.

Chapter 7

The two young Christian women did not expect to stumble over a dead man on their way back to the YWCA that night. They had been out clubbing at Pipeline, a popular singles bar in the hip Kaka'ako district of Honolulu. Now, after hours of flirting, drinking and dancing, they were pleasantly exhausted and ready to slip into their bunks.

A cab dropped them on Richards Street, right in front of the historic Laniakea YWCA, but the taller woman, the brunette, wanted a

quick smoke before they went in - it was forbidden inside the rooms. They walked up the sidewalk to a cobblestone driveway that split the block, and turned right. A few yards along, they stepped into a courtyard that separated the YWCA from its neighbor, the Princess Kamamalu Building. Years ago, the courtyard had been a side-door entrance to the Y, but now it had become a waiting area for people who had parked their cars in the big parking structure behind the Princess Kamamalu Building. It was a nice place to spend a few minutes while the valets scurried after your ride.

The two young women were giggling and weaving as they entered the courtyard. The brunette fumbled to get a slender cigarette out of the tiny purse she carried. Suddenly they stopped. Toward the back of the enclosure, a young man was stretched out, face down, on the ground. He was very still. The women took a step closer. It was hard to see because of the darkness and the fog, but there was no mistaking the blood that had pooled near his head.

"He's been in a fight," said the brunette.

She shook off her companion's hand and took several hesitant steps forward. The man was nicely groomed, fair, wearing an expensive silk shirt and tailored black trousers. She knelt next to the slender figure, thinking that he had been hurt and they could at least call 911 or do something for him. He was very pale and it was hard to tell if he was breathing at all.

The shallow courtyard was bordered on three sides by high walls and on the fourth by the driveway. Within it were several cast-cement

benches and a couple of large concrete bowls planted with bright flowers and stumpy sago palms. Taller coconut palms helped shade the interior from the summer sun. The back corners of the courtyard were barely visible from Richards street in the daytime - tonight they were all but completely obscured.

The young man made the slightest motion with one hand and Debbie, the brunette, almost fainted. His thin lips opened and shut. She leaned forward and then further forward, trying to catch what he was saying. It was a ghost of a dry whisper, a voice at the very edge of life calling back to the living. Then he trembled and let out a raspy breath. A profound stillness settled over him. Debbie didn't want to consider what she had just witnessed.

"What did he say?" asked Linda.

"Something about Jesus, I think."

"OMG, Deb. That's so beautiful."

But when Debbie touched his neck, a shiver raced through her. She was surprised how cold and damp he felt. Like a marble statue; like a side of beef. She pressed her fingers firmly against his neck and the absence of a pulse was, really, not a surprise. She looked back over her shoulder at the blonde.

"Linda, he's stone cold dead!"

Linda's face went pale and the muscles of her jaw tightened. Her stomach clenched and her mouth was full of saliva. In another moment she grabbed onto one of the concrete planters in the courtyard and loudly vomited into it. The brunette stood and held her gently while

the last of it came up.

"Come on, dear. We'll get you inside and call the police."

"I don't wanna get mixed up with no dead men!" mumbled Linda, spitting to clear the foul taste from her mouth.

Debbie, the brunette, stamped her foot. "We're going inside to call right now!"

Leaning against each other like two weary veterans limping off the field of battle, the two young women walked out of the courtyard and toward the front door of the YWCA. Debbie wanted to be strong and not cry but she had never found a dead body on vacation before. By the time they got to the reception desk inside the "Y", she was blubbering so hard that Linda had to tell their story to the night manager, lightly holding a hand in front of her mouth to mask her sour breath.

Chapter 8

After paying off the cab, Noah crossed Richards Street to the Princess Kamamalu Building. He waited less than two minutes before Sam Hokua bounced out of a cab and waved at him.

"Aloha."

"Hey, Sam. We're going to meet the girls in the courtyard." Noah was moving already and Sam pulled his smaller camera, the one with the strobe, out of his bag and clicked it on. The place looked very different in the light of day, but some last threads of fog softened the edges.

As they walked into the courtyard space they could hear the voices of the two girls raised in dispute.

"My mother will have a cow if she sees my name in the papers

again."

"Linda! We have a duty. We're witnesses."

"I don't care about..."

The voices stopped as Noah and Sam approached. The girls were standing against the near wall of the courtyard, about as far from the chalk outline as possible.

"Hi, ladies," Noah said. "I'm Noah Sherman. This is Sam Hokua."

Noah didn't offer to shake hands because you had to be careful about physical contact with women during an interview. But he smiled and held out his press credential for them to inspect.

"So, who's who," Sam asked?

The two women were similar physically, both young and slim, with shoulder length hair. They wore pastel shorts although the blonde had on a frilly blouse, while the brunette was more relaxed in a tank top.

"I'm Debbie. Debbie Hugens." That was the taller woman, the brunette.

"So, you're Linda?" Noah prompted.

The other girl, a blonde with a sharply pointed nose, nodded but didn't make eye contact. She fussed with a lace handkerchief as she spoke.

"Yes. But I'm not sure I want to talk. Debbie thinks we have some kind of civic duty but she's from a liberal family and I'm not."

"I understand," Noah said, gently. "We can go several ways. I can quote you under your names or we can withhold your names, or just get

material on background. I prefer to quote you because readers get more involved with a story if real people are a part of it. But, suit yourselves."

"I don't care if you quote me," said Debbie, with a hint of defiance.

"I was the one who threw-up," Linda said, sounding like a child. "When Debbie told me he was dead, it just came on me. I didn't want to make a mess."

Debbie added, "We went to a club called the Pipeline. A big place with a live band. We were dancing with some sailors from New Zealand. Nice guys, not fresh - but they kept buying us drinks. Whooo."

"I don't drink much at home," Linda said.

"Where's home," Noah asked?

"Salt Lake City."

"And I'm from Riverside, California," added the brunette.

Noah turned his head at a slight angle while contemplating Linda.

"You're LDS?"

"What difference does that make?" Linda responded with a tingle of defiance.

"Look," Noah said, "I'm a reporter. All I do is ask questions and write down the answers. I don't make judgments. Not my job, you know?"

"A lot of people look down on Mormons, they think we're weird."

"Not me," Noah said, firmly. "No matter what Joseph Smith did, throwing him out a second story window was morally wrong and violated

his Constitutional rights. Period.”

Linda glanced up at Noah, making eye contact for the first time. “Thanks. I always thought so, too.”

Noah smiled gently at her. “Maybe you could take us back to when you arrived here?”

Linda took the lead. Perky was clearly her default setting.

“OK. We got out of the cab. We came in here because Debbie wanted to smoke...”

“Linda-Marie!!”

“OK, sorry. But then we saw him.”

Debbie moved toward the front of the courtyard, where they found the body. Sam drifted back into the driveway so he could frame a wider shot. The crime scene tape was gone now and the tableau-vivant of the quiet corpse and bustling police was over. Linda walked toward the spot where the body had lain. The chalk outline had been partly swept away but a trace of it remained, like the fading memory of the dead man himself.

“He was over there. He was on his front, and we thought maybe he was out partying like us,” said Debbie.

“When we walked up,” Linda took a big, shuddering breath, “I saw that his head was bloody. We thought he was in a fight.”

“I didn't want to like touch him,” Debbie added. “But he looked so pale. We thought he needed a Doctor. I remember that his eyes were wide open, like he'd been surprised. He didn't have a pulse”

“That's when I had to spit-up.” said Linda, pointing to the lucky

concrete planter.

"Which way was he facing?"

The girls looked at each other. Debbie took the question. "That way," she said pointing toward the front of the courtyard. Sam instantly had a snap of the moment.

"Then we ran into the lobby of the "Y" and told them, and they called the cops." Debbie continued.

"And we told them everything we knew," Linda said, looking down, interested suddenly in her shoes.

Noah caught the hesitancy, the hint.

"You're sure there wasn't any little thing left over? Something you might have forgotten in the rush of events?"

"We don't want to get in trouble," Linda almost whispered.

Debbie looked defiant. "I'm going to tell..."

"No!"

"Linda! This is a murder. It's like not about us, you know?"

"I'm going to be grounded for the rest of my life!"

"You're twenty-three. They can't ground you any more."

"Oh, go ahead. Tell him."

Debbie drew herself together and stuck her chin forward. "He said something. When I touched his face. He said..."

Noah's head was going to explode, but he remained calm. "He said...?"

"Something about Jesus."

"The Jesus?" asked Sam Hokua.

Debbie nodded. "I couldn't make out the words, but I thought it was so beautiful that he was thinking of Jesus with his last breath. Then he made this horrible little noise and he twitched and then he was totally, totally still."

"And that's it," Noah asked?

Linda almost whispered. "Are we going to get in trouble?"

"Why didn't you tell the police?"

"We like got distracted," Linda said, remembering that she was so embarrassed about her bad breath that she said as little as possible to the police.

Debbie chimed in. "I thought she was going to tell it, and she thought I was going to tell it. We didn't mean to leave it out. Really."

"Look," Noah said, "if you remember something else, you can just call the police and tell them. You won't get in trouble."

"They won't like lock us up and throw away the key?"

Sam shook his head emphatically. "No way, sis. You the good guys, remember dat."

"Sam's right. The police may want you to go downtown to sign a new statement, but that's all. Don't be afraid. The police want the killer, not you two."

"Ho! Now let's take some pics. You two get close together. Face each other. Nice. Look at me. Now smile wikiwiki. Oh, come on! Big Hawaiian smiles. That it."

Sam clicked off a few shots. The girls were now relaxed and

giggling, smiling for the camera and tossing their hair like models. Noah had to put a stop to this or Sam would have their tops off in another minute.

"Ladies, thanks, you've been a big help. Now I think you should call the police before any more time passes. Right?"

They were nodding and smiling. Sam took the names and phone numbers.

When Noah looked at his watch he got a shock, it was 10:28 and they were due to meet Lord Clapham in two minutes. Waving goodbye to the girls, Noah steered Sam inside the lobby and toward the elevator. The display area with the Hawaiian artifacts was quiet and forlorn. A thin sheet of plywood had been rigged over its entrance. Strips of duct tape held the plywood in place

"Wait, Noah. I want to get some pictures here."

"Meet me upstairs, then?"

"Yeah. It empty here now. Just what I want."

Noah stepped into the elevator and pressed the square button for the 4th floor. As the doors closed, he could see Sam raising his camera and framing a shot.

Sam had been alone for maybe thirty seconds when the feeling washed over him. In his ears was a roaring sound like a big wave breaking. He turned and saw the old Hawaiian man standing in the courtyard, looking at him. Staring at him, really. Sam pointed to himself, to see if the old man wanted his attention.

Without any change of expression, the old man began speaking, his

head nodding in a rhythm. He was chanting something. Sam concentrated on his lips. It reminded him of something he had heard from another Hawaiian, a long time ago.

"E Uli i kai,

Eia mai la o Maui, he kanaka,

He ia wawae loloa..."

Sam had to get a picture of this old guy. He looked down at his camera to turn the flash off, so it wouldn't reflect in the big glass window. By the time he raised the camera to his eye, the old man was gone. Not just walking away, but gone. Sam ran up to the glass wall of the lobby and looked in every direction but could not see the old man. He ran outside, into the driveway, looking everywhere. He ran out to Richards street. He looked up and down the street. How far could a buggah old man go in a couple of seconds? You had to wonder.

Sam waited for a moment. He had run so fast his heart was pounding.

Chapter 9

As Noah stepped off the elevator, there were only two choices on the fourth floor of the Princess Kamamalu Building, left or right. To the right was the Sterling Sea freight Company, whose logo was a fat blue arrow spanning a wireframe globe. On the left was the British Legation, represented by an elaborate, gilded coat of arms. Noah headed for their door, smiling at the 19th century fox-hunting prints on the foyer wall, so out of tune with current sentiments in the UK.

He opened a heavy, oak door and stepped in. In front of him was a large, well lit room with eight or nine people in it. There was a reception area with a desk right in front of him - and no one sitting at it. Further back, the large room was divided into cubicles. There were a conference room and some semi-private offices with glass walls at the far end, and a corridor to his left that probably led to executive suites. Back among the cubicles there was considerable activity. Lone staffers rushed by with piles of paper in their arms, groups of two or three people spoke hurriedly in low tones, and somewhere a photocopy machine made a well-orchestrated racket.

Into this beehive strode an extremely good-looking woman, carrying several thick file folders and speaking to someone on a cell phone, held against her ear by a raised shoulder.

"I know how many are in a crew at Oxford, but not at the BBC. No, they said fourteen hundred to fourteen thirty but you know how media people are. Right!"

Noah had an appreciation for an attractive woman that went beyond purely sexual needs. He liked women's faces and a nice body was always a plus. This woman certainly had both. She was slender in a way the Brits might call lithe and she must have studied ballet as a youth to be able to glide over the floor the way she did.

Christiana was built like a swimmer with firm arms and legs. Her face was very nice, too. She had medium length, straw-blonde hair, a wide mouth and wide-set green eyes. Her nose was straight and slender down the bridge. When she smiled, her face lit up with amusement and pleasure. There was something delicate yet powerful about her.

She could be an Alfred Hitchcock heroine from the 1950s, the era of Grace Kelly and Kim Novak. She wore a fitted, sleeveless dress in shiny silk that emphasized her small waist. It wasn't exactly love at first sight, but Christiana had a visceral effect on Noah and he was coming-on to her before he knew it.

Seeing Noah, she graced him with a fetching smile and dumped her burden of files on the reception desk.

"Sir, you have to forgive me, but today..."

"I'm Noah Sherman, Los Angeles Times. Are you Ms. Honore?"

She raised her right hand. "I do so swear..."

The voice behind Noah said, "Holy maka! She looks like a movie star."

Sam had his camera up and quickly took several snaps of Christiana. She made a show of being fussed by the photos, but she relished them and widened her eyes for the camera.

"This is Sam Hokua, my colleague - photojournalist."

Sam flipped Christiana a business card. "I'll take a picture of you anytime, sister."

Noah brought this train to a crashing stop.

"Ms. Honore, we're here to see Lord Clapham, as you know. Is his Lordship available?"

She smiled brilliantly at Noah. "He's been on the phone quite a bit this morning, what with Downing Street and the Foreign Office, relatives and so on. But he knows to expect you. Please have a seat and I'll see if his Lordship is ready. Would you like some tea while you wait?"

Noah and Sam both shook their heads. She waved them to a pair of Chesterfield wing chairs in front of her desk and made for the executive corridor that led from the room.

"Tea in the morning. Bad idea," Noah said to Sam, quietly.

"Noah, I thought she was gonna be a dog - you know a lot of English women are that way, horse face and no figure you could notice? But not her. She remind me of... that Aussie. Used to be hooked-up with Tom Cruise?"

"Nicole Kidman."

"That the one. Could be her twin."

"Sam, we're here on business. Just settle down and get your

snaps."

"Roger that." Sam drew the good camera, the Leica, from his bag and dialed in some settings; f/5.6 was looking good right now.

Christiana took a half step out from the corridor and gestured them over.

"Lord Clapham will see you directly. All the way down the hall to that door at the end - and you may go right in."

Noah couldn't resist a manly smile. "Thanks for your help."

"My pleasure," she replied, tilting her head down and looking at Noah through thick eyelashes.

They walked down the hallway to Lord Clapham's office on heavy, green carpet that seemed to gobble up sound of any kind. Noah thought he could hear his heart beating in that corridor, it was so quiet. He tapped gently on the door and opened it as Lord Clapham said, "Come!"

Clapham's office was at one corner of the Princess Kamamalu building, and he had an amazing view of the Iolani Palace and grounds across the street. But you couldn't see down into the courtyard where the murder had occurred, it was on the opposite side of the building.

Lord Clapham was perfectly dressed in a dark three piece suit with a fairly tall shirt collar and a regimental tie done up in a Windsor knot that could have been in a museum itself, so perfectly was it made. His hair was silver-gray and exactly barbered. He wore a suit of light weight wool, cut in the form-fitting style of Saville Row. A black arm band circled his right bicep and a black silk handkerchief peeked out of his jacket pocket. Unlike most of the Brits Noah had

met, Lord Clapham had a nice tan. It was very becoming with his noble face, and it emphasized a lighter colored scar above his right eyebrow. Dueling with sabres, probably, Noah thought.

Lord Clapham stood and pulled the tails of his vest down before extending a hand for Noah to shake.

"How d'u do?"

"I'm Noah Sherman, with the Los Angeles Times, and this is my colleague, Sam Hokua."

"Pleased to meet you both. Please sit down. Now a brief caveat. I'm quite overwhelmed today. David's horrible murder, Miss Lackley's absence, we have more press contacting us all the time. The BBC will be here shortly. So, I'm begging for speed. A quickie, as you Americans say. I have almost nothing worthwhile or meaningful to contribute about the murder. I was out on my boat, the Regina, all evening. Had some guests for a late supper, then we played bridge, three rubbers, I believe, or four. Then bed. I was called in very early this morning to come down and meet with the police and FBI."

Sam's head turned. "FBI?"

"Yes, Her Majesty's Government has asked that the FBI follow this investigation because it involved some rather weighty people back in Blighty. Some highly placed peers, for one thing. I met with the Special Agent assigned to the case this morning. A young lady named...uhhh..." He squinted at a business card on his desk.

"...named Robin Hernandez. She's to be the liaison with the Bureau. No authority in the investigation but we're more comfortable with

someone on the Federal level as a contact. Now, gentlemen. I will attempt to answer your questions."

Noah liked to start with an easy question to get his subjects talking. Once they had a comfort level established, he'd move in for the kill.

"Did you know David Hamilton very well?"

"Sir David Hamilton. No, I must say that I didn't. Not particularly."

"Was he a good employee?"

Lord Clapham frowned. "Certainly. He was most effective in his position. He had a key role in securing the British Telecom deal in Indonesia."

"How long had he worked here?"

Well, let me see...? He came here in May, so it's been almost a year."

"And before Honolulu, where was he stationed?"

"Prior to this posting, he was in Athens. Before that...Cambodia."

Noah made a quick note in his tall reporters notebook. "What time did you finish dinner last night?"

"Supper, as I said. I'm sure it was around eleven o'clock."

"And what time was it when you went out to your boat?"

"Why so much interest in me, if I may ask?"

"No special interest, your Lordship. Do you know the whereabouts of any of your other staff people for last night?"

"Well, let's see. Miss Honore was at home. I called her there

about four AM to tell her about David's murder and ask her to handle certain details related to David's death. A memorial. And the body must be shipped back to the UK at once for burial. David is quite closely related to the Duke of Malmsey and his Grace the Duke will want to know that everything was handled with the utmost discretion."

"Anyone else?"

"Mmmm... our finance chappy was home - he called me after super. And our liaison with MI6... well I can't say, really. I mean his whereabouts are not for publication, if you get my drift?"

"Not really."

"MI6, old man, secrets and more secrets. But never fear, he's on our side. Frankly I never see the fellow. Scarlet Pimpernel, eh?"

"Yes. Now, Lord Clapham, will you tell me about Sir David's background? His family, academic career, and so on."

"I've sealed his records, which is our normal policy. But I knew David rather well. He comes from a very prominent family, he went to Sandhurst and Oxford. Not a scholar by any means, but interested in history and uhhh... literature. Been in the Foreign Office about five years. Really a fine young man by any measure."

"Did he get along with the others here at the Legation?"

"Oh, famously. Everyone thought the world of him. He had his own field, business relations and development, but he reported to me quarterly."

"I'm still not sure exactly what he did for you."

"May I speak off the record for a moment Mr. uhhh Sherman?"

"Of course. Let me know when you're ready to go back on."

"Well, we're in a rather odd position here. There shouldn't be a British Legation in Hawaii at all. A Legation has almost the same status as an Embassy, and we are represented in Washington DC with an Embassy there. A very nice one, I might say. However, England had diplomatic relations with the old government of Hawaii before the islands came under American influence in the late 19th century. In fact, the last Queen of Hawaii, Liliuokalani, wrote an imploring letter to Her Majesty Queen Victoria, asking for help in keeping you lot out. Americans, I mean."

"Really?"

"Yes, indeed. But before her Majesty could frame a response, the Hawaiian government fell and was replaced by certain prominent Americans who declared Hawaii a protectorate of the USA, and so it has been. Because of the somewhat special relationship between the Islands and her Majesty's Government, we have kept a diplomatic presence here, although we began calling ourselves a Legation after Hawaiian statehood, to not offend our greatest ally."

"Could I speak to your MI6?"

"No, sorry. State secrets. He has nothing whatever to do with this murder, I can assure you of that. Although I can't be more specific."

"And the detective who is in charge of the case?"

"It's the redoubtable Captain Fong, of the Honolulu Police. A good if uninspired policeman - don't tell him."

Sam and Noah had a moment of eye contact.

Lord Clapham nodded decisively. "I can only say that I mourn the loss of a capable and well-liked member of the Legation staff, a protege and a personal friend. Now, gentlemen, if you please. I'm afraid I must end this interview and move on to other business."

Lord Clapham stood and surveyed his office.

"How about a quick picture," Sam said, but he was already in motion, moving the British flag behind Lord Clapham and metering the light coming in through the window.

"Where do you... want me to look?"

"Straight ahead, your lordliness."

Lord Clapham immediately assumed an air of sorrowful gravity. He was quite good at this.

Sam danced around for a few moments, till he found the angle he wanted, then he snapped off three or four, and was replacing the flag even as Lord Clapham and Noah were shaking hands.

Sam gave Lord Clapham a breezy nod and joined Noah on the way out of the office. They walked in silence along the thick green baize, back to the main room of the legation. Christiana Honore was not at her desk. Phones were ringing madly, people were rushing around carrying stacks of files and conferring in small, hushed groups.

Noah was heading for the door when Christiana appeared from behind a partition with a stack of pink phone messages. She laid them on her desk and hurried over to Noah and Sam.

"Oh Mr. Sherman??"

Noah looked over his shoulder. "Thank you, Miss Honore. One more

question. Is there anyone else at the Legation who knew Sir David well, a friend or close co-worker?"

Her smile was tight but not unfriendly. "Not really. I suppose that, other than his secretary, no one was really close to him. He was fairly new to this posting, and his work was... well, not classified but it was not in the public eye."

"That's provocative. You mean he was also a spy?"

"No, no. My God no. Business Development. He would help British businessmen in the Pacific region. We're in competition with Australia and New Zealand in the Asian market and we try to keep ahead. That's all. Sir David would try to use our influence with other governments to get preferment for British companies. So, you see, we wouldn't want to trumpet that about. And, please, let's not put that in your story."

Noah shook her hand and Sam nodded as they moved toward the door.

"Don't hesitate to call if you have any further questions."

Christiana smiled but the dark circles under her eyes made her look tired and harassed. Noah was about to say something but two ringing phones made her turn away a moment later.