

The true and uncensored story of the
Catastrophe
At
Tapu Vana



By

Hal T. Mayberry & Lara L. L. Lee
2008

This novel is the true account of events that took place following the fictional catastrophe that occurred on the island of Tapu Vana on July 14-15 1974.

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Lara Lee

Here I am, on a beach working on my suntan and trying to figure out how things went so wrong. It wasn't like it was my fault although lots of things that have gone wrong in my life have been my fault. Like the time I was arrested for being drunk on the beach and my Uncle Chris had me thrown into the drunk-tank at the jail. That was defiantly my fault.

Where did it start?

My name is a mouthful. I'm Lara Lynn Langtree Lee and my brother is Lavern Lucas Lee. You're probably getting the idea that we have lots of L's in our names. Maybe it's because our dad's name is Lawrence Leland Lee Jr. and our mother has the lovely name Laska Lara Langtree Lee. I think that Laska is the most beautiful name in the world.

If you believed some of the things that people have said about me, you would think that I was just another spoiled, rich kid, raised by over-achieving parents who had more money than time for their only daughter. Mom and dad are over-achievers and they are rich but they had plenty of time for me. In fact, they had more time for me and my brother than we wanted.

In many ways my family is just like most families. You know one dad, one mom, and a few grandparents. My brother Luke is a couple of years older than me and we have a bunch of aunts, uncles, and cousins who aren't really related to us. I had dogs and cats and a horse when I was a kid. If we had lived in a nice, three bedroom house on a quiet street in the suburbs we would be your typical family. But we didn't.

I grew up in a big Spanish ranch house on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. That cliff is the western edge of the Palos Verdes hills near Redondo Beach California. Even that nice beach town might be considered normal if it was anywhere except in the greater Los Angeles area. You know, LA, La-La land, the capitol of the world's largest collection of fruits and nuts. Still, we might have been fairly normal if we had nothing to do with that other LA suburb, Hollywood, but that didn't happen either.

Ok, see if you can follow this. My mom and dad grew up on the cliff that I told you about and they were nearly next-door neighbors. Mom is a year older than dad and when they were kids, she thought that he was a pain in the butt. There were some other boys in the neighborhood and they became my uncles.

When my parents got out of high school, daddy went to college at USC and mom went to work for a movie studio. My grandfather helped her get the job. That was dad's dad and he knew everyone in Hollywood. Anyway, she liked the job and she met all the big movie stars from those black and white films. Dad said that he really loved my mom from the very start but she wouldn't give him the time of day. Well, since they are my parents, I knew that somehow they fell in love. After the war mom and dad made a fortune building houses all over Southern California and my brother Luke was born in

1947 and I came along in 1949. I think right now I need a cool drink to go with my suntan.

Growing up in La-La Land

Growing up in a big house overlooking the ocean was a really cool thing. Mom and dad told me that when they were kids, the house had been part of a big farm even though they called it a ranch. Dad built a hundred houses on most of the ranch but the cliff top houses and grounds were left alone. Today everyone calls it the Lee Compound. There are two houses on the cliff top with a big open area of grass and trees in between. There is the ranch house where dad grew up and, what we call, the Palos Verdes house where mom grew up.

When I was a kid I would climb down the cliff to the little cove and go swimming and fishing and I wanted to do everything that my big brother did. He used to tell me to go find some girls to play with but he really didn't mean it. He was lots of fun then and he still is.

You might have thought that rich kids like us would have gone to a fancy private school but our parents wanted us to have the same experiences that they did. I'm sure that times have changed a lot from the early '30' to the '50's and '60's but they didn't care. They put us on the school bus every morning and we were sent into the world.

I was two years behind Luke as we went through the same schools as mom and dad. Luke was a junior when I started at Redondo High but we still rode to school together and we often hung out together. Sometimes he was a little too protective and if he didn't like any of my friends he let me know it.

He wasn't very social and he didn't have many dates in school but I was just the opposite. Mom made me wait until I was sixteen before dating but I made up for lost time in a hurry. Some of the guys that I went out with were defiantly not on Luke's list of favorite people. I know that on at least one occasion that led to a fight that broke the nose of my guy and after that he wanted nothing to do with me. I was mad as hell at my brother but I still love him.

Luke graduated and went off to USC and when I started my junior year I was on my own. Free at last so I bought new clothes and made new friends. These two things led to one of the most embarrassing event in my young life. I guess that it made me a stronger person but the value of the lesson was lost on me at the time.

Lieutenant Cristiano Renaldo - Redondo Beach Police Department Uncle Chris

The phone rang just after two in the morning on a nice September night and I answered it after one ring. In my job I often get calls like this. My wife and my three girls were all safe in their beds so I wasn't overly concerned.

"Renaldo"

"Sorry to bother you Lieutenant, this is Patrolman Baker and we've had something come up"

"Ok" I said impatiently.

"We found this girl wandering on the Strand. She's drunk out of her mind and it took us a while to even get her name. She didn't have any ID because she doesn't have hardly any clothes on and while we were questioning her we had to stop twice while she puked in the gutter. Finally we got two things from her. Her first name is Lara and she's asking for Uncle Chris"

-Shit-

"Where is she now?"

"In the back of the cruiser"

"Take her to the station. Did you say that she's undressed?"

"Just about, she's wearing a tiny little bikini bathing suit and my jacket."

"Ok, take her to the station but stay in the parking lot. I'll meet you there in a few minutes"

"Yes sir ... Uncle Chris"

"Is everything alright honey?" Ginny asked me in a sleep voice?

"Sounds like Larry and Laz's kid has had a bit too much to drink"

"Luke? He's such a good boy"

"It's not Luke, its Lara"

"Oh no, are you going to call the Lee's now?"

"Not yet. I'm going to the station. Go back to sleep"

On the way out the door I looked in on my girls. This hadn't happened to them yet but it might someday and I just wanted to know that they were safe before I left. In the laundry basket on the back porch I found my daughter Carrie's dirty sweat pants and shirt. I put them into a paper bag and took them with me.

In the parking lot I met Baker and he took me to the patrol car. I open the back door and helped my still drunk god-daughter to her feet. When Baker took his jacket back I thought that Lara was nude. She had on a tiny pink bikini that looked more like skin than spandex and it showed way too much of a sixteen year girl then it should have. I knew that I could have just put her into my car and taken her home and no report would have ever been made and I might have done that if she hadn't puked on my shoes.

“Ok Baker, take her inside and book her. Do the whole thing, mug shots, finger prints and then toss her in the drunk-tank.”

“Are you sure Lieutenant?”

“Yea but don’t turn in the paperwork, just give it to me”

“What ever you say sir, should I ‘cuff her”

“Yes, but don’t hurt her”

While Baker took her off to the humiliating process of being arrested I walked down to the Vice Department and found a friend.

“Hey Officer Gomez, how’s tricks”

That brought a laugh from the officer who is twenty-one years old and a very pretty undercover cop. She was dressed like the sleaziest young hooker that ever graced the streets of Redondo Beach.

“Tricks, I’ve had about all of the would-be tricks that I can stand tonight. I’ve got five guys in the tank trying to make up some story that their wives will believe.”

“Want to take a break, I need a favor?”

“Sure, what’s up?”

I told her that I was going to put my god-daughter in the drunk-tank and I wanted her to sit beside the kid and talk trash to her. I didn’t say but she knew that I wanted to scare the hell out of her and to keep her safe.

I called the Lee’s house and Laz answered on the first ring,

“LARA?”

“Lara’s safe Laz. I’ve got her.

“Chris, where the hell is she?”

“Right now she’s on her way to the drunk-tank”

“My god, is she drunk?”

“Oh yes but after puking on everything in sight she’s probably starting to sober up”

“I’ll come get her right away”

“Laz, you can do that but why not leave her with me for a while?”

“What are you going to do?”

“Humiliate her, scare hell out of her, teach her a lesson in reality, and make her a stronger person. Is there anything else that you want me to do?”

“Will she be alright?”

“What do you think?”

“Ok, I’ll get her later”

“No, send Luke at 7 o’clock, it’ll be a good lesson for him too”

At six in the morning I walked to the tank and there in the corner, trying to hide from the world was Lara Lynn Langtree Lee. Officer Gomez was between her and the other denizens in the tank and she was still playing the part of the tough, sleazy whore. When Lara saw me she ran to the bars.

“Oh Uncle Chris, I want to go home, please take me home”

“No”

“Don’t say no, pleeeese take me home”

“Sorry, there’s nothing that I can do. The bus will be here soon to take you to Juvenile Hall. You broke the law young lady and someone has to pay. Now why are you standing there in your underwear?”

“It’s not really my underwear, it’s my bathing suit”

“Did your mom buy that for you?”

“No, I bought it. She doesn’t know that I’ve got it”

“Here, put this on” and I passed the paper bag with Carrie’s sweats through the bars.

“Uncle Chris, I know that you can get me out of here if you want to”

“Probably”

“Will you?”

“No”

“I could hate you for this”

“That’s your choice. Real life is filled with real choices. Did you make any bad choices lately?”

“Maybe ... yes” she said in a very quiet voice.

“Then don’t lie to me, you don’t hate me, you love me, now go sit on your bench and wait for your chance to make a good decision”

“Yes Uncle Chris” she said looking at her feet.

At eleven that morning my home phone rang and Ginny answered,

“Hello”

“Hi Ginny its Laz, is the cold hearted cop asleep?”

“No he’s reading the Sunday paper, do you want to speak to him?”

“In a minute, I’ve just taken your daughter’s sweat-suit out of the dryer. Do you want me to bring it over now?”

“No I’ll get to tonight, we are still going to dinner aren’t we?”

“Absolutely. We’ll pick you and Chris up at six, just after I lock my daughter in the cellar. Let me speak to the cop now please”

“How is she?” I asked.

“Asleep. She stayed in the shower for forty minutes after Luke brought her home. She didn’t say a word to me but she told her brother that she really screwed up and she was lucky that her guardian uncle found her. By the way, I found a tiny pink bathing suit in the bathroom trash. Do you have any idea where that came from?”

“I doubt that it came from J.C.Penney”

“God Chris, where does she get this stubborn streak?”

“Oh come on Laska, do you think that she got it from meek and mild Larry or maybe you should look closer to home”

“Thanks hon for looking out for her”

“Well between mother and daughter, looking after the both of you is a lifetime commitment”

“Love you – bye” Laz said before she hung up the phone.

School, school and more school

Lara

Well, I lived through high school and I followed my family tradition to USC. I guess I did my share of partying and playing around but I survived and maybe even prospered. I dated occasionally but the thrill of telling a new guy ‘NO!’ over and over was gone.

I was set to go to law school when I met the love of my life, or at least, my love of 1971. He was the ‘tall-dark-and-handsome’ guy and he swept me off of my feet. He was a veteran just back from Vietnam and that added a sense of mystery. He had been in Army Intelligence and when I asked questions he always said the he ‘couldn’t talk about it’.

He was a junior majoring in Political Science and Luke and I were L-1 law students. We dated, we hung-out, we slept at each other’s place and in the fall of 1973 we moved in together. That didn’t make mom or dad very happy but it was time for them to stop thinking of me as their ‘pure-as-the-driven-snow’ daughter.

The bliss of romance lasted until the spring of 1974 and then, just eight weeks from the end of Law school, Bruce, that was his name, Bruce Linthicum, announced that he had been accepted to grad-school in Boston.

SHOCK! ... No invitation to go with him, nothing, just ‘Have-a-nice-life’.

My first thought was to have Luke kill him but I didn’t want my brother to go to prison. The next day I put everything that he owned into three black trash bags and left them on the front porch. Luke changed the locks on the doors and as a final bit of childishness, I pushed a straight pin through every condom package that was in his nightstand drawer and then I tossed them into the trash bag with his clothes and tried to put him out of my mind.

The end in sight – June 1974

Finally after all of the lectures and books and tests the end of Law School was in sight. I felt like I had been in school all of my life and truthfully, I was sick of it. Luke seemed to have a much better attitude than me and I attributed that to his love life. With Angie by his side and talk of marriage and kids and a new career, he had his eyes on the future while I was still looking at the past. He had a fiancé who loved him and I was alone and the fact that I was not alone by choice didn’t make things any easier for me.

Luke and I had enrolled in a bar exam prep course which was supposed to make passing the California Bar easier but I had my doubts. I didn’t think Luke needed the class and I was sure he could have passed the test on graduation day so that meant that he had taken the course to help me. I would have rather just hung out with him and reviewed everything together but he said that the course would be more organized than anything that we did ourselves.

We were in the apartment and Luke was reading the newspaper while I was laying on the couch feeling sorry for myself. Here I was, 25 years old and still being helped by my big brother. Well his sympathy was under-whelming.

“Stop mopping around Pip and get over yourself. God damn it, you’re a pretty woman with a good education and your about to be an honest to goodness California lawyer.”

He said that I was a woman but he called me Pip, his nickname for me when we were kids.

“What are you doing this summer?” he went on.

“Taking the Bar just like you”

“No, I mean after that”

“I don’t know, just hanging out I guess”

“That’s a bad choice sister dear. Either go on vacation or go to work. Just because you’re a rich girl, you don’t have to act like one”

“Luke, you know that the Bar results don’t come out for months, how can I go to work?”

“Work for dad, join the Peace Corps, flip hamburgers at McDonalds, do something to get out of the house and put a smile on your pretty face”

“I think I’d rather go on vacation. Why don’t just you and I go somewhere? Let’s go to Hawaii and lay in the sun. No books, no school, and no worries?”

“And no Angie? Look honey, I love you as much as I ever have but that life is gone. I’m not doing anything without Angie from here on out and as much as I do love you, your not coming on our honeymoon”

I laughed at that.

“Oh pleese, you’re all that I have now, I need to live vicariously through you. I won’t make any noise and I’ll just watch from a distance”

He threw his newspaper at me,

“Get your ass off of the couch and go to the student union. There’s a bunch of flyers on the bulletin board about summer trips and jobs. DO SOMETHING WITH YOUR LIFE PIPSQUEAK!”

“Don’t call me pipsqueak, I’m a grown up woman with a good education and so on ...”

He threw more papers at me as I went out the door.

The bulletin board was covered with notices, cards and flyers. Some had probably been up there for years but several caught my eye. One was a month long trip helping doctors treat starving people in North Africa but they really wanted med students. There were a couple of surfing trips to Mexico that might have been fun but I wanted something more social than drinking beer and hitting the waves. The one that looked the best was a 16 day trip to a remote island in the south pacific.

Tapu Vana and the Tapu Vana Royal Hotel, an all inclusive, adult only facility offers a True Pacific Paradise

Tapu Vana, a true tropical paradise. Honeymooners look for the most romantic place in the world and the Vana Islands are among the favorites. International flights originate in Los Angeles and are non-stop to Papeete Tahiti where Inter-island flights to your final destination are short and sweet with personalized greetings as you depart the aircraft. Request and we can tell you more about the Islands. You will spend your first night at a four star hotel on the island of Lano Vana. The next morning you will enjoy a tropical breakfast followed by a tour of this quaint Pacific port. After lunch you will be whisked away for a one half hour flight to your final destination, the beautiful island of Tapu Vana and the luxurious Tapo Vana Royal Hotel.

For the next fourteen nights you will enjoy the all inclusive hospitality of the island. All food, drinks and recreational facilities are provided at no additional costs*. We offer many excursions to see the water, as well as the land with true service as we plan your "trip of a lifetime" Please take a moment to give us a call or send for a quote.

* Waterskiing and parasailing offered at a modest fee.

I wrote down the number and went to the apartment to call. This sounded like just the place for me to get a new outlook on life and Luke was pleased. I was kind of excited about it and I tried to think of any of my girlfriends that might want to go with me but none came to mind. I'm sure that I could have found a guy but I was off of guys for a while. Besides, I might meet someone interesting and exciting in the midst of all of that 'true tropical paradise' that the flyer talked about. I made my reservation leaving two days after the Bar exam and I could hardly wait.

A new friend – maybe

A few days later the phone rang,

“Hello?”

“Oh, hi, is this Lara Lee?”

“That’s me”

“Lara, this is Maggie Taylor, we had Contract Law together”

I knew her from that class but I had never spoken to her.

“Hi Maggie, what can I do for you?” I asked think that she wanted to study for the Bar exam together.

“Lara, I signed up for a trip to Tapu Vana and the travel agent said that you’re on the same trip. The lady said that if we shared a room we could save a couple of hundred dollars so ... would you like to share?”

She seemed nice enough and a couple of hundred was worth saving so why not.

“Sounds great Maggie, let have lunch and talk about it”

-Lets meet and see if we can stand each other for two weeks-

“Good, is today ok?”

“Sure”

Maggie was a pretty girl about my age and I knew from the Contracts class that she was very bright but I did think that she was a little over dressed for a lunch at the Student Union. I was in jeans and a T-shirt and she looked like she had just come from church. I decided that she was trying to make a good impression.

We chatted like girls do and soon I was telling her about my break-up with Bruce. I didn’t mean to, but it just came out. She sympathized and she said that she had the same experience a year before but the hurt went away when she met new friends. We talked awhile longer and then agreed to share a room at the resort.

Back at the apartment I called the travel agent and told her of our plans and she said that she would arrange everything. So now all I had to do was put in a hundred hours of intense study and then take the three-day exam.

Susan Wang – San Francisco Chinatown.

Susan Le was a San Francisco raise girl who grew up in the mixed neighborhood between Chinatown and Little Italy. Her parents were from old California Chinese stock that could trace the family tree back only as far and the importation of labor from China that were used to build the Union Pacific Railroad.

Like most of their friend and neighbors, her parents tried to maintain their culture by sending their kids to Chinese School every Saturday morning but that was about as far as that went. They both could speak Mandarin when required but San Francisco English was the language of choice.

Susan, like her school friends could speak excellent, if somewhat Americanized Chinese, fair Italian and some Spanish and they all like to joke that they knew most of the dirty words in several other languages. She had an uneventful childhood and being the middle child between her older brother and her younger and cuter sister. She worked hard to achieve her goal being as inconspicuous as possible.

Her brother got the good grades and went to college at the University of California across the bay at Berkeley. Susan was not nearly as ambitious and attended local Cal-State San Francisco. Her ever-so-cute sister was married at eighteen and gave birth to a son seven months later. Although Susan was sad that her sister became pregnant and was forced to marry, she was happy for her and her new baby-boy. She did, however, have a satisfied smirk on her face every time she saw her parents.

Her social life at Cal-State was active. She joined a sorority and learned skills such as drinking too much, staying out too late and occasionally smoking marijuana. The sexual revolution was in the making and she had lots of nearly-sex that she enjoyed but she wasn't on 'the pill' and she wasn't going down the road that her sister had taken.

During her senior year she had a real affair with a young assistant professor named Peter Wang. He was a far more cultured Chinese than she was and on the pretext of doing research they spent many pleasant afternoons on the couch of his locked office.

In June of 1965 she graduated with her degree in Hotel Management and they were married. For all of Peter's culture, they needed her income to live and she found an entry level position at the San Francisco Royal Hotel – Chinatown.

The blissful couple found a small house not far from the university and settled down for the marriage experience. Like most college professors Peter was involved in the Peace movement and he often attended Anti Vietnam War rallies. Susan was just the opposite and had no interest in politics. She worked hard in her job and was promoted a little faster than her peers.

She became concerned that her husband was coming home from some of these Peace meetings with the distinct smell of marijuana on his clothes and by 1968 she was very

aware of the so-called summer of love. Things came to a head when she received a call from Peter who had been arrested at one of the marches. She took the family checkbook and went to the jail. At the desk she had been handed his arrest report and was told the amount of his bail. That night she read the report and she was shocked to read the Peter and an un-named girl had been arrested several blocks from the march in a van. They were sighted for misdemeanor obscene conduct.

For this offence, Peter slept for one month on the couch and was sent to the family doctor to guarantee Susan the he was free of any communicable disease. The only thing that saved the marriage was his solemn promise to give up further participation in the Peace movement and especially the summer-of-love.

By 1970 it was clear that Susan wasn't going to have children. She was tested by the doctor who could find nothing wrong with her and her requests for Peter to be tested were unfulfilled and so she was resigned to be a good aunt to her now-not-so-cute sister's growing horde.

In 1971 she was promoted to assistant manager of the SF Royal and in 1973 she was promoted to Night Manager. Her marriage was suffering from benign neglect and when she started working nights it seemed to fade away to complete indifference on both of their parts. Sex for her was a thing of the past and even though she was sure that Peter was making use of his office couch, she just didn't care.

In January, 1974 Peter told her that he wanted a divorce. His current girlfriend was pregnant and he felt honor bound to do-the-right-thing. Since Susan had never been blessed with a child from Peter's sexual favors she wondered how he had impregnated a girlfriend. A little investigation on her part found the girlfriend was loaded with the money from a grandmother's trust fund and whether or not Peter's deposit in her had been fruitful was offset by her deposit in Peter's fantasy bank account. Susan got the house with its mortgage and he was set free on an unsuspecting world.

Susan's life didn't change much. She was still alone most of the time and her life was still mostly her job. At first she was glad that he was gone but after a while depression set in. She didn't feel like she was getting anywhere. She took a week's vacation but that made things worse. She wanted things to be better but she didn't know what to do.

While reading through a pile of paperwork on her desk, a flyer caught her eye. It was offering a year's contract at the Tapu Vana Royal Hotel on an island in the South Pacific where they were looking for a night manager.

Susan's new start – June 11, 1974

The flight from LA had been long and the two books that she brought were boring. Her spirits were lifted however when the flight attendant announced that their landing in Lano Vana would be in twenty minutes. Like the other passengers she pressed her nose against the window with hopes of seeing the capitol of the Vana Islands and like many before her she was disappointed in what she saw.

In her carry-on bag was the letter from the Tapu Vana Royal Hotel that said she would be met outside the customs lounge by a representative of the hotel who would arrange her transportation to Tapu Vana but she didn't look forward to another airline flight that day.

Once in the small terminal, clearing customs was less than a formality. A guard glanced at her passport and welcomed her to the Vana Islands. Pulling her roll-on suitcase and carrying her small bag she walked towards that door looking for someone who might be from the hotel. Just outside she walked by a man leaning against the building smoking a cigarette but she still didn't see anyone that might be meeting her.

“Hi cutie, are you Suzie?”

She turned and looked back at the man with the smoke. She looked around and then finally pointed to herself with a big question on her face.

“Are you Susan Wang?”

“Yes, are you from the hotel?”

“That's me Miss” he said in an obvious Australian accent.

She wasn't sure if she was impressed or not. He was tall and blond in a rugged sort of way. He looked like he had spent too many years in the sun and he had a crooked nose. Still, she had seen a lot of men who looked worse than him. He stomped out the cigarette and extended his hand,

“Hello Mrs. Wang, I'm Jocko Street and I've come to fetch you”

At first she thought that she should be annoyed and then she thought that she should be pleased. She knew from her experience in the hotel business that most Aussie's didn't hide anything. What they thought came out their mouth and that could be good or bad.

“First you call me cutie and then Miss and now Mrs. Do you actually know who I am or are you trying to offend as few as possible?” She said shaking his hand.

“No offence Mrs. Wang I really do know who you are”

“Ok Jocko, call me Susan, I'm not a Mrs. anymore”

“Alright Suzie”

“Susan”

“Right ... Susan. This way to your ride”

They walked around the terminal building and back towards the flight line. Parked to one side of the airliners was a red, white, and blue single engine airplane with 'Tapu Vana Royal Hotel' painted on it.

"Here is the pride of the hotels fleet. In fact it's the only plane in the fleet"
Susan had never been in a 'little' airplane before and her first thought was to be apprehensive but then she decided that it went very well with her new-start-on-life attitude.

Jocko explained that it was a Piper Cherokee-Six so called because it could carry six people. Susan knew enough about airplanes to know that some had a wing on top and some had the wing on the bottom and this one had the wing on the bottom.

Jocko opened a small door on the plane's side and put her luggage inside. Then he used a step on the side of the plane to step up onto the wing on the right side where he unlocked the door. There was one door in the front and another on the other side in the back. When the door was opened he reached down and helped Susan into the wing beside him.

"I'll get in first and when I'm settled in the left seat, I'll help you into the right seat"

When they were both in their place he reached across in front of her and pulled the door closed and locked it. He reached up and latched another small handle at the top of the door.

"Ok Suzie ... Susan what do you think of this?"
"It's smaller than I thought it would be"
"Well it's big for an airplane but it would be small for a car."

He showed her the controls and the instruments and she wondered if he was so instructional with all of his passengers. He seemed so friendly and just a little charming she wondered if he was flirting. Nine years of marriage had left her oblivious to the subtleties of the boy-girl-man-woman thing. That thought made her blush and she felt just a little flattered.

He was still talking and she quickly wondered if she had missed anything important. He gave her a set of large, green earphones and helped her slip them on. He put his on and flipped a switch and she could hear him speak clearing. He buckled his seat belt and she did the same. With no thought what-so-ever he put his hand under her belt at her waist and gave it a tug to see if it was tight enough.

She disappeared from his consciousness as he glanced through a printed card and checked several things. Then he opened a small window on his side of the plane and shouted 'CLEAR' so anyone outside could hear. She thought that it was odd because no one was outside. He turned the ignition switch and the propeller started to turn. Then the engine came alive with a roar. He flipped more switches and she heard the radio come on.

“Lano Vana control, Cherokee 9009-Juliet, request taxi to runway 27 for takeoff”
“Roger 09-Juliet taxiway alpha, wind calm, altimeter 29.96, cleared for takeoff, no traffic reported in the area”

With that concluded Jocko taxied to the end of the runway, checked the engine one more time and pushed the throttle forward and the plane accelerated down the runway. Susan wasn't sure if she was scared or excited but before she could decide the nose of the plane came up and the rumbling of the wheels stopped. The ground slipped away and the panorama of the harbor at Lano Vana appeared beneath them.

It was breathtaking and she felt like she was soaring. He got her attention by patting her knee and she looked towards him. He was smiling and so was she.

“What do you think of my world Suzie-Cutie?”
“Oh Jocko ... I think that it's very cool ... call me Susan”

He didn't climb very high so she really had the sensation of speed. She watched the sea and the sky and her very outspoken pilot and she was very happy. She realized that she was happy for the first time in a long time. Jocko spotted a pod of whales and he circled so she could see. In what seemed like a short time he pointed to an island ahead.

“That's Tapu Vana, home-sweet-home for the foreseeable future”

She thought that it was much prettier than the island that they had just left and as they approached land he flew lower until they were very close to the water. They raced across the lagoon and the hotel was just out of her window. At the end of the beach he pulled the nose up and they climbed towards the mountain peak. They were just above the tree tops when he cut the power and lowered the flaps to slow their approach to the hill-top landing strip. When the tires touched to asphalt there was no hint of a bump. He taxied to a small hanger and cut the engine.

“Welcome to Tapu Vana Mrs. Wang”
“Why did you call me Suzie-cutie?”
“Because I'm an Aussie and I say the first thing that pops into my mind”
“Thanks for the ride Jocko”

He locked the plane and tossed her bags into a golf cart that was parked at the hanger. It was a short ride down the mountain to the hotel and he pointed out the points of interest along the way. When he pulled up at the front door he turned to her,

“Ok Susan, you go and talk to the boss-man and then I'll take you to the dungeon, that's what we call our quarters. Just have his secretary call me and I'll pick up in front of the hotel. You can leave your bags with me”

Living in a big city hadn't instilled much trust in Susan but she decided that she might as well trust him because he or she had no where to hide on the small island. She left all of her worldly positions with this stranger and went to report to the new employer.

Susan was back in the cart with Jocko and they were driving away from the hotel. There seemed to be many paved paths that disappeared into the jungle and they turned down one that was about a hundred yards into the palm trees from the hotel. There ahead was a low building with flat roof. The building appeared to have been built in a hole. She was sure that an effort had been made to hide it. Even its dark exterior seemed to blend in with the jungle background.

“This is the dungeon. At least that's what everyone calls it. It's really the staff quarters. The hotel architect didn't want the sight of other buildings to detract from the appearance of the main building so they hid the building behind this big sand berm. The staff quarters are quite comfortable with single and double rooms for everyone. We have our own kitchen, recreations facilities, a patio and a swimming pool. We even have our own bar with a small dance floor. Every room has its own bathroom and even satellite television with programs from Australia. We have all of the comforts of home in what looks like a hole in the ground”

Jocko took her to an office where she was welcomed but a young girl with a New York accent who gave Susan a set of rules and procedures and the key to room 45. It turned out to be very nice, and even had a sliding glass door with access to a small patio with a comfortable lounge chair. When she was all settled Jocko shook her hand and left with an invitation.

“Most evenings lots of us get together by the pool for happy hour. It's fun. Please join us if you can”

“Oh Jocko, I'd love to but I'm working evenings for a while and then I'll be working nights”

“Oh well, I'm sure that I'll see you around”

She was a little disappointed that he hadn't offered to take her to lunch or dinner or whatever time of the day it was. She thought that she must have confused flirting with Aussie hospitality. Still Susan was satisfied and happy with her arrival in paradise.

Lara – July 9th, 1974
School's out – forever

It was done, the Bar exam was finally over and I had no idea if I had passed or failed but my mind was too numb to think about it. Luke said that he felt the same way but it would snow hard in Hollywood before my compulsive brother failed any examination.

Back in the apartment Angie was snuggling on the couch with Luke and we were doing our best to get through a six-pack of Budweiser. Luke couldn't just live for the minute and he was already planning the next few days.

“You know, sister dear, that mom wants us out of the apartment by the weekend. She has a painter coming and then she wants to rent the place to a real tenant. You know, someone that actually pays rent.”

“Sorry, the day after tomorrow I'm on my way to Tapu Vana for sixteen glorious days of tropical paradise and I can't think about moving now”

Angie laughed,

“Are you really going to tell your mom that?”

“Not exactly but the results will be the same”

Now Luke laughed.

“Don't you remember when mom wanted to paint your room?” he asked.

-God I do remember that, I put it off until her patience wore out and I came home to find every thing I owned in big trash bags in the garage. Clothes, shoes, make-up, even the magazine that I had hidden under my mattress were all dumped in together-

“Ok, Angie, I'll pay you \$10 to pack and move my stuff”

“No”

“Luke?”

“Get real”

“Twenty five Angie, that's my limit”

“I'll help you tomorrow morning and that's my final offer” Angie said.

-I knew that she would eventually come around to my way of thinking-

Bar Exam Party

We had everything out of the apartment and stashed at the Ranch house in Palos Verdes before noon. Although Luke and I still had bedrooms in the house we hadn't actually slept there more than three or four times in the last few years.

It seemed a little strange to lie on my old bed and look at the room. There were the same curtains that mom and I had picked out when I was in high school and the paint that I just had to have seemed a bit faded now. Next to the bed was a table with a record player. Next to that was a pile of music albums that I thought were the coolest thing I had ever heard. Still hanging on the bedpost were the earphones that mom made me use so she and dad didn't have to listen to my music.

I got up and looked through the dresser. Here were clothes that I would never wear and in the closet were more things that needed to go to the Good-Will. I looked on the inside of the closet door frame and there were the pencil marks that recorded my growth. Beside each mark mom had written the date and under the first mark she had printed my name. I suppose that she wanted to let others know that this was the progress of her only daughter. I stood with my back to the door and put my hand on my head and held my finger against the frame. When I looked I saw that I hadn't grown since I was eighteen but I hoped that I had grown in other ways. A glance back at the full length mirror reminded me of how skinny my butt had been back then.

That evening mom and dad held a party for the family to celebrate the end of law school for her children. Everyone was there and I really enjoyed it. Uncle Bobby who studied law at UCLA gave me a list of attorneys who might be interested in a bright new lawyer. Uncle Chris gave me the name of the assistant District Attorney for Redondo Beach who was looking for new prosecutors and my cousin Carrie Ann told me that she was pregnant with her second child.

After dinner Luke announced that he and Angie were actually engaged and the wedding would be in November. The family laughed and hugged him and Angie. There were lots of comments like "lucky guy" and "about time".

Angie spent the night in the guest room but Luke's room is next to mine and the walls really do have ears. I was really happy for them and still sad or pissed-off or something about my miserable love life.

The next morning mom and dad drove me to LAX for the flight to paradise and I put all of the problems of the past out of my mind.

Sammy (Kami) Maliuna – San Francisco Little Italy

Sammy Maliuna was a giant of a man, six foot six and two hundred and forty-five pounds. He was truly his father's son even if he had nothing to do with his dear old dad and his father returned the favor.

Kale Maliuna was a true Hawaiian, born of the polaneasion blood of the ancient travelers that arrived from Bora-Bora in the distant past. Kale, who was called Charley, proclaimed his purity despite a Portuguese grandmother on one side of his family and a Scottish grandfather on the other.

In Hawaii, which is mostly populated by Causations, and Orientals, the native Hawaiian is often dismissed as a lazy and uneducated good-for-nothing that spends his time surfing and stealing. Of course the stereotype is as wrong as most generalizations are but, without showing some extra effort, it's a hard one to overcome.

Charley grew up on the north shore of the island of Maui and until he was in high school he did fit the perception. He had some trouble with the local police over some missing property and a bag of marijuana but nothing that was out of the ordinary.

When he walked into the auditorium of King Kamayamaya High School, for an orientation talk, a white teacher pulled him aside and spoke to him in the pigeon English that was so prevalent among the native Hawaiian's. What he was asked was 'Do you play football?' Those four words led him to four state championships and a four year scholarship to the University of Hawaii in Honolulu.

Charley was big and mean. He was cat-quick and he was the best outside linebacker that U of Hawaii ever had. In his senior year he met fellow student Sonya Henderson from Utah. She was a Mormon girl with blond hair and blue eyes. He was six feet two inches tall which was only two inches more than she was. He was dark and angry and she was so white that she nearly glowed in the dark but they were in love and despite vehement objections from both families, they were married.

In the spring of 1952 Charley was selected by the San Francisco Forty Niners as their first pick in the second round of the NFL draft and with his two thousand dollar signing bonus, he and the now pregnant Sonya relocated to the west coast.

Kami Maliuna was born November 2nd 1952 at 1:45 in the afternoon. Unfortunately that was the date of a Niner's home game against the Los Angeles Rams and there was no way that Charley was going to miss that game. He did come to the hospital later but not before he spent several hours' celebrating the victory with his team mates.

Sonya had already filled in the baby-boys name on the birth certificate that was waiting for his father's signature. She had decided on Samuel Trent Maliuna after her father. Charley angrily scratched the Samuel Trent and scrawled 'Kami' saying that there was no

way his Hawaiian son would have an outsider's name. Sonya bit her lip but she never called her son by any other name but Sammy from that day on.

In the early fifties, NFL players didn't make the kind of money that they would years later. Most were paid about the same as a plumber or an electrician when they were working which was no more than six months a year. All but the leagues highest paid stars had to supplement their earnings with other jobs. After Sammy was old enough to leave with a baby-sitter, Sonya, who had her degree in Accounting, found a job at a local hotel as a book-keeper but Charley never quite adapted his laid-back life style to fill the family's financial needs.

The martial bliss of the Maliuna's came apart on a three week trip to the east coast when a picture appeared in a San Francisco newspaper. The Forty Niners had played the New York Giants and the Niner's had won. Hours later, a fire broke out in a local house of prostitution and several San Francisco players were rescued from the inferno. The picture in the Chronicle showed the fire scene where scantily clad young women and their customers were being lead through the smoke and flames. The only face that was completely recognizable was the San Francisco Forty Niners star outside linebacker, Charley Maliuna.

The NFL had no specific rule covering prostitution but they had a very strict policy against embarrassing the league. Charley was suspended for three games without pay and Sonya wouldn't let him back into the house.

Charley still had a few beer-drinking buddies that helped him survived the suspension but that was the beginning of the end for the rising and now falling star. The next spring, before training started, he was traded to the Chicago Bears. He drank so much during the summer that the bears cut him and he played a few games for Toronto in the Canadian football league.

Without ever contacting Sonya, Charley quietly returned to his former life as a surfer-thief on the north shore of Maui and he never tried to see his son again.

After a while Sonya found her ex-husbands exotic name to be a burden so when she was scheduled for a job interview with a large, chain hotel she simply resumed using her maiden name of Henderson. She actually looked into changing Sammy's name but she was told that as long as her ex-husband was alive, he could object and in any case it would require a lawyer and going to court and the payment of money that she didn't have.

In 1960, when Sammy was eight years old Sonya was hired as the head bookkeeper by the San Francisco Royal Hotel at Fisherman's Wharf. Ever though she had a degree in Accounting she was relegated to the lower position of bookkeeper because all big-business accountants were men. That didn't mean as much to Sonya as her increase in

income. Within a year she was able to buy a small house in a fairly nice neighborhood and life for her and her ever growing son was getting better.

Sammy went to the local school which had a diversity of student. There were Chinese, Italian, Mexican, black and white kids. They all got along and all of them learned some of the others language.

Sammy was very good looking and he had inherited the best of his mothers and dad's genes. He was big and tall and had his dad's athletic ability. He had sandy-brown hair and blue eyes and his mom's smile. Until people heard his Hawaiian name they knew that he was exotic but they couldn't guess what his background was.

He would have been very popular in high school if he hadn't have been so shy. It took him a long time before he would initiate a conversation but in his senior year in high school he had a very outgoing girlfriend and that seemed to loosen him up. Despite coming to a certain age in the most sexually active period in American history he managed to graduate without ever having his initial enlighten encounter.

He did, however, have a 4.0 grade point average and six varsity letters, three in football and three in baseball. His senior year he was named first team All-City for Football and second team All-City in baseball. All of this was impressive but the big payoff came with a four-year, all expenses paid, football scholarship to Stanford University. Sammy and his mother thought that he had hit the jackpot.

At the prestige's school in Palo Alto he seemed to blossom. He declined many offers to join Fraternities but he did have a very active social life. As a freshman he never thought that he would actually play for the University and had resigned himself to the practice squad but in the seventh game he played as a backup. In the ninth game he was the starting outside linebacker and he kept that position until the last game of his junior year.

On a cold and very wet day in Seattle a University of Washington fullback caught him from the wrong angle and his knee collapsed. After surgery the doctor told him that he would make a full recovery for a normal life but he wouldn't play football again. Sammy asked how that could be. Knee injuries were fairly common for football players but they didn't end a career. The doctor explained that Sammy was different. He would have all of the strength that he had before but he wouldn't have the ability to run backwards and sideways.

He tried to beat the odds. He worked hard to rehab the injury and by the time football spring training started in May he was as fast and strong as he had ever been but it didn't take long to realize that he wasn't the same. It didn't take long for the coaches to see it also. Eventually the head coach scheduled Sammy for an evaluation physical and the results ended his life as a football scholarship recipient. He was officially dropped from

the team and the school finance office informed him that the financial support for his senior year was gone.

He had always been a good student and, unlike many college athletes, he had taken a full load of classes while at Stanford but he needed two full semesters to graduate. There was just no way that he or his mother could pay the tuition for that last year. It was even too late to arrange a transfer to a state college for the fall semester but he wouldn't have done that anyway. A degree from Stanford was worth much more than a degree from San Francisco State and he wanted to hold on to that possibility.

He went to the Dean's office and arranged for an 18 month delay in the start of his senior year. That would give him the time to get the necessary money. He didn't know where it was going to come from but he was sure that he could solve that problem.

A week after school ended at Stanford his mother brought several flyers home from the hotel. They were offers of employment from various Royal Hotels around the country and one caught Sammy's eye. It was a year's contract at the Tapu Vana Royal Hotel on an island in the South Pacific. Sammy looked over the list of skills needed and he saw one that he might be qualified for. They needed Security Guards.

Sammy and the South Seas – June 24, 1974

Sammy was met at the airport at Lano Vana by Jocko Street in the hotel's Cherokee-six but he wasn't alone. There were three Filipino landscape workers with him. Jocko did a quick addition of the weight of all of the passengers and bags and decided not to fill the tanks with gas.

“You're as big as two bloke's mate but it'll be ok. If thing's get dicey we'll just throw out a couple of the little guys”

Sammy recognized Aussie humor when he heard it but the Filipino's looked a little worried. He enjoyed the flight to Tapu Vana and the pilot went out of his way to show them all the hotel and island from the air.

They all reported to the hotel manager, Mr. Yen and then they were taken to their quarters. The Filipino's were given bunk beds in a dormitory room with several others of their countrymen and Sammy was assigned to a double room that he shared with another security guard.

His new roommate was a black man from Selma Alabama and his southern drawl was so slow that Sammy wanted to help him get his words out. Tyrell Young was funny and likeable once his words finally manifested themselves. It was convenient for the pair to room together because they were both working the evening shift.

The next day at 3:30 in the afternoon, Tyrell and Sammy dressed in their uniforms which consisted of kaki shorts and flowered shirts and white tennis shoes. They both had hotel issued two-way radios and their only weapon was a can of pepper spray that was kept in a pouch on their belts.

“Look kid, use this stuff only for a last resort. Our job is to make the guests happy and safe. The only time we would ever use the spray was if there was no other way to solve a problem.”

At 3:45 they met in a large conference room with the day shift hotel manager. There were several others in the meeting including the evening manager and assistant manager, the evening five-man security detail and the evening department managers such as the kitchen staff, building maintenance and housekeeping.

The day manager gave a brief report on the evening's activities and any problems that would be carried over into the next shift. In eight hours the evening manager would hold a similar meeting for the night shift.

The security team met in their office and the head guard assigned the tasks for the evening. Sammy and Tyrell would walk through the halls of the guest's rooms several times in the next few hours. Their task was just to make sure everything looked ok and to reassure the guests that someone was looking after them. Just after dark they would drive

a cart along all of the beach paths to see if any assistance was required. Sometimes guests would drive a cart to a remote location and then find that the cart had been taken by others when it was time to return to the hotel. The guards would have dinner in the dungeon cafeteria at 7:30 and then check the halls and beach again. At 10:30 they would walk unobtrusively around the pool area while watching for belligerent drunks. At midnight they would go off shift.

It had been an interesting shift and they were making their last beach sweep of the evening when Sammy saw something back in the trees and was reaching for his big flashlight when Tyrell stopped him.

“Don’t go shinning your light back in there”

“Why not?”

“Remember what I said about making the guests happy?”

“Yea”

“Well some of the guests are making each other happy”

“What?”

“Oh you know kid, love under the stars, splendor in the grass”

“Oh ... I see”

“It’s not your job to see. If anyone needs help they’ll yell for help”

Midnight

Sammy and Tyrell got off shift and went to the dungeon. Sammy was sleepy but his roommate had other plans. He went to visit a housekeeper from Jamaica and he told Sammy not to wait up for him.

When Sammy woke at 8:30 the next morning Tyrell was sound asleep. He showered and dressed and walked to the cafeteria. The day shift was already at work and the night shift hadn’t come in yet so the big room was nearly empty. He went through the serving line and looked for a place to sit.

Across the room he saw a slightly familiar face. A woman was sitting alone and he recognized her from the 3:45 meeting the day before. At first he wasn’t sure if he wanted to disturb her but he knew that he had to meet people and make friends or it was going to be a lonely year.

“Excuse me Miss, is this seat taken?”

Hello Susan Wang

She was a Chinese woman wearing a white skirt and a colorful aloha blouse with a nametag on her left pocket. She had long straight black hair and he couldn't guess her age except he knew that she was younger than his mother and older than him. When she looked up she didn't show much expression but he knew from his years of going to school near San Francisco Chinatown that this was a typical response.

-Hello young man, who might you be- she thought.

"The seat is free, please sit down" she said.

He knew immediately that she was a Californian and probably from his part of The City.

"I'm Sammy Maliuna and I've only been here for one day"

"Hello Sammy Maliuna, I'm Susan Wang and I'll bet you're a long way from Little Italy"

He smiled at her recognition of a fellow San Franciscan.

"I am a long way and I guess that you are too. Have you been here long?"

"Three weeks. It took a little adjusting but it ok now"

"I saw you at the meeting yesterday afternoon. You're the evening assistant manager"

"Acting Assistant manager, I start as the night manager next week"

"Well I'm the lowest ranking security guard and I have a lot to learn"

They chatted as they ate their breakfast and finally realized that they had sat there for over two hours. That embarrassed both of them a little and they wished the other a nice day and went their own way.

Sammy spent the day exploring the island and at 3:45 he was in the conference room meeting. When he walked in, Susan was talking to the day manager but she saw him as he stood in the back of the room. She glanced away and didn't look at him again until the meeting was over. She approached him with a smile and asked if he had enjoyed his day and then she went to her office.

Sammy's assignment was slightly different than the previous day but the results were the same. The only excitement was a drunk had lost his room key and caused a fuss until his room was unlocked and his key replaced.

The next morning she was sitting alone in the dinning room and again, he wasn't sure if he should disturb her but she looked up and smiled when she saw him. Their conversation brought some facts to light. She learned that Sammy's mother had worked for The Royal at Fisherman's Wharf and she had talked to her by phone on a few occasions. Sammy

learned that Susan had worked for several years at the Royal Hotel in Chinatown and that she was divorced.

-She's about thirty ... that not much older than I am - he thought.

Susan did the same math.

-He's just a kid maybe twenty-one or twenty-two. Way too young for me ... still it would be nice to have a new friend -

Although she was aware of the length of time that they had spent at breakfast the day before she was in no hurry to leave and that afternoon at the 3:45 meeting she smiled at him.

The schedule of days off was an odd one and without a schedule it was impossible to calculate ahead of time. In her office that night she looked at the schedule. She always had Monday off and another day during the week. In this case she was off Tuesday. Normally she would have looked forward to the leisure time but here on the island she really didn't have anything to do. She read a lot and she tried to avoid excessive television. As an employee she couldn't take advantage of the many recreational opportunities that the hotel offered. She could use the beach at any time but she wasn't allowed to use the hotel pool or patio. There was an employee pool and patio at the dungeon but she hadn't made any friends to share that with.

She thought for a while and then checked the schedule for the other employees that was kept in the managers desk drawer. She felt a little guilty when she found the entry for Kami Maliuna. He was off Tuesday and Friday. She wasn't sure that she would mention that to him but she wasn't sure that she wouldn't.

The next morning when Sammy got to the cafeteria he was disappointed when she wasn't there. He looked around until he was sure that she was missing and then he looked at the other tables. There were a couple of guys that he had met and there was a girl from the evening shift. She was sitting alone and he thought of introducing himself but he didn't. Instead he went to the empty table where he had sat with Susan for the last couple of mornings and he sat alone.

He hadn't finished his orange juice when he heard her voice,
"Good morning Sammy, I thought that I might have missed you. Mr. Yen wanted to chat"

They chatted and laughed and Susan pondered a decision.

-Do I really want to spend all of my spare time with this kid ... still, I haven't done very well at meeting new people-

“Sammy, what are your days off next week?”

“Tuesday and Thursday or Friday, I’d have to look it up”

“Would you like to do something?”

“Sure, what would you like to do?”

“I’m off Monday and Tuesday, maybe we can explore or go to the beach or something on Tuesday”

“That’s great. You know that I’m off until three on Monday, maybe we can do something then too”

“Maybe” she said.

Expanding Susan's opportunities

Monday morning Susan was walking towards the cafeteria when she met Jocko Street in the hall.

"Good morning Miss, how is life on the night shift" he asked with a grin.

"Dark but not cold, how's life flitting among the clouds?"

"Well we never actually call it flitting. I like to think of it as cheating death with acts of astounding bravery"

She laughed

"Are all of you Aussie's so full of bull?"

"No dear, just me. I've seen you in the cafeteria for several days in a row with the big bloke from the states. Is anything happening there?"

"Nosey aren't you and why are you watching me have breakfast?"

"I keep track of the cute ones"

"More bull"

"How about having lunch with me at a good place that I know"

"What place? Do you have the key to the boss's private dining room?"

"Do you like seafood?"

"Yes but you haven't told me where"

"André's Seafood Bar and Grill on Lano Vana"

"On the other island? I wasn't very impressed when I saw it from the airplane. How could we do that anyway?"

"I have a way my dear, I'll call for you at eleven. Dress casual and I'll have you home before dark"

"I haven't said yes yet"

"Eleven o'clock cutie and don't be late"

Sammy sat at the table looking at his watch.

-Where is she? I saw her in the hall but what's keeping her so long-

Finally Susan came in and went through the serving line. When she sat at the table she could tell that Sammy was irritated.

-What's with you fella, did you get up on the wrong side of the bed?

"Good morning Sammy"

"Morning Susan, I thought that you weren't coming.

"Sammy, I can't always be here when you expect me. Sometimes things come up. If I don't show up just start without me"

-Damn, he's not my boyfriend or my god damned ex-husband. I don't have to explain things to this kid-

“Sorry Susan”

God damn it, this isn't high school and she's a grown up lady. Don't piss her off by being a jerk-

“Jocko invited me to lunch today on Lano Vana. He has to fly over to pickup something so we are having lunch out”

-Damn ... -

“I thought that we were going to do something today”

“No, we're going to do something tomorrow. Don't you remember?”

-Be quiet dummy ... don't make her mad-

“I guess I forgot”

Eleven o'clock and is all well?

Susan had just finished dressing when she heard the tap on her door. She looked at her watch and it was eleven o'clock to the minute. Opening the door she was surprised that Jocko was dressed in clean white shorts, tennis shoes and he wore a brightly colored aloha shirt and his dirty baseball cap was missing.

She laughed

“You clean up very well. If I didn't know better I would think that you were one of our rich hotel guests”

“I might say the same for you cutie, your California clothes become you”

She laughed again,

“You're so full of crap. Does all of this charm work on your other girlfriends?”

“Do you presume that your one of my girlfriends?”

“Ok, ok, let's go to lunch Prince Charming”

The flight

As the plane climbed into the clear blue sky Susan scanned the horizon.

“How do you find the other island, it's not visible from here?”

“Magic my dear and some help from science. I know the compass heading from here to there by looking at the map but that's the old fashion way.”

He pointed at an instrument that had a dial and a needle on it.

“This is a radio direction finder or RDF. I tune it to a radio beacon on Lano Vana. It’s sort of like a radio station the plays music but it broadcasts the airport name. Right now I’m not receiving the broadcast because we are too far away but in a few minutes you’ll see the needle move and point to the beacon. Then we just follow the needle”

“So this flying stuff isn’t all that hard?”

“Not at all, would you like to try it”

“Sure”

She took hold of the controls like it was the wheel of a car and to her surprise she could turn the plane a little by turning the wheel. Jocko pointed to the RDF needle which had come alive and was pointing a little left of there current direction and she made a small turn until it was lined up straight ahead.

“Ok, I’ve learned to fly now so you do it”

He made a quick turn to the right and then to the left and her eyes were as big as saucers.

“Oops” he said as he laughed.

The flight was pleasant and he gave her an a real tour of the best part of the island. On the backside of the volcanic peak she saw towering cliffs covered by the velvet green of the jungle. She noticed a surprising amount of smoke coming from a number of places on the peak and she asked Jocko about it.

“The old volcano rumbles a bit but no one seems very concerned. I guess that it happens often. This latest activity has been going on for nearly a year now”

He took the plane down very low over the water and near the beautiful beach there was smoke bubbling out of the water in several places. As they rounded the tip of the island the busy port came into view and in just a few minutes they had landed at the airport.

Jocko found a taxi in front of the terminal and in less than five minutes they walked into André’s Seafood Bar and Grill. In some ways it reminded Susan of seaside café’s in San Francisco but the ocean view here was much more tropical.

They sat at a table on the patio that was secluded by palms and it gave them the illusion of dining alone. The menu was very simple. They were offered shellfish for appetizers, local fish for the entree and fresh fruit for desert. The two beverages offered were Coke and San Miguel beer. Jocko explained that in the US and Australia drinking alcohol was forbidden for a pilot for 24 hours before flying but here it didn’t matter. He could have a cold beer before the meal and by the time they would return to the plane, it would have no effect on him.

They were very relaxed with each other and they chatted about many things. He told her of his youth in Australia and his time in the army that was spent in Vietnam. She described growing up in San Francisco as a 5th generation Chinese girl. Some of the time

she had been the traditional oriental but most of the time she had been an American teenager who was hooked on rock-n-roll.

Jocko had switched to iced tea but Susan had two more beers. She talked at length of her romance with the dashing young college professor that gradually turned sour as she became more responsible and he became more adventuresome. She confessed that she was glad that she found an excuse to dump him and to change her lifestyle.

After lunch they continued to chat and she realized how relaxed she was. She liked this charming Aussie but she had no illusions about his intentions. His goal was to get into her pants and she hadn't decided what to do about that yet. She absolutely knew that there was no long-range connection between them but he was very nice and it had been a very nice day.

They left the café by taxi and stopped at the UPS office where he picked up two parcels and then they returned to the airport. There was a note sticking out of the crack in the door of the plane and Jocko seemed quite happy when he read it.

Hey Jocko ... I need a ride to the island ... I'm napping in the terminal ... give me a shout ... Greg.

"It's my mate Greg, He's wasn't expected until next week. Come on Susan, let's go find him"

"Who's Greg?"

"He's a consultant that comes around every once in a while. He works for Accord and they own Royal hotels. I grew up with him in Australia."

Susan watched as Jocko looked through the rows of seats and finally found the allusive Greg at the snack bar. There were lots of hand shakes and back slaps and many boisterous mock insults. When the two finally calmed down, Jocko introduced Susan to Greg.

"G'day Miss" Greg said extending his hand.

"I'm Greg Allenby and despite what Jocko says I'm a good guy"

"He's a scoundrel and a liar" Jocko laughed.

"It's nice to meet you Greg. I guess that you have known Jocko for a while"

"Yes Miss, since the beginning. I might say that he's keeping better company than I remember"

As they arranged themselves in the plane Susan thought about this new guy. They were obviously the best of friends. Their accents were nearly the same but not quite. Occasionally Greg had a slight American sound about him. Jocko was a bull of a man with muscled arms and legs while Greg was taller and lighter and if Jocko was a football player then Greg was a long-distance runner.

Without hesitation Greg climbed into the backseat of the plane leaving Susan the seat beside the pilot. In a few minutes they were climbing for altitude and Jocko dialed in the frequency of the radio beacon on Tapu Vana. After about fifteen minutes of flying time the needle on the RDF came alive and settled on a direction that was just to the right of their course. In just a few more minutes the island came into view and they followed the beacon to the landing field.

Greg tossed his bag onto the back of the golf cart and they all drove to the hotel. Jocko and Greg talked for a minute and then he went into the lobby and Jocko and Susan drove to the Dungeon. Susan was a little disappointed that the day was ending. She had enjoyed herself and she liked both of the Aussies. Jocko walked to the door with her and Susan surprised herself with she asked,
“Would you like to come in?”
“Sure if you don’t mind”
“I don’t mind”

Inside she tossed her purse and stuff on the dining table and turned on the air condition while Jocko stood by the door and waited.

“Jocko I had a really nice day ... I ...”

She felt the tightness in her throat and a tingling in her body as she walked back to him. She thought that she should ignore the rush that she was feeling but she knew that it was too late. They came together gently at first and then with more urgency. Without her actually realizing what was happening he picked her up in his arms and laid her on the bed. The rest was pure emotion.

The last light of the fading sun lit the bedroom and she looked at her companion. She was fascinated and curious about the many scars on his muscular body. Several she was sure came from gunshots and she remembered him saying that he had been in Vietnam. He opened his eyes and with a smile he gave her a little kiss.

“Hi cutie, I had a dream about you”
“Did you enjoy it?”
“Yes I did, did you have the same dream?”
“Possibly. Do you take a lot of girls to lunch?”
“Do you really want to know?”
“Jocko, I’m a grown up woman and I don’t want to marry you. It won’t hurt my feelings if you’re not true-blue to me”
“In that case, yes I take a few but you’re my favorite”
“Do you ever stop with the bullshit?”
“Hmmm ... I don’t think so”
“Your lots of fun Jocko and maybe your just what I needed today”
“So you’ll be amenable to a repeat performance in the future?”
“Don’t push your luck. Do you want to stay here tonight?”

“I’d love to but I’m meeting Greg by our pool for a beer, do you want to come?”
She laughed at his choice of words and declined.
“No, I think I’ll just lay here and enjoy the glow”

The morning after

Tuesday morning Susan awoke to the pleasant feelings from her afternoon in bed with Jocko and then reality returned. She had promised Sammy that they would do something together. She thought that a tour of the island by golf cart would be good and later maybe some beach time. She was a little concerned that the young guy might have a crush on her but if it was a problem then they could talk about it. She looked at her clock and decided that she had another twenty minutes to lie in bed and relive the event of yesterday.

Day of leisure or not

Sammy and Susan had a leisurely breakfast together but today they took their trays out to the patio and enjoyed the warm sun and the cool breeze.

“So what would you like to do?” he asked.
“Let’s get a golf cart and explore the island. Have you seen it all yet?”
“Not all of it, you’ve been here a while, what have you found?”
“Nothing, I’m not much to do things alone”

-How was your lunch yesterday, you certainly didn't do that alone?-

“Ok, I’ll show you what I know and then we’ll just look for the rest.”

At first they checked out the paths around the hotel and the dungeon then drove the two miles up to the airport. There were several places where they could stop and look at the view. At one lookout spot Susan saw something far below.

“Sammy, come look at this secret cove”

The cliff was nearly vertical above a cove that was nearly surrounded by rocks. Protected by a natural breakwater, the water in the cove was as smooth as glass. There was a small sailboat anchored in the blue water and a guy and a girl were swimming off the back of the boat.

“Does that look like fun?” She asked.
“Yes but have you noticed that they are both wearing the same color bathing suit?”
“What? Oh Sammy, they’re skinny dipping”
She looked at him and he looked embarrassed.
“Sammy, haven’t you ever gone skinny dipping?” She teased.
“Well, maybe but not in broad daylight”

“So, let’s get this straight, you and a girl went swimming naked”

“God damn it Susan, I was a junior at Stanford. I saw and did a lot of things in college just like you did I’ll bet”

-Ooooo that touched a nerve. I wonder just how much he did do in college. Maybe all of the shy, innocent stuff is just an act-

“And did you like it?” she continued to tease.

“Of course I liked it but things didn’t always go very well. Some times one of us got our feelings hurt”

“Did you get your feelings hurt?” she asked now in a more sympathetic voice.

“Oh come on, let’s explore some more” he said trying to hide his embarrassment.

Susan glanced back at the sailboat as Sammy walked towards the golf cart. The couple was now lying on a lounge chair on the deck and they were kissing.

Near the airport they parked and hiked up a trail through the jungle until they had a clear view of the island below. They sat on the grass and enjoyed the sight and the breeze.

“Did you do that in college?” He asked.

“Do what?”

“Did you go skinning dipping?”

“No but I did it once in high school. There were several girls and boys and we’d all smoked some marijuana and the first thing that anyone knew we were all naked in a swimming pool. I just got carried away with the moment and after I was in the water I found a beach ball to hide behind. It probably wasn’t necessary because I was so flat chested that they probably thought that I was a boy”

“So what else did you do?”

“I stayed in the water until the others went inside then I got dressed and went home. After that I just denied that I was there at all”

-He seems happier now that I admitted to doing something naughty and embarrassing-

They drove to the far end of the island where the paved cart path stopped and driving farther would get the cart stuck in the sand. Susan had brought a bag with her bathing suit and towel and Sammy was wearing his trunks. They walked about a hundred yards and found a beautiful, palm tree lined beach. They were the only ones there.

The water was too inviting to pass up and Susan needed to change.

“Ok Sammy, I can go change in the trees or you can turn your back and be a gentleman”

“How do you know that I don’t have eyes in the back of my head?”

“Ok, I’ll watch you and if you blush when I get naked I’ll kick your ass”

She stripped off her clothes and Sammy, looked the other way, laughing and joking,

“Oh Susan what a pretty figure you have. Is that a birthmark on you butt?”
“Just keep it up fella and I’ll get even”

Her bathing suit was a modest two piece that did nothing to cover her lack of curves. She was probably pretty average for a thirty year old Chinese lady but that wasn’t saying much. She had to face the fact that she couldn’t flaunt what she didn’t have.

“Ok, turn around and don’t laugh”
“Oh Susan, you look just like a Playboy ...centerfold”
“Oh bullshit, let’s go swimming.”

They frolicked in the small surf and splashed each other with water. They played a lot and she began to notice how often he was touching her. He splashed her and then put his hand on her shoulder. She didn’t mind as long as it didn’t get out of hand. When they finally came out of the water he gave her a brief hug as they walked up the beach to their towels.

After they were dry Susan took two more towels from her bag and spread them on the sand in the shade of the palms. They lay on the towels and rested and she was well aware that his hand was touching hers. Without being sharp or condescending she said in a quite voice,

“I’m too old for you Sammy. Let’s just be friends”
He said nothing for a minute and then responded in an equally quite voice,
“I hope that we are friends and that has nothing to do with age”
“I know but I can tell that you want more” she said.
“I do want more and I still don’t think that age has anything to do with it. I’m twenty-two and you’re thirty. If you were twenty-two and I was thirty would that make a difference? How old were you when you met your husband and how old was he?”
“That’s different”
“How old were you?”
“Twenty-one”
“And how old was he?”
“Thirty”
“Hum, do you want to make out?”
“No!” she laughed and threw sand at him.

They laughed and teased for a while and then they needed to go. She didn’t relish the idea of the long drive back in the cart wearing a wet suit that was full of sand.

“Sammy, I need to change out of my suit and I need to rinse the sand off in the water. I’m going to undress and go in the water and then I’m coming back here to dry off and get dressed. Please don’t embarrass me by watching. Ok?”
“Ok, I’ll just sit on that log and watch the clouds”

-Liar, if you don't sneak a peek then your queer-

She stripped and rinsed the sand off and then dressed. She was sure that he had seen her but it was innocent enough. They had dinner of hamburgers and beer on the patio that evening and that night, in bed, Susan reflected on her pleasant day.

Flight of fancy – July 12th, 1974

Lara

When I entered the departure lounge for Qantas Air Lines I saw a lady with a sign that said ‘Tapu Vana’. She was our travel agent and she had arranged for us to meet in a private room off of the waiting area.

Maggie was there and she gave me an excited hug and our agent quickly introduced us to the rest of our traveling companions. There were twenty-two of us. There were ten men including Dr. Howard who was the assistant dean of the USC law school and Dr. Sheppard who was an assistant Professor of Anthropology and who I had taken Cultural Anthropology 101 from several years before. The rest of the guys were your typical twenty-two to twenty-five student types.

Of the twelve women, six were girlfriends of the young guys and the rest were typical students or new graduates. When we finally all got a cup of coffee and a cookie I had a chance to talk to Maggie. She looked happy but different from the last time that I had seen her. Gone was the tailored suit and now she was in bell-bottom hip-huggers. Her hair was long and straight and she obviously was not wearing a bra. She looked more like a hippy than a law school graduate. I didn’t think that it was bad. In fact, I thought that she looked very relaxed and ready for a good time. I thought about myself standing there in my Jordache jeans and a blouse buttoned to my chin. In my carry-on bag were two romance novels and a few Twinkies and I decided that I should have what Maggie was having.

Out to the South Seas

Qantas flight 3220 took eight and a half hours to negotiate the miles between Los Angeles and Papeete, Tahiti. In that time Maggie and I talked, read, napped and watched a movie. I was in the window seat and for a full workday all I saw outside was a blue ocean and white clouds.

As we approached the island we all had our noses glued to the window and Maggie’s chin was resting on my shoulder. That would have seemed too intimate when we first left LA but now, after being six inches apart for eight hours, it was fine.

When we first saw the island I thought it looked like Hawaii. It was incredibly green and that made the water look very blue. The peaks of the mountains seemed very steep and the white sand beaches were snow white. No wonder Tahiti was the epitome for a beautiful and faraway place.

That illusion changed as Papeete came into view. The city sprawled around a busy harbor and the shore was lined with hotels. As we descended for landing I could see the traffic in the streets and my ‘tropical paradise’ dream was already fading.

In the airport terminal we had over an hour before we boarded the Air Tahiti Nui flight to Lano Vana. It was starting to be a really long day and we were still over 1200 miles from our destination. In the airport shops I bought a beautiful sundress and Maggie bought a bathing suit that couldn't have been more than four square inches of cloth. The two-piece suit that was packed in my suitcase seemed like an overcoat compared to her new little bit of modesty, or lack of modesty depending how you looked at it.

When we left Tahiti for the two-hour flight, I spent a long time looking out the window. At first there were many small islands and some much larger ones but eventually everything faded to blue. I thought of the Polynesians exploring the Pacific in wooden canoes and I wondered how many just sailed away until they died of starvation.

Twelve hours after leaving Los Angeles we touched down on the tropical paradise of Lano Vana but it didn't look much like paradise. It was a low island with one tall volcanic peak. If there ever had been any native vegetation, it had long since been replaced by coconut palms, banana plantations and gray fields of pineapples.

Even from the air we could see several smokestacks belching soot into the Pacific trade winds. The harbor was lined with unpainted wooden warehouses and the bay seemed filled with small, rusting ships. There wasn't one saving grace in sight.

As we descended the stairs from the plane we saw a guide with a large sign that said 'Lano Vana Tours'. He led us to the baggage claim area and then a bus took us to our four-star hotel.

He said that the bus for our deluxe inland tour would leave from the front of the hotel at one pm. Somehow that didn't make any sense to me at all. When I asked the local time he said it was eleven-thirty in the morning.

-How the hell can we leave LA at eight in the morning, fly for a hundred hours and it only be 11:30? What day is it anyway?-

Maggie and I looked at our four-star room and then looked at each other. There was no air conditioning but a ceiling fan was slowly circling in harmony with the circling flies. The window was open and the sounds of commerce in the harbor flooded in. There was one sagging double bed and no shower or bathroom. They were a half-mile down the dingy hall.

"Are you going on the deluxe tour?" I asked feeling very forlorn.

"Screw the tour. Do you have anything to eat?"

"I have Twinkies"

"Get them out" she said and disappeared down the hall.

I sat on the bed with my Twinkies and thought about crying. I didn't think that it would help but it seemed better than just sitting here. After a bit Maggie came through the door

with what looked like a mop bucket. She had a smile on her face when she reached into her bucket and tossed me a ice covered bottle of San Miguel beer.

“Bless you Maggie, how many do you have?”

“Ten, that’s all that would fit in the bucket unless I left the ice out”

“Do they have more?”

“Damn right” she said as she snagged one of my Twinkies.

Later that afternoon we found a vending machine that offered packaged cheesy crackers. For one Polynesian Frank I bought a pack and we carefully read the label. It was made in Australia and it was no more than six months past the sell-by date. We stopped at the bar on the way to our room with our pockets stuffed with cheesy crackers while the bartender refilled our mop bucket. Some of our traveling companions were drinking away the afternoon and we stopped to chat with them. It seems that only eight people turned up for the deluxe tour and they demanded to be brought back to the hotel early.

Back in our room we lay on the bed and watched the sun sink into the Pacific and I was really surprised how fast it got dark when the sun went down. One minute it was day and then it was night.

Sometime during the evening we decided that we had been awake for three days and it was time for bed. The biggest problem was the bathroom which was now a mile down the hall and was moving farther away every minute. Maggie, being a resourceful girl, drank the last of the San Miguel, dumped the remnants of the ice out the window and promptly pee’d in the now empty bucket. Of course I would have never done such a thing back in the real world but I was here in the tropical paradise so I followed her lead.

The double bed seemed tiny for the two of us and the night was so hot and sticky that, even though we both started in T- shirts and panties we soon were just in our panties which at some time in the dark night became o’natural.

For some reason I woke just when the night sky started to turn pink. Maggie was peacefully sleeping and I had to stifle a laugh. What would the Redondo Beach Girl Scouts think of one of their former members having dinner of crackers and beer and then laying in bed in a sleazy hotel with a naked woman on the far side of the world?

-What part of your twisted mind did that little thought spring from?-

I guess that I went back to sleep because Maggie stirred first and woke me. She didn’t seem a one bit embarrassed by her complete lack of modesty while I assumed the fetal position and waited for her to turn her back. She just laughed and swatted my bare butt while she slipped on her unused nightgown. Then she carried her mop bucket off to the bathroom. At ten that morning, after a breakfast of cheesy crackers, we boarded Air Vana flight 002 and departed for our next tropical paradise.

Tapu Vana – July 13th, 1974 - Tropical paradise or else

The plane was a small turbo-prop Folker that had seats for forty passengers but there was only the twenty-two of us. After our experience on Lano Vana we were all apprehensive and from the look of my fellow passengers it wouldn't have taken much to get them to turn around and head for Tahiti.

The flight took about forty minutes and we were all ready for the sight of our destination. In the distance we saw a tall green island. The pilot circled Tapo Vana to give us a look and from the air it looked beautiful. From several thousand feet the island looked like a green circle in a circle. It was like a dime was laid on a half dollar with one side aligned. The larger circle was the remnants of an ancient volcanic creator that had weathered away so just the circle of the low, rocky outline still showed. The dime was a much newer volcanic island with a towering peak. The result was an island with a beautiful lagoon on one side and towering cliffs on the other. As we descended still circling the island we could see a long white sand beach with a nice resort hotel that was built on a rocky outcropping next to the lagoon. Everywhere else was lush vegetation. In the highlands near the volcanic peak was the landing strip that was our destination.

The pilot put us down on the short field and we taxied to a sheet metal shed that offered some protection from the sun. When the door opened and we walked down the portable stairs we could feel a warm and pleasant trade winds blowing from the Pacific. The trees on the edge of the runway were filled with wild orchids and colorful, but noisy, birds. A man, who looked Chinese but spoke with a British accent, greeted us as our bags were quickly loaded into several open vehicles that looked like big golf carts.

I hadn't noticed before but now I saw about thirty departing passengers waiting, under the sheet metal roof, to board our plane. They all looked happy and I wasn't sure if that was a sign that they had a good time of that they were glad to be leaving a bad situation.

“Welcome to Tapu Vana. I am Charles Yen and I will be your host for your stay. I know that your experience on Lano Vana was a bit of a shock but that's over now. In a few minutes we will be showing to your rooms in the beautiful Tapu Vana Royal Hotel. We presently have seventy eight guests including your self's and we have a staff of sixty-four to cater to your every need. Now come this way and we will board our environmental friendly electric carts for the two mile ride to the hotel.”

As Maggie and I walked to a cart I gave an inquisitive look to the departing guests and I got several smiles and thumbs-up signs as they walked towards the plane.

Maybe we had arrived in a tropical paradise after all.

The Tapu Vana Royal Hotel

The ride down the mountain was interesting and very pleasant. There were no bugs or insects to bother us. The temperature was mild and the views of alternating cliffs, ocean and lush jungle were spectacular.

About halfway down we could see the hotel below us nestled in palm trees and sitting on the edge of the blue lagoon. The crescent of the white sand beach swept away to the right and to the left was jungle growing out of an ancient lava flow. As we rounded a corner on the winding road, we were overlooking a large cove with a dock. At the end of the dock was a storage tank, and a square concrete building that could only be a small power plant. This was evidently the source of the electricity for the island.

As the carts stopped in front of the hotel, several young men and women greeted us with kisses on the cheek and beautiful orchid lei's.

The hotel was very impressive with a wide entrance and an open air lobby and reception area. The rest of the ground floor was completely enclosed by a glass wall that gave a feeling of openness.

In the lobby were many palms and flowers spread between comfortable wicker chairs and sofas. The island motif was evident in the large, slow turning ceiling fans and it couldn't have looked nicer.

Maggie was excited and she kept nudging me to point out different things. On the open veranda we could see a bar with tables and umbrella's and it seemed to call out with the promise of tall, cool, drinks.

“What do you say Lara, should we get a mop bucket of San Miguel?”

“I could go for a cold beer but I don't want it served in a bucket that doubled for a pee-pot”

She was laughing when we was greeted by a smiling receptionist.

Our room was as nice as the rest of the hotel. It was actually a small suite with a big bedroom, a small sitting room and a luxurious bath and dressing area. The entire outside wall was glass windows and French doors that opened onto the balcony. There were ceiling fans in every room and a thermostat that controlled the air conditioning but we wouldn't need that. It was hard to believe that it was mid-winter here in the southern hemisphere and I guessed that the summers were much warmer.

We were on the third and top floor and the view from our balcony was great. We looked down onto the beach and to our left was the large patio and pool area. I had spent a spring break in Cancun one year and I knew that these adult-only resorts allowed topless sunbathing and swimming. Looking down at the other guests now I saw that about half of

the girls and women were bare-breasted. That didn't bother me at all and I hadn't decided yet if I would try it.

"Hey Maggie, that tiny bikini that you bought in Papeete will fit right in with this crowd"
"Do you think so?" She said from the dressing area.

She walked out onto the balcony in just the bottom of her minuscule suit. There was a lot of Maggie with a tiny bit of cloth between her legs. I guess I blushed because she laughed at me.

"Honestly Lara, didn't you ever have a gym class or go to summer camp. You act like you've never seen a girl's skin before"

"Oh Maggie, I'm sorry. I was always so self-conscious in those situations that I just looked at my feet. The one time that I bought a tiny bikini, I was sixteen and I had too much to drink at a beach party and I spent the night wearing it in the Redondo Beach Police drunk-tank."

"Wow, I'll bet that was embarrassing. Well get used to it girlfriend because this is what I plan to wear unless I get a better offer"

I was a little confused until I realized that her 'better offer' was to take her bottoms off in some intimate situation and with at least half of the guys here unaccompanied, I was sure that she would find someone to help her with that.

We explored the rest of our suite and found some interesting things. There was a small refrigerator that was filled with bottled water, soft drinks and beer and there was a liquor cabinet that was stocked with gin, vodka, and rum.

There was a warning in the bathroom that water conservation was very important and each room was limited to no more than two showers per day.

"I wonder what they do if we take three, do you think that the shower police knock on our door?" I joked.

"No, they probably just cut us off after we use so many gallons. By the way, I intend to shower first every day"

Reading farther I found something else that was curious.

"Listen to this Maggie"

The hotel had provided each room with a supply of lotion and sun tan products. Please use only these. Do not use other lotions, creams, sun blocks or tanning agents. The hotel's water reclamation plant can only process the products provided. Please note that the reclaimed water is only used in the toilets and for landscaping. It is never used for drinking or cooking"

Maggie frowned and said,

“Well that’s nice to know. I took an ecology class once where we studied water reclamation. They called it ‘Toilet to tap’ and a lot of cities are looking into it. It gives a whole new meaning to the warning, ‘Don’t drink the water’”

On the table in the sitting room under a large basket of fresh fruit, we found the book that had all of the phone numbers of the front desk, fire, security and all of the restaurants. There was also one page of the rules. These rules were about the same as any hotel except for things like ‘no topless men or women in the lobby, inside bars or restaurants’ and ‘fresh caught fish must be taken to the kitchen door behind the building. Under no circumstances may they be taken to the guest’s room’.

There was also a list of times and places of all meals. There was a main dining room that was open for breakfast, lunch and dinner. There was a kiosk near the pool that served coffee and crescents for breakfast and a light lunch and there was a Polynesian theme restaurant that served a late dinner with reservations required.

“So what do you think?” Maggie asked.

“Let me put on my modest bathing suit and then we can try the light lunch by the pool”

As we walked towards the pool I noticed many golf carts parked around the hotel.

“Hey Maggie, does the hotel have a golf course?”

“No, didn’t you read that part?”

“What part?”

“These are electric carts and anyone can use them. There’s an hour timer on the dashboard. If you find one with an expired timer you can just take it. When you’re through, just leave it anywhere. If you’ll need it soon, just set the timer. There was a map of the allowed area but essentially it’s all the way to the end of the beach and any of the paved paths around the hotel. I think that it’s a really nice feature”

Lunch by the pool was a real treat. A barbeque was setup and a cook was grilling fresh fish that was served with a fruit salad and ice tea. Of course the pool bar would provide any and all drinks that anyone might want.

Maybe this really was a bit of that tropical paradise after all.

After some lunch and a bit of sun I went to our room for a nap and Maggie said that she would be along soon but I was asleep before she returned. When I woke I heard the shower and I stuck my head in the bathroom and shouted to her,

“How many showers have you had, I’m counting you know!”

A bar of the hotel’s biodegradable soap came flying over the glass shower wall and a somewhat sunburned Maggie stepped dripping onto the mat.

“Did you sleep well princess, or should I call you sleeping beauty?”
“There was no pea under my mattress or I would have felt it. What did you do or is it best that I don’t know?”
She smiled a sly smile,
“Wouldn’t you really like to know?”
“Of course I would. I have no life so maybe I can get a piece of yours”
She smiled again at my choice of words.
“No dear, I didn’t get lucky but I did meet some nice people. What do you want to do for dinner?”
“How about cocktails on the balcony while the sun is setting and then we can try the food in the dining room?”
“Great choice and there will be music and dancing on the patio later”
“Dancing? You mean letting some strange man put his hands on my body while we sway to a Polynesian guitar?”
“That’s the dance”
“Be still my heart”

Maggie and I wore sundresses and sandals to dinner and the only difference between us was that I wore underwear. Dinner was delicious and the moon was full as we found a small table on the patio. We both ordered big rum drinks with a little umbrella in them and we listened to the music.

Maggie had an offer to dance right away and I even attracted some nearsighted guy. He must have been nearsighted because he mistook me for someone who liked to have my ass fondled.

After pouting for a while I did let a couple of other brave souls guide me around the dance floor. The first was a German who talked the whole time about all of the romantic places that he had been and I decided that there would be no more dances for him. The next guy was a surprise. It was Dr. Sheppard, the assistant Professor that I had taken a class from at USC.

“So Miss Lee, are you having a good time?”
“Why yes Professor, I am. Will there be a pop quiz later?”
“I guess this isn’t exactly an academic environment. Let’s start over. Hi I’m Sam Sheppard from California, may I have this dance?”
“Why yes you may Sam, I’m Lara Lee, also from La La land and I would love to dance with you”

We both laughed. He looked younger than I remembered but I took his class when I was nineteen and then everyone in a suit looked old. We danced and chatted. He kept his hands off of my butt and I managed to keep my feet off of his. When the music stopped I asked if he would join me at my table. I caught Maggie’s eye and gave her the ‘get-lost’ look and she smiled and waved as she moved away.

During the next hour we had a couple more of the giant rum drinks and I had a warm glow.

“I remember you from Anthro-101” he said.

“How could you remember me, I was just another face in a long line of faces? That was seven years ago”

“I would like to say that you were a real stand-out but the truth is that was the first class that I taught at USC and I was so nervous that I spent an hour before class everyday anticipating the questions that all of those enquiring minds were going to come up with.”

“So did I ask anything appropriate?”

“Oh yes, you evidently had read a lot of Margaret Mead’s work on primitive societies and you grilled me on my knowledge. I always wondered where you got such in-depth knowledge on such an obscure subject”

I laughed,

“In high school I had the hots for a young science teacher and I read it to impress him”

“And did you impress him?”

“No, he broke my heart one day when I saw him in the parking lot with some old broad. She must have been twenty or twenty-one”

Now he laughed. I was feeling a little giddy from the rum and when we danced again I probably held him a little too tight. He understood because he disappeared and came back with two cups of coffee and after my head cleared I asked him if he would walk me to my room.

I took his arm and we strolled through the moonlight and swaying palms, with the tropical breeze blowing the scent of jasmine through the night. It was romantic as hell but I still felt like a student with her teacher. At my door I didn’t ask him in and he looked a little disappointed.

“I had fun tonight Lara, can we hang out together again?”

“Sure Sam but you have to compete with this swarm of guys that are after me.”

I swatted at the air.

“Damn, there goes another one”

He laughed and kissed me on the cheek.

“Good night Lara, I hope that I’ll see you soon”

Inside I had a double surprise. The first was the time. It was nearly two in the morning. The second was that Maggie was there and already dressed in a short nightgown.

“What the matter sweetheart, did you strikeout?” I asked.

“You can’t strikeout if you don’t swing. I was just scoping out the prospects”

“See any good ones?”

“I met a few how about you. Any action?”

“There could have been but I was hung up on past history. I took a class from that guy my freshman year and it just didn’t feel right”

“Then move on dear, the world is filled with willing subjects”

Better and better – Morning - July 14th, 1974

Maggie and I had just sat down at a patio table with trays of coffee, orange juice and crescents when she got a smile from a big blond guy who was sitting alone at a table near the pool.

“Sorry to eat and run dear but I just got a better offer. That’s Lars from Sweden. I met him last night and I need to practice my international diplomacy”

I was resigned to eating with my romance novel when I sensed someone standing beside me. I was sure it was Sam and then he spoke,

“Excuse me Miss, is this seat taken?”

-With that lovely accent, this guy has to be an Aussie-

I looked up at a very pleasant smile from a very interesting man. He was very blond with a crooked smile. He was a little older than me but I couldn’t guess how much. My first impression was that here was a guy that had been there and done that. He was dressed in a kaki shirt and shorts and if he had been wearing Jodhpur boots and a pith helmet I would have said that he was a big game hunter. He was, however, wearing dirty Nike tennis shoes without socks and a baseball cap that said ‘Accord’ on the front.

“No, the seat is open to all comers.” I said.

-Stupid... why did you say that-

“Thank you Miss”

I noticed that he had two cups of coffee and many crescents on his plate.

“You must be very hungry or are you expecting company?”

“No Miss, I’ll probably skip lunch so I’m getting a good start. I’m Greg Allenby” he said extending his hand.

“Hello Greg Allenby, I’m Lara Lee, not Miss Lara Lee. Well, I guess that I am Miss Lee but ... oh you know ... just call me Lara”

-God girl..., have those blue eyes got you tongue-tied-

“Hi Lara or whoever you are. I saw your friend bail-out on you so I thought that I would fill in, so to speak”

“Maggie, oh she went off to take a Swedish lesson”

“Really? Last night she was taking an Italian lesson or maybe it was Spanish. All of those romance languages sound alike to me”

“So Greg, you don’t look like a tourist, do you work for the hotel?”

“No, I work for the company that owns the hotel. I’m what they call a Facilities Engineer”

-Keep him interested, talk about him-

“Really and what is that?”

“I’m here for a couple of weeks to make sure that the system is running correctly. My specialty is power generation and distribution but I also check their water and sewage systems. The hotel has only been operating for a year and I was involved in the original design. ‘Accord’ is a French company but my home office is in Sydney. Office work is ok but I do get to spend four or five months a year in the field.”

-I would guess him to be about thirty and since he’s away from home a lot he probably isn’t married. That doesn’t mean that he doesn’t have a girlfriend, probably lots of girlfriends-

He continued, “So any way Miss ... Lara, where are you from?”

We chatted for a long time and he kept refilling my coffee cup. I desperately needed to wee but I didn’t want to let him get away. I suppose he liked me a little because he offered to give me a tour of the island.

“Ok Greg but I need to slip on some jeans and shoes. I just have a bathing suit on under this cover-up. How about I meet you in the lobby in fifteen minutes?”

“Good idea and wear a hat, the sun can fry your brain here in the tropics”

Who is this guy?

I was a little nervous in my room. Did I really want to go off into the tropics with a guy that I had only known an hour? He looked nice enough but Jack-the-Ripper probably looked like a nice guy.

I picked up the telephone and dialed the operator. I asked for Greg Allenby and I was told that he was away from the office but I could leave a message.

-Well at least he works here so I’ll give him a try ... damn he’s cute -

Ten minutes later, dressed in my very best Gloria Vanderbilt jeans and with a little dab of Chanel #5 behind my ear I met him in front of the hotel. His mode of transportation was an electric cart with a little pick-up bed on the back. It was loaded with toolboxes, rope, pipe joints and other stuff and it didn’t look nearly as romantic as I had hoped. He talked to someone on a small radio that was clipped to his belt and then we were off.

There seemed to be many paved paths that disappeared into the jungle. We took one for about a hundred yards and a low building came into sight. It had a flat roof and the bulk of the building looked like it was built in a hole. It was as if an effort had been made to hide it. Even the dark exterior seemed to blend in with the jungle background.

“This is the dungeon. It’s where the hotel staff live. They really have everything that they need here”

“Greg, you say ‘they’ have all of these things. Don’t you have a room here?”

“No, remember that I’m not a hotel employee. I work for Accord and I have a room in the hotel. It’s not like yours but it’s fine”

-His room’s not like mine? Is it in the basement or the attic or something? I probably shouldn’t ask to see it on our first ... tour-

The next stop was the sewage treatment plant and I tried to fake interest but I wasn’t very convincing. He laughed and we drove to the Electric Power plant. I didn’t have a lot of interest in that either but at least I could understand it. A big diesel engine turned a generator that made our lights come on. The diesel fuel was brought by ship and was stored in a tank on the dock. He talked for a while about the backup generators and then we drove up the mountain.

I was starting to think that the tour was a little too aesthetic when he parked the cart off of the path and rummaged through the various things in the back. Finally he had a thermos and a couple of folding chairs and he led the way through the thick vegetation until we came onto a ledge that overlooked the ocean. The view of the coastline and the cliffs dropping a hundred feet to the waves below was spectacular. The only sounds that we could hear were the calling of the colorful birds and the sea far below us. Greg unfolded the chairs and opened the thermos. I expected coffee but it was strong, hot, tea.

“Here you go Miss ... Lara. We need a little break from my busy workday. Now tell me what you think for Tapu Vana?”

The island was fine but what I really wanted to know about was Greg Allenby. He was handsome but not movie star handsome. He was easy to listen to but he didn’t offer much about himself. There was no doubt that he was an Aussie but his accent also seemed a little different. He had a scar just over his left ear that was ugly enough to have threatened his life. There was no sign that he had ever worn a wedding ring but he didn’t look like the kind of guy that would have been on his own. For one thing, he was too smooth with me to have been celibate for very long.

“So Greg, tell me a little about yourself”

-Nothing ventured, nothing gained-

“Not much to tell. I grew up in a suburb of Sydney. After high school I went into the forces for a while and then I went to college. I got a job at Accord and here I am”

-Does this guy has something to hide or he's very modest?

“What are the Forces? Is that the army or something?”

“Yes, I was with the yanks for a while”

“Oh, where?”

“In Vietnam. I was there in 1968”

“Really, my brother was there in ‘69”

“What did he do?”

“He was Air Force. He flew F-4's”

“Fast-movers, good for him”

“What did you do Greg?”

“Oh, this and that”

-Well that's the end of that line of conversation-

“Where did you go to college?”

“University of Western Montana”

-What? You could have mentioned that before-

“Really, did you like living in the states?”

“Yes, very much. Shall we continue our tour now?”

We stopped at several other places and at a couple of closed gates that he opened with what looked like an automatic garage opener. I noticed that the control boxes on the gates had solar panels to keep their batteries charged.

Finally we reached the airport where Greg parked in front of a small, open hanger where a man in dirty, white coveralls came out and greeted us.

“Good day Miss, hi Greg, what brings you up here?”

-This guy's an Aussie too and he's as good looking as Greg-

“Mind your manners Jocko, Miss Lee's a hotel guest from California”

Jocko wiped his hands with a shop towel and extended it to me.

“Please forgive Greg's bad manners Miss, I'm Jason Street and welcome to Tapu Vana International Airport”

“Hello Jason ... Jocko ... I'm Lara Lee and please don't call me Miss”

“Sorry Miss ... sorry Lara, force of habit. Are you enjoying your holiday Lara?”

“So far”

Greg interrupted our small talk,

“Jocko, why don’t you show Lara the view while I try to fix the NDB”

“Non-Directional-Beacon” I said to show off a little but I got a strange reaction. Jocko looked at Greg who had a quick little frown on his face.

“That’s right Lara, it’s broke but Greg’s going to fix it. Come along and I’ll show you the view”

Jocko and I walked into the hanger while Greg drove off toward a small building near the end of the runway. In the hanger was a Piper Cherokee-Six with its cowl removed. I noticed that sparkplugs from the plane were laid out on the workbench and so was one of the cylinders and a piston. Jocko opened a small refrigerator and asked if I wanted coke or beer.

With two cans of coke we went out of the hangers backdoor to an absolutely breathtaking view. It looked like an advertisement for a true tropical paradise. Near the airport the jagged peaks and ridges of the volcano were covered with velvet-like drape of lush green jungle. Far below the snow-white beaches gave way to the light blue of the lagoon. The ocean side of the lagoon was lined with the ragged remnants of an ancient volcanic crater that formed a breakwater that kept the lagoon calm. Beyond that I could see coral heads and reefs that would have made an approach to the island from the sea impossible.

I suppose that I was staring at the sights when Jocko asked me to sit on one of the several lounge chairs that were in the shade at the back of the hanger. They were the same lounges that were around the pool at the hotel and I doubted that the hotel manager knew that they were up here.

“Lara, you know what an NDB is, do you fly?”

“Yes I’m an 800-hour private pilot with a multi-engine and an instrument rating. My dad has always owned planes and my brother and I both learned when we were teenagers”

“What are you type-rated in?”

“Oh all of the high-winged Cessna’s up to the C-206. All Piper PA-28’s except the one that’s in your hanger and the twin Aero Commander Shrike. That’s dad’s favorite but I don’t like it. It’s all system management and very little stick-and-rudder”

Jocko gave me a smile and a thumbs-up.

“I’m impressed but that one in the hanger isn’t a PA-28 it’s a PA-32. It’s a common mistake since they have all of the same instruments and controls. I think that Piper changed the model number so they could charge more money for it”

“So why is it torn apart?” I asked.

“Just regular 100 hour maintenance. I pulled the cowl off because it was a little lower on compression than the others but maybe I just have too much time on my hands”

“Do you fly anywhere other than Lano Vana” I asked.

“There’s no where else to fly and even this place doesn’t really exist. It’s a phantom island”

“What do you mean, we’re here aren’t we?”

“It’s just a joke. Tapu Vana was left off of the new Aeronautical charts and another island has its name.”

“I don’t understand”

“Here, let me show you”

He went into the hanger and returned with a chart that every pilot is familiar with. He laid it out on the little table and I scooted closer to look at it.

“These islands were discovered by Captain Cook back in the 1700’s and he had a habit of naming islands after his crew. The Vana’s are really part of the Tahitian archipelago but they are so far south that the Europeans didn’t know they were here. The Polynesian knew, of course, and a few of them settled on Lano Vana.

When Cook came through the area he found four islands. Lano Vana was named after his navigator, William Russell. Out here to the west he found three more islands and he named them The Peaks after another crewmen. The one to the south of here was named Peaks Spit. This one was named Peak Island and off to the north is a volcano cone sticking up out of the sea that he named Peak’s Rock. The three are all about a hundred miles from Lano Vana and they are all about sixty miles apart.

After WWII the names of the islands were changed and Russell Island became Lano Vana, Peak Island became Tapu Vana, and here’s where the confusion started. Peaks Spit became Tapo Vana and Peak’s Rock became Tapu a Vana.

When the new Oceanographic charts were printed, no one had noticed that Cook’s original charts were wrong. Some chart maker in Paris was sure that Tapu Vana and Tapo Vana was really the same island and so the new chart had only three Vana Islands.

All of that didn’t matter at all to the people in this area because they all knew where the islands were. Now, even the new flight charts are wrong and will stay that way for at least another year. So we are sitting here drinking coke on a phantom island”

I laughed at the bureaucratic screw-up and said,

“Well at least you marked the real location on this chart in pencil so we can find our way”

We sat for a while and then he spoke,

“Have you known Greg for long, Lara?”

“No, not at all. We met at breakfast this morning and he invited me on a tour”
“Really, that’s a little out of character for him”
“Why’s that, he looks like the social type to me”

Jocko just stared down the mountain for a bit and I wondered if he was going to continue or just leave me hanging there.

“He hasn’t been very social lately. Not since he came back from California”

-What’s going on here? I thought that these guys were just work acquaintances but they must be closer than that-

“Have you known him a long time?”

“We grew up together. We were in school together, in the army together and I would have been the best-man at his wedding ... if there had been a wedding”

“Did you go to school in Montana?”

“No but we stayed in touch. I saw him every Christmas and at least one other time during the year.”

He didn’t say any more and I waited. Finally I decided to ask for more.

“You said that you were in the army together, did you go to Vietnam?”

“Oh yes. We joined at the same time and after our basic training they sent me to demolition school and they sent Greg to the US Army Language School in Monterey California. He was always good in school with languages.

He already spoke French, German and Russian but the army wanted Vietnamese and Laotian. So he went off to California while I learned to blow things up. When he came back we went to Vietnam to work with the yanks. It was all great fun, crawling around in the mud and the muck and occasionally getting the hell scared out of us. I never read that book, ‘A year of living dangerously’ but I like the title and that’s what we did.

We weren’t regular army, we worked with your CIA and we spent a lot of time in very bad places. When it was over, we came home and I learned to fly airplanes and Greg went off to Montana to learn all about power plants and water and sewage and who knows what else”

-Damn Jocko, don’t stop now-

“You mentioned a wedding?”

“Well the third Christmas after he started school he brought home a girl named Ronnie. She was really something. She was raised in the Rocky Mountains and she was a adrenalin junky. She rode horses, skied, fly-fished, scuba and free dived, parachuted, climbed mountains and who knows what else and she was a pilot”

“Is that why you both looked at each other when I knew what an NDB was?”

“I suppose. Anyway, they were in love and planned to be married after he finished school or at least that was his plan but it didn’t quite work out that way. When he did graduate she wanted to move to San Francisco and to put the wedding off until things were more settled.

That was 1969 and San Francisco was the hippy capitol of the world and Ronnie really got into it. Poor old Greg, who never did anything bad in his life, was drawn into a life where drugs and sex had no rules. He didn’t like it but he wanted Ronnie. He did his best but she slipped away. He even got her enrolled in a drug rehabilitation clinic and she was clean for a while but it didn’t last. One day she took the car keys and Greg’s wallet and credit cards and just disappeared.

She called weeks later from the Phoenix jail. She had been arrested for solicitation for prostitution. She wanted him to send money to bail her out but he refused and he never heard from her again.

He applied to Accord for a job and he spent the next year on the road. Most of his work was in Asia so he asked for a transfer from San Francisco to the Sydney office. That’s where we reconnected and he recommended me for a job at the Singapore Royal Hotel. I liked flying VIP’s all over the area and when this job became available I took it.

So here we are in paradise. My contract’s up next month and I’m out of here. Greg is still working around the world but he invited you for an island tour. That makes me very happy because he’s grieved long enough”

I was a little stunned when Greg walked around the hanger.

“Hey Jocko, have you bored the poor girl to death?”

“No mate, she was just asking if I could help her get away from a stiff like you”

“I did not” I said as they laughed.

“Did you fix it?” Jocko asked.

“Don’t know, let’s give it the smoke test”

“What’s that?” I whispered to Jocko.

“Plug it in and see if it goes up in flames”

Greg was talking to someone on his little portable radio.

“Ok Jerry, pull the breaker on the airport circuit”

The guys both turned and looked at the red light that was on top of the radio antenna tower and saw it go out. Faintly in the distance I heard a small engine start and the red light came back on. The backup generator had done its job. After a minute Greg called on the radio again and had the main power restored and the generator went off.

“Good job Mate let’s have a beer to celebrate”

“Can’t do it today, I have to get Lara back to the hotel for her lunch. Are you ready to go Miss ... Lara?”

I reached for Jocko’s hand,

“Thanks for the drink and talk, will I see you again?”

“Afraid not Lara, us peasants aren’t allowed to socialize with the guests but maybe I’ll see you somewhere someday, us flyers have a way of running across each other”

He shook my hand and bent forward and kissed me on the cheek.

Greg didn’t say much as we drove down the mountain so I finally said it.

“He told me”

“I knew he would. Big mouth”

“He’s a good friend”

“Yes he is. He’s the best kind. No B.S. Just up-front with everything”

“He was surprised that you had breakfast with me and that you asked me to take a tour”

“Well, it’s been a long time since I did any socializing”

“Why me? There are a lot of girls on that beach that are probably more eager than me”

He chuckled,

“Do you mean the girl that you started to have breakfast with? She was certainly willing to show her assets”

Now I laughed,

“You mean willing to show her ass”

“That and the rest of her”

“Oh, she’s ok. She’s just looking for some acceptance from her peer group. She’s a victim of parental suppression and she wasn’t allowed to suck her thumb when she was a child”

Now he was laughing and he stopped the cart.

“I’ll bet that you’re a psychologist”

“Attorney”

“That was my second choice, honest”

“Sure, are you going to asked me to dinner or am I going to go with my roommate and look for a guy to give me French lessons?”

“I don’t know if I can teach you anything but I would love to take you to dinner. Shall I come to your room or meet you at the pool?”

*-What to do ... am I ready to be in my room with him yet? ... ever?
... I’d better make it the pool-*

“Why don’t you make reservations at the Kon-tiki restaurant for nine and come to my room 309 at eight?”

-Well you handled that one well ... dummy-

A new job for Susan and a new attitude – July 14th, 1974

Susan had been moved to the nightshift where she would assume her duties as night manager. Sammy had requested a transfer to the night shift and the move was approved after the personnel director cleared it with the new night manager.

That morning at breakfast they discussed the night-work-dilemma. Should they sleep before the shift or after? They decided that they enjoyed the mornings so much that they would sleep in the afternoon. Bedtime would be around three to eleven leaving the time between eight in the morning until three in the afternoon free.

“So let’s take advantage of our free morning and go to the beach” Sammy suggested. She smiled at his for a minute.

-Does he just want to see me naked again or what?

“Ok but we have to go now. Remember that we have to be at the meeting at 11:45 tonight”

They enjoyed their morning until a disturbing thing happen. They had driven to the secluded beach at the end of the cart path and they followed the same routine changing into bathing suits but by now Susan wasn’t quite so concerned. They were frolicking in the surf when suddenly Susan fell and struggled to get up. Sammy helped her and was very concerned when he saw that she was bleeding from a cut on her ankle. She had stepped on a piece of very sharp coral and had cut herself.

She was surprised because the cut was so clean that it didn’t actually hurt. Sammy picked her up in his arms and started towards the cart, which was a hundred yards away. She was very aware of his arms around her and his bare chest pressed against a lot of her skin. As he walked carefully between the rocks and palm logs she shifted her weight several times rubbing his skin against hers.

-Oh no, not now... think about something else- she thought.

She felt the heat rising in her belly.

-Don't' do it ... god damn it you Horney bitch ... he's just a kid-

He must have felt something, maybe her hands against him were sweating or she shuddered a little because he knew what she was feeling and she knew that he knew and that turned out to be embarrassing for both of them.

At the cart, he sat her in the seat and turned away. He wrapped a towel around his waist and covered her with the other towels. He drove to the med-center where her cut was cleaned and bandaged. Then he drove to the dungeon and all of this time neither of them

said a word. He was still trying to think of something to say when she hopped out of the cart acting as if nothing had happened.

“See you at the meeting tonight” She said as she hobbled off towards her room.

Jocko – July 14, 1974

Among Jocko’s duties was the care of the small sailboat that the hotel provided for the pleasure of its guests. It wasn’t much of a chore because ‘housekeeping’ kept it clean and changed the sheets everyday. His job was to fill the fuel tank with diesel, the water tank with fresh water and to check to make sure that everything was working correctly. He scheduled this regular maintenance once a week by reserving the boat for an afternoon and evening.

Of course, Jocko being Jocko, he soon found an assistant to help him with the job. Currently that assistant was a Miss Peggy Roundtree, a fellow Aussie, who was a physical fitness trainer in the hotel gym.

Peggy was a bit of a character and many of her fellow employees didn’t know how to take her. There was a lot of gossip in the dungeon about the possibility that she was a lesbian. No one had any proof, of course, but her muscular build and her severely cut short hair did seem to fit the stereotype image. Jocko knew the real story and he was living proof that she absolutely favored men for her recreation.

At 1:00 that afternoon he found the boat tied up at its dock that was connected to the Power-Plant pier. He ran a water hose from the building and filled the freshwater tank. After checking the fuel gage, he filled two five-gallon cans with diesel from the big tank in the plant building and took them to the boat on a handcart.

When he was finished and the hose and the cart were returned to the plant he looked at his watch. In five minutes Peggy would come down the ramp to the dock carrying a little bag of sandwiches and six bottles of cold San Miguel beer. She wouldn’t bring a bathing suit because she never wore one.

Jocko had his reservations about Peggy. She was pretty in a way and she was good in bed but she was very outspoken. She had been raised on a sheep station in central Australia and she always said exactly what she was thinking. He thought about the civilized conversation that he had the day before with Lara. She was pleasant and charming and he was a little jealous of Greg.

Maybe it was because she was a yank. Susan was the same way. She never just opened her mouth and flooded you with too much information. He liked Susan and he hoped that

they could get together again. Even if she didn't sleep with him she was nice to be around. His thoughts were interrupted by a call from the pier.

"Hey Buster, get your ass in gear, the day's going fast and we have lots to do!"

Room 309 – 7:00 PM – July 14th, 1974

I was sitting on the sofa with my feet on the coffee table when Maggie came in.

"Hey roomy, how was your day?" I asked as she plopped down beside me.

"Good, what's up with you?" she asked.

"Nothing, I'm just painting my toenails."

"Anything else?"

"In a bit, I'm going to take a shower and, get this, I'm going to shave my legs"

"You're a wild woman, are you then going to put on your jammys and snuggle up with a good book?"

"Hardly"

"Are you going to dinner?"

"Yes, but not with you"

She laughed.

"That good sweetheart because I have no plans to have dinner with you. Do you have a date?"

"I do, I do. A real, honest to goodness man has committed himself to my pleasure this evening"

"And does that involve anything ... intimate?"

"Well, maybe not intimate in the way you are alluding to but maybe in the old fashion snuggles and cuddles way"

Now she did laugh

"Good luck with that but don't be surprised if he wants to at least feel you up"

"That's ok, I'm a big girl. I've been felt up before"

Hotel Manager's office – 7:40 PM – July 14, 1974

Greg was talking to the evening manager and the maintenance supervisor.

"So how does the facility look to you Greg? Are we keeping it up ok?" the manager asked.

"Look's good except for a couple of things. The big stuff is ok but I'm concerned with the standby generator at the airfield and the backup generator for the dungeon is going to need an overhaul soon."

"So what's the problem? We have a spare backup at the dungeon" the maintenance supervisor said.

"While the overhaul is being done, you're relying on the only backup. I'm going to recommend to Accord that a second backup be brought in. The problem at the airport is all-electrical, that little diesel engine will run forever but we only have two circuit boards

that control the thing and one is off to be repaired. Yesterday I had to fix the last one with a wire jumper. We need a third set of circuit boards.”

“Is it ok now?” The manager asked.

“Yes for now but if there is any problem, call me on my walky-talky. I can fix it faster than I can tell someone else how to do it”

“Ok Greg but you don’t look like your ready to fix a generator. You look like you’re dressed for a date”

Kon-Tiki restaurant – 10:05 PM – July 14th, 1974

Lara

Dinner was delicious, the restaurant was romantic, the music was soft and the moon was full. I had just finished my second glass of French wine and Greg was looking better and better to me. He seemed more relaxed than he had earlier in the day and when he came to my room and I introduced him to Maggie.

She had looked like a million dollars in a tropical sundress that she had bought in the Papeete airport. It really showed off her long legs and she had done something to the neckline because it showed a lot more titty than I would have been comfortable with. Still, on her it looked great. I was really coming to like my accidental roommate and despite her brashness I thought that we could be close friends. She called me into the bathroom just before she left.

“Ok Sweetheart, I know that you’re all sweetness and light but if you get this guy into the sack tonight, drop a Kleenex or something under the door and I’ll stay away. So good luck”

She gave me a little kiss on the cheek and a pat on the butt and then she waved goodbye to Greg as she left.

Now, we had been eating and talking for an hour and things were going very well. We could hear a small band playing sweet music on the terrace and Greg suggested that we check it out. The thought of holding this guy in my arms as we danced under the stars sent a little tingle through my belly.

The sailboat anchored in the hidden cove – 10:30 PM – July 14th, 1974

Jocko and Peggy sat in two deck chairs and drank the last of the San Miguel. He was wearing old cut-off shorts and Peg had a towel around her shoulders. The rest of their clothes were on the bunk downstairs where they landed about one minute after they motored into the cove that afternoon and tied up to the buoy.

In her charming way she made it clear to him that their first order of business was to satisfy her needs. Later they had swum and then lay in the sun. The boat was equipped with fishing rods, snorkel gear and fishing spears. After another bout in the bunk, they had snorkeled and explored an underwater cave at the base of the cliff. Before they returned to the boat, Peggy had speared a large fish that they barbequed for dinner. With the beer gone she walked naked down the stairs and returned with a bottle of Cutty Sark scotch and poured each of them a hefty glass.

“Do you know that the gossip in the dungeon is that you’re a lesbian? Is there any truth to that?” He asked.

“You mean doing it with girls? I tried it once in college and it was ok but you know how girls are. They get all clingy and possessive. I wanted a bloody roll in the hay and they wanted to move in together. No mate, give me a big man with no conscience anytime”

“Is that how you see me, big with no conscience?”

“Well your not all that big but you’re fun and you’re here so what’s not to like?”

Jocko wasn’t sure if he had been insulted or not but it didn’t matter. He wasn’t looking for a wife and she was very good at what she did.

“How late do you want to stay out here? The boat has to be at the dock and cleaned up by eight tomorrow?” he said.

“Oh I don’t know, it gets light about six, let’s take it back then” she said laughing as she poured them another glass.

Dungeon cafeteria - 11:00 PM – July 14th, 1974

“Good morning or good evening or what ever it is” Susan said to Sammy in the serving line.

“Good morning Susan, it must be morning because I just got up”

“Did you sleep well?”

“No, how can you sleep well when you go to bed at three in the afternoon, how about you?”

“No, not at all. I took a sleeping pill at five but that didn’t help much”

They found their table and noticed that there were only a couple of other people eating. The night shift didn’t have a lot of workers.

“Sammy, I’m sorry about this morning at the beach”

He blushed a little.

“It wasn’t your fault. It just happened.”

“I know, at least with me it didn’t show as much as it did with you” she said trying to keep a straight face.

He did blush this time but he kept his composure.

“I’m not so sure about that or maybe you accidentally dropped a couple of walnuts down the front of your bathing suit”

She couldn’t help but laugh.

“Ok, I was Horney and you were sure as hell Horney and we maintained our composure. I’ll try to keep the bumps out of my bra and you try to ... do ... whatever” she laughed again.

Hotel Conference Room – 11:45 PM – July 14th, 1974

“There’s a big party by the pool tonight and so far they’ve all kept their clothes on but that may change. A thunderstorm is approaching from the east but it should pass north of the island. Greg Allenby is on his radio and is to be called if there is any problem with the Radio Beacon at the airport. Now let’s welcome Susan Wang to her first shift as night manager. Are there any questions?”

Night Managers office – 12:22 AM – July 15th, 1974.

Susan sat in the seat of her power. She had worked here for a while as the assistant manager but she had sat at the desk in the outer office. Here she had the lighted status board for all of the electric power on the island. There was a green and red light for every circuit and a switch with a reset button below the lights. She could see that everything was green except the stand-by generators, which would start automatically if the power failed.

Next to her desk was the short radio console. With the push of a button she could be talking to the Police or the Harbor Master on Lano Vana as well as the night managers of several of the Lano Vana hotels. One of the buttons was labeled ‘LV Weather’. She pushed it and immediately heard a recording of the local weather conditions at the Lano Vana airport. The recording was updated whenever the conditions changed. She heard that a thunderstorm had passed over the Lano Vana airport at 6:55 this evening and was moving away on a heading of 285degrees. The wind speed to the west was twenty-one miles per hour.

-That storm should be here soon-

From the outer office she heard the night security boss tell Maliuna and Smith to go to the pool but to stay out of sight unless there was trouble. Immediately another voice objected.

“Oh come-on chief, if there are naked girls in the pool it’ll take an experienced hand like me to get them out without feeling them up. Who known’s what a kid like Maliuna would do”

That brought a laugh and the boss relented.

“Ok, ok, Maliuna, you man the fort here and monitor the radios. Call me if you have any problem”

Susan chuckled to herself. She really didn't want Sammy looking at those young, bare breasted girls. Then she wrinkled her brow and wondered why she should care.

The Pool – 12:55 AM – July 15th, 1974

Maggie strolled across the patio with a tall, blond man holding her arm. They stopped in the dark near the building and kissed. She touched the lobe of his ear with her tongue and whispered,

“Is your roommate out for the evening?”

“No, he left with a new friend a few minutes ago and he told me to find another bed to sleep in tonight. How about your room?”

“Sorry, she's probably in bed asleep by now and she wouldn't approve of a threesome”

“What should we do?” he asked.

Maggie took his hand and they walked down the sidewalk. She pulled the pads off of a couple of lounge chairs and tossed them into the back of a nearby golf cart then she kissed the big man again.

“Shall I drive?” She asked.

“By all means”

Room 309 – 1:12 AM – July 15th, 1974

Lara

We were cuddled together on two chairs on the balcony of my room and maybe we were kissing a little. Not really deep, frantic kisses although I could see that coming soon. No we were just nuzzling and being close. I kept whispering in his ear but I really wasn't saying anything particular. Inside my mind I was wrestling with the dilemma of what I was going to do when the kisses got more serious and his hand moved from the outside of my dress to the inside of my bra.

KABOOM!

Lighting flashed and the thunder rolled over us. That brought us out of the cloud of bliss and back to reality. The rain hit our over-heated bodies and we scrambled through the open sliding door. We laughed and laughed and then the lights went out. I grabbed him so I didn't lose him in the dark but five seconds later the lights came back on.

“That's the stand-by generator” he said like I cared. He went back out on the balcony and looked towards the blacked-out pool area and suddenly the light's everywhere came back

on. The rain seemed to have stopped and we could see the lightening moving off to the west.

Looking back at the pool we could see several undressed guys and girls laughing as they climbed out onto the deck. That reminded me of what we had been doing before the storm hit. I really wanted to resume where we had left off when Greg's radio interrupted us.

"Greg this is Susan ... are you there?"

"Greg here Susan, what's up?"

"I guess it's no secret that we had a hit on one of the lighting rods at the airport. Everything went off-line and then automatically went to standby. The NDB generator didn't start and I can't start it manually from here. Everything's back up now but the procedure manual says that the airport is closed until the standby generator is functional. Any ideas?"

"I'll go fix it Susan. I'll call you from the airport when I find out more"

"Ok, Susan out"

"Greg out"

He looked at me with big eyes, like a puppy that had just peed on the carpet.

"Sorry Lara. Duty calls"

"Will it take long?"

"I don't know"

"Ok. I'm going to bed but I'll leave the door unlocked. Come back when you can"

"Are you sure?"

"Hell no but come back anyway"

We kissed and then kissed some more and then he left. I poured a glass of wine and went out on the balcony. The night was once again beautiful and the full moon made a pathway of light across the lagoon.

The sailboat anchored in the hidden cove – 1:22 Am July 15th, 1974

Jocko and Peg were finishing their drinks on the deck when the storm approached. The lighting made an awesome show and, for some reason, it really excited Peggy. At the height of the storm they had been in the bunk below and Jocko was wondering if she ever ran out of energy. Now that the storm had passed she was still in the bunk and he had gone back on deck to pee over the back of the boat when something in the southeastern sky caught his eye.

In the palm trees – 1:22 AM July 15th, 1974

Maggie and her latest guy were lying on the two lounge pads that she had taken from the patio of the hotel. Her lovely tropical dress was hanging neatly from the branch of a

flowering bush and her shoes were half buried in the sand. The big guy was in a hurry but she wouldn't allow it. They would take their time or at least they would take her time and she would be enjoying every minute of the experience. She was distracted for a minute by something in the sky.

Room 309 – 1:22 AM – July 15th, 1974

I was sitting on the balcony when I saw a lightening flash to the south-east. It didn't surprise me but something was odd. It wasn't the blue-white that you expected. It was orange. Suddenly half of the horizon lit up with orange flashes and then a gigantic flash took up half of the sky. It looked like the pictures of the atomic bomb tests that had taken place in Nevada when I was a kid. Suddenly I felt cold and I went inside and closed the sliding glass door.

Tapu Vana Airport – 1:22 AM – July 15th, 1974

Greg had the cover off of the generator when he saw a flicker of orange light from outside the shed. Looking out the door he saw the horizon flash with more orange lights and then half the sky was bright orange with a core of white light just at the horizon. It all seemed to wave and flicker as it grew dimmer and then the sky was black. He looked at his watch and saw 1:22:35 on the digital display.

He knew an explosion when he saw one and his first thought was that a ship had blown up nearby. Anything that big had to send out a sound wave and when it got here he could calculate the distance. He glanced back at his watch, which now read 1:22:52.

He keyed his radio and said

“Susan?”

Nothing.

“Susan?”

“Yes Greg, is it fixed?”

“Susan did you see the big orange light in the sky to the south-east?”

“No but my office doesn't have an outside window”

“See if you can raise the Harbor Master on Lano Vana”

“Sure, just a minute Sorry Greg, nothing but static”

“Call someone else ... anyone on Lano Vana”

“Ok Nothing but static, what's going on?”

“I don't know but a ship in Lano Vana harbor may have blown up. Take your walky-talky and go up to the roof and see if you can see anything”

“Ok, I'll call you from the roof”

“And Susan, take that kid, Sammy with you”

“Ok, out”

The sailboat anchored in the hidden cove – 1:28 Am July 15th, 1974

Jocko didn't like what he had seen in the sky. He was very apprehensive and he called to Peggy below.

“Come on Peg, we're getting out of here”

“No were not, come to bed”

“Were leaving now, get up here and give me a hand.”

She was grumbling and when she came up the stairs she was pulling on her jeans and she had slipped his t-shirt on. He started the little diesel engine while she unsnapped the bowline from the buoy. It was completely dark with the moon hidden behind the island so he switched on the mast floodlight. As they navigated the narrow passage back into the open sea he glanced at his watch and then looked again at the now black southeastern sky.

Hotel roof – 1:29 Am July 15th, 1974

Susan and Sammy had taken the service elevator to the fourth floor. That button in the elevator was blank and it only worked if a key was inserted and turned. This floor was the maintenance level for the elevators and a lot of other things that the guests never saw. They went up a short flight of stairs and opened a heavy door that led onto the roof.

Away from the lights of the patio and the front façade of the building it was very dark. The stars were bright to the north and the big full moon hung over the lagoon making a silver pathway across the calm water. As they walked toward the south side of the building she put her arm through Sammy's so they wouldn't bump into each other and he took that as an invitation to put his arm around her and to pull her close. They stopped and she keyed her radio.

“Greg?”

“What do you see Susan?”

“Nothing ...”

Her voice was drowned out by a gigantic clap of thunder and they were nearly knocked down by a gust of wind. Greg heard and felt the same disruption. He looked at his watch and it said 1:29:56. The explosion had been about a hundred miles away. It had to have been a ship in Lano Vana harbor that had blown up.

Then he had an icy feeling and he looked at his watch again. He did some quick math in his head and then he shouted into his radio,

“Susan, get inside now. SUSAN RUN FOR THE DOOR!!! GET INSIDE FAST!”

She was trying to make sense of what he was saying but Sammy had taken action. He dragged her a few steps then he picked her up and ran through the darkness. The door had

closed but it was still unlocked. He flung it open and pushed her down the stairs. The breath was knocked out of her when she hit the floor he landed on her.

The sailboat just north of the Power Plant pier – 1:31 AM, July 15th, 1974

Jocko had heard the thunder and had felt the blast of wind. Right now his only goal was to get the boat tied up and to get the hell away from the water. The lights from the pier were bright and less than a hundred yards away when he knew that something was wrong. Although the boat was going no more the five miles per hour the lights were racing towards them.

He flipped on the mast floodlight and he saw the water churning and roaring past them from behind. He knew what was happening. There was a hell of a big wave coming towards them and it was sucking up all of the water in its path.

Too late he realized that they were being pulled under the pier and he shouted to Peg to get below and he pushed her down the stairs. They landed in a pile on the cabin floor as the pier tore the mast and rigging from the little craft. Jocko was a bit relieved when the boat suddenly came to a stop at an awkward angle. He started to scramble up the steps when someone pushed the UP button on the elevator. The boat went up at a crazy angle and he caught a glimpse of the Power Plant lights out the porthole. That was odd because those lights should have been thirty feet above them.

Room 309 – 1:31 AM – July 15th, 1974

The roll of thunder was so loud and the wind rattled the windows so I went back onto the balcony to have a look. The wind was gone which seemed odd. I looked at the lagoon in the moonlight and something seemed wrong. The silver path of moonlight had been bright on the calm water but now it was broken and jagged. I had seen this before in Oregon when the tide was out. The water was gone from the lagoon.

I looked out to sea and I could just make out the line of white water where the ocean crashed into the reef. Suddenly the thin white line swelled into a wall of white. The moonlight path was torn by a boiling line of foam racing across the lagoon. It seems funny to think of it now but my first thought was that the lounges on the beach were going to get wet. I stood frozen by the sight that was coming towards me. I guess that it was the deer-in-the-headlights response but when beach disappeared under the carpet of foam I jumped inside and slammed the door.

I had nowhere to go. I backed up until I was against the far wall and I felt the building shudder. From my left I heard a pop pop pop and somewhere my mind registered that it was the big plate glass windows on the ground floor giving way to the water. The lights

from the building façade illuminated the water, as it seemed to flow beneath me. It was as if I was standing on a bridge with a river just below my feet.

The shock hit me that it was flowing into the first and second floors and I was next. I turned my back and the lights went out. There was no pause followed by the backup generators. It was just jet black and the building was shaking and the noise that I hadn't noticed before was deafening. I felt for the easy chair near the door and sat down. I just sat there waiting for what was coming next and I wished that it would hurry up because the suspense was killing me.

In the palm trees – 1:32 AM July 15th, 1974

It was very good for Maggie now, it was very, very good ... what was that sound?

The 4th floor - 1:23 AM - July 15th, 1974

Susan lay on the floor in the pitch black darkness and Sammy lay on top of her. The building shuddered and shook. She could hear windows breaking and big things hitting walls. Sammy's lips were against her ear and she tried to hear what he was saying. Finally it all became clear.

“I love you Susan ... I love you Susan ...”

She freed her arms so she could hold him against her. She knew that the building would disintegrate in a few seconds but somehow she was calm. It made her feel safe for Sammy to hold her and it made her happy that he loved her. She held his face in both of her hands and tipped it towards her. She lightly kissed him on the lips and said in a calm voice,

“I know sweetheart. I love you too; it'll be all right. In just a minute everything will be all right”

Day 1 - the dawn of a new day – 6:35 AM – July 15th, 1974

Greg had spent the night in the hanger at the airport and at the first light of dawn had called Susan on the radio but there was no answer. He could think of several reasons why she was off the air but the one that bothered him the most was that she and Sammy hadn't made it off of the roof in time.

He drove his golf cart down the road towards the hotel. His cart only had one headlight and it didn't show much more than a good flashlight. Several times he had to stop to clear the way through downed palm trees and about a quarter mile from the hotel he could no farther. The road was covered with beach sand that just waited to trap his cart. Not sure when the batteries in the cart could be charged again he pulled up the seat and turned off the master switch. He called Susan one more time but still there was no answer and then he walked into the unknown.

It was still too dark to see much and the air was filled with swirling volcanic ash. The smell of sulfur was so strong that it brought tears to his eyes. He was confused when his path was blocked by a sand dune that was at least twenty feet high. Piles of broken trees, and jumbles of lounge chairs and over-turned golf carts hindered his progress.

From the top of the dune he had a clear view of the hotel and he held his breath. Even through the haze of ash he could see daylight through the building where the lobby should have been. He walked closer and a gust of wind cleared the ash for a few seconds.

“Oh my god!”

The sight was almost too much to be believed. The ground floor and the second floor were gone. The building now looked like a bridge supported at each end by concrete stairwells and in the middle by the core that contained the elevator shafts and the water and power lines. There were a few steel pillars that still stood although they were at crazy angles. There was water falling from what had been the bathrooms on the now missing second floor. He was surprised that across the top of the bridge, the third floor and the hidden maintenance floor looked intact.

Greg made his way very carefully through the wet sand and the rubble to the center core and found the stairway nearly blocked by seven feet of sand. After negotiating that barrier he climbed up past the gaping hole that had been the second floor and finally found the third floor hallway. Evidently water had surged up the stairs because the carpet was still very wet.

Using his flashlight he located the door to room 309 and with his heart pounding he tried the door and found it unlocked. He pushed it open and shined his light into the room.

No one was there.

Day 1 - The 4th floor – 6:47 AM

It was completely dark where Susan and Sammy had spent the night. She would have never believed that they lived through the night let alone that they would have had any sleep but when she saw the time on her Timex Indiglo watch she realized that the night had past. Sammy was awake and he helped her to her feet and using his flashlight they found the door that led to the hallway and they could see daylight through the stairwell.

She looked at her radio and saw that battery compartment cover was missing and the battery was gone. They retraced their footsteps and found both at the bottom of the stairs that led to the roof. Evidently the battery had popped out when Sammy pushed her down the stairs.

Back in the daylight of the stairway she put the radio back together and keyed the send button.

“Greg?”

“SUSAN! Thank god, I thought that you were dead. I called and called but you didn’t answer”

“We’re ok, Sammy broke my radio in the dark and we didn’t realize until now. Where are you?”

“I’m on the third floor, I’m looking for a friend but she doesn’t seem to be here”

“We’re on four. What room are you in, we’re coming down?”

“309”

“Ok – out”

Day 1 - Room 309 – 6:54 AM

Lara

I was so frightened in the night that I found a place to hide. When I was little and scared in the night I would sneak into my brother’s room and sleep on the floor beside his bed. When he got older he was very good at finding me and pushing me out into the hallway. Last night after Greg didn’t come I locked myself in the bathroom and lay on a pile of towels on the floor.

I wasn’t sure if I was still asleep when I heard a radio. Someone was talking on a radio. I opened the door and peeked around the corner and there he was. He had come back. He hadn’t abandoned me.

He heard me and shined his big flashlight on me when I realized that my romantic little nightgown from last night probably showed way too much of me now but I didn’t care and he sure as hell didn’t care. I jumped into his arms and it took a few minutes to realize that he was covered with black dirt and he smelled like rotten eggs.

I was still standing on my tiptoes with my arms around his neck and my butt showing under my pulled up nighty when two more people with a flashlight came into the room. I guess that I laughed when a big guy quickly turned away and said

“Excuse me Miss”

Greg was ever the gentleman. He gave me his flashlight and went out into the hall with the others while I found some clothes and dressed.

I opened the drapes and the room was filled with a weak light. I opened the hall door and Greg introduced me to Susan and Sammy. She was the hotel night manager and he was a security guard. In the light they could turn off the flashlights and Greg carefully opened the sliding glass door. Now we all smelled like rotten eggs and I saw that the balcony was covered with black soot.

When I looked outside I was shocked. The world looked like it was covered with snow except the snow was black. The beach was gone and had been replaced by a rocky mud flat. The forest of palm trees had been replaced with rolling sand dunes and the jungle that covered mountain that was completely black.

Suddenly I was hit by an icy thought,

“Where’s Maggie?”

Greg looked a little uncertain.

“I don’t know, did she come back last night?”

“No”

“Maybe she spent night in a ... friend’s room?”

“Maybe”

-God I hope that she did-

The door to the hall was still open and people started coming in and no one seemed to know what to do. Finally Dr. Howard from the USC Law School arrived and seemed to take charge. I guess that he was used to running things in his job.

He asked Greg if there was a place that all of us could meet. Of course he meant all of the survivors but he didn’t say it that way. Greg mentioned the ballroom which was on the third floor between the east and west wings of the guests rooms. So still needing flashlights in the dark hall we all marched to the big double doors of the ballroom.

With the doors open to both wings of the guest’s rooms, people started to wander in attracted by the daylight. There were some questions about breakfast but Dr. Howard put them off for the time being. Sammy and Susan banged on every door on the floor and

sent people to the ballroom. If there was no answer, Susan opened the door with her passkey and when they were finished they were sure that every survivor on the third floor was accounted for.

Susan took Greg aside and asked about the others.

“Greg, should we go and gather the survivors in the dungeon?”

“Susan, there are no survivors in the dungeon. There is no dungeon, there’s just a thirty foot high sand dune and nothing more”

She gripped his arm,

“Greg, are you sure”

“I’m afraid so”

“What about outside?”

“I doubt it. The airport was safe but I was alone there. There might have been some mid-night lovers up in the trees but the thunderstorm probably drove them to shelter.”

“Jocko?”

“I don’t know”

“Lara’s roommate?”

“She’s not here”

“Anyone on the second floor?”

“Susan, there is no second floor”

“Damn”

“Yea, damn”

The extent of the tragedy was starting to take effect on the survivors. People were calling out names but there were no answers. There was weeping and whaling and a general feeling of great loss.

I heard a woman screaming, “It’s your fault, god damn-it. It’s your god-damned fault”.

I cried for a long time over Maggie and the others and the shock of everything while Greg held me in his arms. Finally Dr. Howard asked everyone to take a seat at the tables that were closest to the windows. I noticed that he took the seat at the head table with Greg, Susan, and Sammy, of course, me who wasn’t going to let Greg out of my grasp.

The guests clung in social groups of people that they knew. There were tables with couples and a table of single guys and another of single girls. Susan seemed a little surprised when a young, good looking guy and a pretty girl joined us at the head table and then I noticed that they both were wearing nametags indentifying them as hotel employees. The last one into the room was Dr. Sheppard and looking as grim as the rest of us, he stood in the back.

Now it dawned on me that these were the few, the chosen few, who had survived the tidal wave. I wanted to believe that the rest were somewhere else and they would join us soon. I wanted to think that Maggie was safe and Greg’s friend Jocko was waiting outside but I knew better. Morbidly, I counted the few.

Evidently there were eleven men and nine women survivors. That was twenty out of 65 employees and 78 guests. Twenty out of one hundred and forty three people.

-Oh my god, why did we survive?-

Dr. Howard was asking everyone to write their names and home phone numbers along with their hotel room number on the back of a menu that was being passed around. When asked why he needed the information, he said that it would be used to notify our people back home when we were taken off of the island.

There was some discussion about how long it would be before help arrived and the consensus was two days. The question about breakfast, or food in general, came up and Dr. Howard said that he would have the answer to that by the afternoon and that there would be another meeting then. Greg was asked about restoring the power and he said that he would look into it. Dr Howard then reminded us that most rooms had a basket of fresh fruit and that should keep every one happy until the food thing was worked out. Looking at his watch Dr. Howard closed the meeting with notice that they would all get together that afternoon at 4:00 pm.

As the guests filed out Dr. Howard told Greg that he wanted to go with him and survey the damage and Susan motioned for the hotel employees to stay after the others left.

Day 1 - What the hell were you doing?

“Ok, who are you?” She asked the two employees.

“I’m Jerry Wilson and I’m one of the Social Directors”

“And you?” she asked the girl.

“Ann Barlow, I’m a cocktail waitress on the patio”

“Why were you in the hotel guest area after midnight last night?”

Both looked at their feet.

“Look, I don’t give a damn if you were sleeping with a guest or if you were sleeping with each other but I do care if you were stealing from the rooms. Now what was it?”

“Oh Miss, I’ll loose my job if they find out” Ann said.

“Look around girl, your job washed away last night”

“Ok, a guy asked me up to his room and I knew better but I went anyway. We were just talking when the wave hit”

“Bullshit, who was the guest?”

“It was Sam, I think that his last name is Sheppard. He was the one standing in the back at the meeting”

“Alright, how about you Jerry”

“I was in bed with Sheryl somebody in room 321”

“Did you ask her?”

“No, she asked me. I think that she was looking for a thrill”

“Well, I hope that you thrilled her. Now listen to me. We are the Royal Hotel right now and we have a responsibility to protect our guests. Until you hear differently, you work for Greg Allenby or me. There are several empty rooms on this floor so find yourselves one. If there are suitcases in the rooms the guests won’t need their stuff anymore so find clothes that are more appropriate for your new job and I don’t have to tell you to stop screwing the guests”

“Yes Miss Wang” They said together.

When they walked away Sammy came and stood beside her.

“We need new rooms Susan, what do you have in mind?” he said

“Yea we also need some clothes. There are lots of rooms here with suitcases in them but I don’t want to be too close to the guests because we might have to do things that they don’t like.

There are four rooms up on the fourth floor where Greg is staying. Sammy, we need to be practical. We have to take some clothes from the guests that ... don’t need them anymore. Don’t think what we’re doing is bad it’s just necessary. I’m afraid that we’re going to have a problem finding things for a guy your size.”

“Maybe not, a few nights ago I was on hall patrol and we had to help a guy who was drunk. He and his wife or girlfriend was in the last room at the far end of the hall. He was a big, fat guy and his girl was little, like you”

“He wasn’t at the meeting?”

“No, I guess that their ... gone”

Susan unlocked room 399 with her passkey and they looked inside. The drapes were pulled and it was dark.

“Hello! Anyone here? Ok Sammy, open the draped and let’s get this over with”

There were two opened suitcases on the floor that still had clothes in them. There were also some clothes hanging in the closet and some, obviously dirty, clothes were in a dresser drawer. There were toothbrushes, some make-up and an electric razor on the bathroom sink. Susan and Sammy scooped up everything and crammed it into the suitcases. Susan checked the nightstand drawer and found several condoms, still sealed in their foil packages. She tossed these into the suitcase and zipped it up.

“God, let’s get the hell out of here, I feel like a grave robber” she said.

On the fourth floor there were four rooms. They were more like hotel rooms than the suites where the guests stayed. Greg’s stuff was in 401 so Susan used her passkey to open 402. Sammy stood waiting to see if she was going to open 403 for him but she just went into the opened room. She wasn’t sure what to do about Sammy and she was relying on her oriental heritage to hide the almost overwhelming fear that she was feeling. She just couldn’t face the thought of being alone.

There were two, queen-size beds with a night stand between them. There was a small sofa, a TV set, and a writing desk with a straight chair. The bathroom had a toilet, a vanity and a stall shower. There was no balcony but the big window looked out on what was once, the beach and lagoon. There were glass louvers down each side of the window that could be opened for ventilation. As if mocking them, there was a telephone and a reading lamp that, at least for the foreseeable future, were worthless.

Susan put her suitcase on one of the beds and Sammy put his on the other. "Ok, let's see what Santa has brought us" she said trying to lighten the situation. Sammy was still watching her for any indication that she would send him next door but she was ignoring that problem. He wanted to stay here with her. In fact, he wanted to share one of the big beds with her but that seemed unlikely, at least for now.

She opened her case and tossed the dirty things that were in the dresser drawer onto the floor. Then she unpacked like it was her own things. She hung the dresses, blouses, and skirts in the closet and folded and put the underwear and socks in a dresser draw. Without examining it, she put the jewelry case and all of the make-up in the bathroom on the vanity. There was a lightweight nightgown that she put under her pillow and the only things left was a box of tampons and the condoms. Showing no concerns at all as she put them into the nightstand drawer.

While Sammy was hanging up things, Susan sorted through the dirty stuff on the floor separation the man's underwear and socks from the woman's. These were put into separate dresser drawers. The last item was a pair of high-heel shoes that seemed distinctly out of place.

Sammy wasn't as neat as Susan, hanging only the shirts and folding everything else. He wasn't too happy to find boxers briefs when he preferred 'Y-front' but they would do. He slipped on a shirt and found that it fit although he was sure that the pants would be too short.

He followed Susan's example and put after-shave and deodorant on the vanity. He found no shoes and thought that they had been overlooked under the bed in room 399. He unzipped a side pocket on the suitcase and pulled out a large, opened box of condoms. He was embarrassed and he didn't quite know what to do. He realized the Susan was looking at him with a little smile on her face. He gave her a hopeless look that caused her to laugh,

"Oh Sammy, just put them in the nightstand drawer with the others"

-What others? he thought.

He hadn't noticed that she had already put some condoms into the drawer.

"Ok Mrs. Grave-robber, now what?"

"Let's look around"

The other two rooms were empty but they did find something. A locked door down the hall turned out to be the housekeeper's storage room. There was a cart with towels, sheets, and cleaning supplies. On shelves along the wall were more towels, linens, cleaning supplies, toilet paper, Kleenex, match books, small candles, and a large plastic bag of the Hersey's Kisses that the maids left on the guests pillows each night. Susan popped one into her mouth,
"Sweet's for the sweet" she laughed.
"You'll spoil your appetite, little girl"
"I may be little but I'm tough"
"Ok tough girl, let's go outside and see what we're facing here"

Day 1 - Moonscape

Lara

Greg wanted me to stay on the third floor but I told him that I wasn't letting him out of my sight. Dr. Howard was anxious to get started outside and he didn't seem too happy that I was tagging along but that was just too bad.

We started down the stairs but halfway down to the second floor or at least where the second floor had been, Greg stopped at an unmarked door. He opened it with his key and Dr. Howard and I looked inside. One wall was covered with circuit breakers and on the other were several large valves that evidently controlled the water and sewage lines for the guest's rooms. Each valve was padlocked and Greg consulted the chart on the wall before he unlocked and turned off two of them.

"There, that should stop the water that's draining out of the second floor bathroom pipes"
"Do we still have water?" Dr. Howard asked.
"Yes, I guess that the underground water pipes survived. It's all gravity feed from the reservoir up on the mountain. The sewer system also seems intact although the sewage treatment plant went offline when the electric power failed"
"Can you get the power back on?" Howard asked.
"I don't know, let's go take a look"

The power plant was a pitiful sight. Part of the pier had collapsed and the generator station was half in and half out of the water. The big tank was cracked and oil or something was leaking into the ocean and the floating dock for the boats was on top of the wreckage of the power plant. I could see a small boat up on the rocks and the mast and cables from a sailboat was tangled and mixed with the rubble from the pier. It looked like a complete loss to me.

"No electricity from here today or ever" Greg said to no one in particular.

We walked away from the pier following a cart path into the trees. About a hundred yards into the trees was a low building that had been the transportation center. In front of the big, open doors was a jumble of golf carts looking like a child's' toy box. Greg had us wait while he climbed up high enough to see inside. He came down with a smile on his face.

“In back of this pile of crap, I can see the skip-loader. If we can get it out we can move some of this sand”

“Do you mean to uncover the staff quarters?” Dr. Howard asked.

“No, that would be hopeless but we might be able to get into some of the rooms on the hotel ground floor”

“Why would we want to do that?”

“That's where the food is stored”

The sand in the front of the hotel was nearly as high as the lobby ceiling but it tapered off towards the back. We went around the building to a loading dock and a big overhead metal door. On the loading dock, the top of a metal door was visible just above the sand.

“Behind that overhead door is the hallway that divides the storage room from the walk-in refrigerators. Supplies come once a month by barge from Lano Vana where they are unloaded onto flatbed electric carts and brought to the loading dock. The dry goods are stored in the room to the left and the frozen stuff goes into the freezers on the right. The door on the right side of the dock is the normal entrance into the kitchen area of the hotel”

“So if we can get the doors open we can eat?”

“Yes but its easier said than done. Both doors open out which is impossible with all of the sand here. We might be able to cut through one of the doors if we can find the tools to do that or we can free the skip-loader and clear away the sand”

Dr. Howard clapped his hands.

“So now we have a plan. We can get started at the four o'clock meeting today”

Day 1 - Where's the patio

Susan and Sammy circled the hotel. They saw Greg and his girl talking to Dr. Howard but Susan wasn't sure how she felt about the Professor taking charge. Technically she was the hotel manager and Greg represented the hotel owners. This college guy had just assumed his authority but, at least for now, she was just going to wait and see.

They picked their way through the sand and the rubble from the building. The only parts of the patio that they found were several broken slabs of concrete. If the pool was still there it was buried under several feet of sand. Near where the poolside bar had been Sammy found an unopened and unbroken bottle of vodka.

Susan looked at the pile of sand that was under the stair at the end of the building. Normally there was a small room under the stairs that checked out towels and sports equipment and she was surprised to see that it was still there. Sammy helped her clear away enough sand to uncover the shutters that covered the checkout window. He pried it open and Susan shined her flashlight inside.

Besides a pile of towels, there was snorkel equipment, fishing rods, volleyball, freebees and other things. Susan thought that if the food situation got bad the fishing stuff would come in handy. Looking at her watch, she knew that it was nearly time for the four o'clock meeting.

Day 1 - Meeting #2 – job assignments

Lara

I wasn't surprised when most people took the same seats that they had occupied that morning. That was almost always the way that it happened. Dr. Howard still considered himself the leader and he got right to the point.

“There is some good news and bad news. The bad is that there will be no electricity today or any other day. Some more bad news is that no new supply of food will be available today but the good news is that with a lot of hard work, we should be able to get into the food storage room tomorrow.

Mr. Allenby and I surveyed the damage and before we proceed, I'll have him give you a status report, Mr. Allenby?”

Greg looked a little annoyed with the pampas Doctor.

“Ok, the power plant is done for and can't be repaired. The water and sewer systems are intact and the filter system should keep the volcanic ash out, but even if it get's into the reservoir, its harmless. It was heated to a thousand degrees when it left the volcano so no bacteria survived.

From the evidence it looks like this disaster was caused by a volcanic explosion on Lano Vana and judging by the extent of the tsunami ... the tidal wave, I doubt that any help will be coming from that direction. By now there should be some rescue activity coming from Tahiti so look for planes to be flying over. We have no radio capability to talk to aircraft so we need to arrange for some type of signal fire.

The most important thing for us is to get a food source now. I'm going to ask Mrs. Wang to unlock all of the unoccupied rooms and these should be searched for fruit, crackers, candy bars and anything else that we could eat.

Tomorrow, we need everyone to help. There's a skip-loader that's trapped in the wreckage of the transportation shed. We need to get it out so I can remove enough sand at

the back of the building to get to the door of the kitchen. Once in there we can get to the food storage area.

Tomorrow, we will meet here at 7:00 AM. Wear jeans or long pants. There is a lot of rubble to clear away and you are likely to get scratched. If things go well, we will have lunch together”

Dr. Howard looked miffed that Greg had given away the plan.

“Mrs. Wang, do you have anything to add”

Susan stood and looked around then she said as loud as she could,

“Mr. Maliuna and I will unlock the rooms where the guests are absent. Remember that I have a responsibility to safeguard all guests and their property. We will secure all valuables before you are allowed in. These things will be held and turned over the authorities when they arrive. Please feel free to take any clothing that you may need for the job tomorrow. It will be dark in less than two hours so we need to work quickly.”

Dr. Howard was left with nothing to say so he closed the meeting. He called Greg up to talk to him and I was left sitting at the table when someone walked up behind me.

“Hello Miss Lee”, it was Dr. Sheppard and he sat at the table with me.

“Dr. Sheppard?”

“Sam please, class is out now Lara”

“Yes, maybe for a long time”

“Well it might be very interesting if we aren’t rescued for a while”

I laughed a little,

“Interesting?”

“Sure, you studied anthropology and the way hunter-gatherer tribes organize”

“We’re not a tribe Professor. We’re just normal people that are temporarily in an abnormal situation”

“Yes, for now. We are all used to order and authority. Right now, everyone is working for the good of the group. We all still have shelter, safety, and food, but what will happen tomorrow if we don’t get into the warehouse?”

Presently, nearly every one has deferred to the ‘tribal elder’, Dr. Howard. I say nearly because your friend Greg has no intention of letting a bureaucratic law professor make any real decisions. Even Mrs. Wang looks at Allenby before she agrees with the good doctor.

So what do you think will happen if the threat of the loss of shelter, safety and food becomes a reality? You studied Margaret Mead’s work on primitive societies. What will happen to the group’s respect for authority?”

I knew what he was talking about,

“One or more new leaders will emerge, the so-called Alpha character. In this case, it would be an Alpha male.” I answered.

“Yes Miss Lee, one or more new leaders and they would attract followers. Other males that wanted to hook up with a leader and women who wanted to hook up with a good provider.

One leader would be the equivalent of the Indian chief who would guide the tribe in the best direction. Two leaders would be the equivalent of street gangs who competed for the same resources. Ultimately, the top dog eats his rival”

“Sam that’s all bullshit. It would take years for that to happen. Besides, the rescue plane will be here any time now and we already have a leader and it’s not your stuffy professor. It’s Greg Allenby”

“I think your right for today but if we’re still here thirty days from now, things can change. The same thing has always motivated every primitive society leader. They need food, shelter, and ultimately women. Right now, food and women are in short supply”

Day 1 - Night

Susan and Sammy used her flashlight to find their room. She was becoming concerned that they expending her batteries because there was no source for replacement so they had stopped by the housekeeping storage room and picked up some matches and several of the small candles.

The drapes in the room were open and the nearly full moon offered some light but it still seemed very alien to them. Both were aware how dirty they were and they were both miserable. Sammy was carrying a pillowcase with the missing guests valuables along with a few cameras, some boxes and bags of jewelery, some traveler’s checks, a bit of cash and a couple of watches. Sammy had found a pair of shoes that fit him and they had two pineapples and three papayas for their dinner. The first thing that Susan wanted was a shower even if it was with cold water.

She lit two candles and put them on the end table by their sofa and she lit another and put it on the vanity in the bathroom but it was still very dim in the room.

“I’ve got to take a shower. I think I have this god-damned ash on every inch, crack and crevice of my body”

“Me too”

“Look, I’m the manager so I’m going to shower first. It’s not like I’m going to use all of the hot water”

“We could shower together” he said

“Dream on big boy and no peeking”

In the bathroom she undressed and felt bad about throwing her clothes on the floor. They were so dirty that she really wanted to throw them away but she knew that everything

was needed until the rescue came. Using the little candle she located a tiny bar of hotel soap and an equally tiny bottle of shampoo and then she stepped into the dark shower.

At first the water seemed freezing but after a few seconds it was tolerable. She washed and shampooed as fast as she could and stepped out. She felt around for the towel, which was still folded on the dresser in the other room.

“Sammy, close your eyes”

“Again, why do I always have to close my eyes? I never ask you to close your eyes”

Day 1 - Night - Room 309

Lara.

Greg came with me to my room and we couldn't have made it without his flashlight. I opened the draped and the sliding door onto the balcony. We sat outside in the moonlight and ate an assortment of things that he had brought with us. We had fruit and pretzels and a candy bar.

“What were we doing this time last night?” I asked.

He looked at the Luminas dial on his watch and laughed.

“Lara, It's only 7:30. I think that I was in the shower getting ready for our date”

“Was it a date? I didn't think of it as a date”

“Ok, our rendezvous. Is that better?”

I laughed and scooted my chair closer to him.

“I was sitting here talking to Maggie. She was giving me advice on what to do if I got you onto bed”

“Was that your plan?”

“I had no plan. I was just letting the moment take me. It was really a nice evening until you had to go to work”

“You asked me to come back when I was finished”

“Did I?”

“Did you?”

“Yes. Yes I did. I didn't have enough of your Aussie charm at dinner”

He turned serious for a minute,

“Lara, you do realize how serious our situation is don't you”

“Oh, we're stranded on a tropical island and no one knows that we are here. Is that what you mean?”

“Yes, I think that Lano Vana maybe be gone. The shock of the explosion and the amount of ash isn't encouraging. The tsunami surely reached the islands to the north and the French have an airbase at Rontanga. They would have tried to contact Lano Vana and us by radio and with no response they would have flown down here in one of their C-130's.”

“And the charts are wrong”

“Yes, the charts are wrong”

“My dad will find us”

“What?”

“My dad, he’ll find us. He would never let me be lost. If the French don’t find us, my dad will. It’ll take a while but he will”

He put his arms around me and held me tight.

“Get some sleep Lara, tomorrow is a big day”

“Stay with me”

“Not tonight, tomorrow is do or die for us all”

Day 1 - Forth floor – room 402

While Sammy showered Susan put on the nightgown that she had put under her pillow and looked through the things from the suitcase and found a hairbrush. When Sammy was finished he came out of the bathroom wearing just a pair of his new found boxer shorts.

“Don’t look” he said.

“Oh for goodness sakes, you’re wearing as much as when we went swimming”

“Well, it may be the same amount but I still feel nearly naked. Let’s have dinner”

He took the pineapple and papayas to the vanity and cut them up with a Swiss-Army knife and then, with Susan in her nighty and him in his underwear, they sat on the sofa and dined in style.

After dinner Susan found a couple of hotel plastic glasses and poured each of them a shot of vodka. They talked about the events of the previous night and the day and had a couple more shots until they were both a little tipsy.

“Doesn’t it seem a waste for us to use both beds?” he said with a smile.

“Not at all. They’re here to be used. Besides I don’t just sleep with anyone”

“Susan, last night you said that you loved me. I’m not just anyone”

“Well, I said it in a moment of weakness”

“What weakness?”

“Well, I thought that we would both be dead in thirty seconds and I knew that I could live with the guilt for that long”

“So if you loved me then, don’t you love me now?”

“Nope, I’ve changed my mind”

“Why, I’m the same guy”

“Maybe, but now I would have a lot longer to live with the guilt”

Day 2 - Do or die

Everyone was hungry and everyone was working to free the skip-loader. The problem was the huge pile of broken palm trees, upended golf carts and the mounds of sand blocked the entrance to the cart garage. Fortunately, the landscape equipment was stored in the same building so a supply of shovels was available.

After four hours of backbreaking work they started to see some progress. There were still several rows of golf carts to be moved but most of them still had enough charge in their batteries that they could be driven. By two in the afternoon, the skip-loader was free and Greg started its diesel engine. By the time he attacked the pile of sand that was blocking the kitchen door it had started to rain.

By the lights on the skip loader they worked on into the darkness with shovels and the loader. At one point Greg ran out of fuel but more was located in a tank at the back of the cart garage. By nine only a few still had the strength to move the wet and heavy sand. Finally, Greg wrapped a chain around the big handle on the door, unlocked it with his key and attached the chain to the skip-loader. As the exhausted and starving workers looked on he tried several times to dislodge the door and finally he pulled it off of its hinges. The cheers were very faint but a huge sigh of relief went through the group.

With one flashlight, the dry storeroom was located and everyone trudges back to the hotel with his or her supper in their hands. Dr. Howard stood at the bottom of the stairs telling everyone that a meeting would be held the next morning at 8 am to layout a plan for distributing the food.

Day 2 - Room 402 10:30 PM

Susan was so tired that Sammy had to nearly carry her up the last staircase to the fourth floor. They were both filthy with ash and mud and they both carried a large can of food in each hand. After she unlocked the door she stopped Sammy from entering.

“Sorry Sammy but we’re too dirty to go in. I know that it’s hard but I have to get into the shower now. I’m going to wear my cloths and try to get this crap off of them. When I’m through, you do the same.

She didn’t light the candle but felt her way into the bathroom and turned on the shower. Without think she waited a minute for it to warm up which, of course, it didn’t. Then she kicked off her shoes and stood under the cold water for a long time. After a few minutes she poured a tiny bottle of hotel shampoo onto the legs of her jeans and rubbed it in. She pulled off her shirt and bra and dropped them onto the bottom of the shower and followed them with her jeans and panties. Finally she washed her very tired body and her hair. Leaving the clothes where they were she turned off the water and found a towel.

After drying her hands she found the matchbook and lit the candle. Then she remembered that her nightgown was under her pillow.

“Close your eyes Sammy, I need my nightgown!”

There was no answer and she opened the door. There was no candlelight in the room and she carried her candle with her.

Sammy was asleep on the sofa. She could see the pile of his dirty clothes next to the door and he was completely nude. She laughed to herself that his last conscious thought had been to keep the room as clean as possible. She put on her nightgown and looked at him again. She took the light cover from his bed and spread it over him, and then she kissed him lightly on the cheek and blew out her candle. She was too tired to even check what they had brought back from the kitchen.

Day 2 - Room 309 – 10: 35 PM

Lara.

My god, what a day. I didn't know that my little body could move that much sand. Greg had worked so long and so hard that I didn't know if he could get up the stairs but he did. He carried three big cans of food and I carried one more. When we got to my room he wanted to go straight to his own but I wouldn't let him. I pushed him into the shower and I told him that I would cook dinner.

“I should go” he said.

“Greg!”

“Ok, but take this, there's a can opener on there somewhere”

He gave me his Swiss-Army knife and disappeared into the dark bathroom. I looked through the four cans of food that we had found in the dark. We had tried to get a can from different boxes so we wouldn't have all of the same thing and I laughed when I saw what we had selected. There was a quart can of peanut butter, a can of lima beans, another of asparagus and one of peaches.

I guess I was still laughing when Greg came out wrapped in a towel and carrying his dim flashlight.

“What's so funny?”

“Would you like beans or asparagus with your peanut butter?”

“What's my other choice?”

“Asparagus and peaches”

“You go take a shower and I'll decide”

When I came out he was gone and I wasn't too happy with that but as I stood there with only my towel between me and completely nudity, there was a knock on the door and

Greg's voice was asking to be let in. I knew that he had a passkey so his knock was just a courtesy.

"Yes?" I said opening the door.

He stood there barefoot wearing clean kaki shorts and a t-shirt. In one hand was his dim flashlight and in the other was a bottle of brandy.

"Oh, a clean man bearing gifts"

"Yes, I thought that the peaches and lima beans might need a little spicing up."

We ate the asparagus then decided to have peaches and brandy for dessert. I wouldn't have believed it possible but some of the fatigue was fading. Maybe the brandy helped it along. I had found two little candles under the sink in the bathroom so we were able to save what remained of Greg's flashlight. We sat together on the sofa and after a while I forgot that I was still only wearing a towel.

"More Asparagus-Allenby?" He asked.

"No, I don't want to spoil my appetite for the dessert. May I pour you another brandy in our crystal goblets of the finest plastic?"

"Yes please"

The more that I drank the closer I sat to him. I knew that we were both too tired for even a little making-out but I was sitting very near to him and that was nice. I was brought back to reality when he reached over and pulled my sagging towel back into a more modest location.

"Bed time little girl"

"Oh not yet"

"Another big day tomorrow, maybe the rescue plane will find us"

"Stay a little while longer"

He helped me to my bed and found my pajamas under the pillow. He sat me on the bed and put the PJ's in my hand and blew out the candles. He kissed me goodnight and went to his room. I would have been very disappointed if I had stayed awake more than the next thirty seconds.

Day 3 - The meeting

At 8AM Dr. Howard walked into the ballroom and was surprised that there was only one person present. A young woman that he vaguely recognized as one married couples was waiting by the door.

"Where is everyone?" Howard asked.

"Their all down at the food warehouse. They sent me up here to give you this ..."

She handed the professor a folded sheet of paper.

When he read it his mouth fell open.

Howard.

You stood around watching while we sweated our butts off yesterday. I don't know who you thought appointed you king but that bullshit is over. If you want to eat you better figure out how to earn your keep. Ben Roberts - room 301

Day 3 - The warehouse

Greg was investigating everything in the kitchen storage area while the rest of the guys were gathering food. Most of the women were missing and Greg assumed that the work of the day before had been hard on them. He had forgotten about Dr. Howard's meeting but he wasn't concerned about the self-appointed leader. After he watched the doctor do nothing for all of those hours the day before, he didn't give a damn what Howard did.

The kitchen storage area consisted of a dry warehouse where all of the canned goods were kept, a cold storage locker for fresh fruit, vegetable, eggs, and other perishables and a freezer for meat and poultry. After two days without power, one whiff of the air in the freezer was evidence enough to leave it alone but the cooler offered more hope. There were oranges, pineapples, papayas, and other fruit that were still fine but the green stuff like lettuce was gone. The brightest note was many large bags of potatoes, carrots, and onions that would stay fresh for weeks.

The canned goods were ok and, in an emergency, there were also several cases of condiments like ketchup and mayonnaise. It was just a guess but Greg estimated that there was enough food here for seven or eight weeks.

The kitchen situation was half good and half bad. The actual cooking area had been untouched but the preparation room which was between the cooking area and the dining room was filled with sand. While Greg was inspecting that area he noticed that most of the kitchen knives were gone and it didn't take long to see them in the belts of his fellow survivors. That didn't concern him as he had had as much trouble as anyone opening the big cans that he and Lara had dined on the night before.

He also noticed that a hierarchy seemed to be developing. There were two guys whose voices seemed to be heard about the others and these two seemed to stay away from each other. That didn't bother him a bit. In fact, it would be easier if there were only a few people to deal with instead of everybody who wanted to be heard.

Greg had some things to say and this was as good a time as any.

“Guys! .. Guys! ... Lets have a quick talk outside. It’s will only take a minute and I think that you’ll want to hear it.”

Greg took an orange for his breakfast and walked out into the sunshine. He wasn’t sure what he would do if no one followed but the all of them trailed along and sat on the loading dock while eating something. Again Greg saw that most of the guys grouped around one or the other potential leaders.

“Ok, you may or may not know that I’m Greg Allenby from Accord Hotels and I’m the expert on the hotel systems. Your guys worked your asses off yesterday and we are eating today. There are other things that I can do but I’ll need some help. My immediate goal is to keep the water and sewage functioning and the next project is to try and get the lights back on. Mr. Maliuna will help me but we may occasionally need some muscle.”

The mention of lights brought a cheer from the guys.

“Ok, now here’s a problem that you can help me with. I can’t be working trying to keep you all safe and be down here trying to get food for the hotel staff too. I don’t want to fool you about this. When I say the staff I mean Mrs. Wang, Mr. Maliuna, and Miss Lee. Any questions about that?”

He saw several of the guys looking at each other with knowing nods and then one of the loud guys stood up.

“What about that lazy bastard, Howard?”

“Dr. Howard had no authority that he didn’t assume himself. As far as I’m concerned he’s just like the rest of us and I’m doing everything that I can to keep you all safe until we’re rescued”

“What about rescue. Why haven’t they come for us yet?”

“I don’t know. I think that Lano Vana was completely wiped out and the authorities in Tahiti may assume that we were also. I think that we should hope for the best and plan for the worst, which may be an extended stay. We have an unlimited supply of water, we have hotel food for a couple of months and we have an abundant sea around us.

There are resources here that will help us. There are also resources that must be conserved. Food is an obvious one. All of the equipment like the skip loader runs on diesel and we lost a lot of that when the storage tank at the power plant collapsed but there is still quite a bit left so don’t waste it. If you run across any tanks or drums of fuel, please let me know.

I need my work cart, which is electric. If I can get the lights back on, I can charge the cart’s batteries at night when our electric usage is low. That is a precious resource so no joy riding in the golf carts. No hair dryers, no TV, one light bulb per room and only one light in the hall.

Ok, one more thing. There is food here that needs cooking like the potatoes and there is no way to cook in the rooms. If you try, you will either burn down our only shelter or you will die of asphyxiation. Find big pots in the kitchen. You can set up a tripod and build a campfire outside or in the stairwells at each end of the building. They are all-concrete and won't burn but don't let the smoke and embers blow inside. I'm afraid that your only choice for cooking fuel is firewood. The jungle is full of it but it is soft wood and it doesn't last very long. Now, any questions?"

"What about cigarettes?"

"You can buy them in the hotel gift-shop"

It took a few second for the group to realize that Greg had actually made a joke.

Day 3 - The airfield

Lara

Greg, Susan, Sammy and I rode up to the airfield on the skip-loader. Greg wanted to see if the NDB stand-by generator could be salvaged and used at the hotel and he needed Sammy to help him. Susan and I went along because we didn't want to be alone. The sun was out as we chugged up the road but we could see threatening thunderheads in the distance.

"So what are you ladies going to do while Sammy and I look over the generator?" Greg asked.

"I think that we'll have our hair done" I laughed.

"And our nails, I really need a manicure" Susan said smiling.

I didn't know Susan very well and I wasn't sure that we really had anything in common but she seemed nice and Greg thought a lot of her.

Except for a few palm fronds that had blown onto the runway, the airfield looked the same as it did when Greg worked on the generator and I spent some time with Jocko on his patio behind the hanger. That thought brought a dull spot in my heart when I thought of the talkative and funny Aussie. As long as I was feeling bad I decided to feel bad about Maggie. I hadn't known her long but I liked her and now I missed her. I just hoped that awful minute when the wave arrived hadn't been too bad for her.

Greg parked by the hanger and he and Sammy went to the generator shack. The hanger door was padlocked but Greg unlocked it before he left and I slid open the door back and looked at the Piper that was sitting there with its cowling still off.

"Do you know something about airplanes Lara?" Susan asked.

"Yeah, I'm a pilot and I've flown this plane's little brother. Everything was the same except this one has two extra seats."

I saw that Jocko had replaced the cylinder head that had been on the workbench when I was here before but the job wasn't complete. The push rods and head cover still needed installing and all of the spark plugs were still on the bench. I checked the fuel tanks and found that they were nearly full. I figured that he filled it the last time that he was on Lano Vana so it was probably down about fifteen gallons.

Susan opened the hanger's back door and found the big cooler where Jocko kept his beer. It was warm of course but we decided to try it anyway. We sat on the lounge chairs which I had sat in when Jocko told me about his friend Greg. The view was still spectacular and the sun was still shining. Susan opened the warm beer for us and we sipped in silence for a while.

"Did you every meet the plane's pilot?" Susan asked.

"Yes I did. Greg brought me up here on an island tour and I visited with Jocko. He seemed very nice"

"Oh he was nice and very charming. He took me to dinner on Lano Vana once and we had a great day"

"Was it a date?"

"If you could call it a date. He was such a flirt that you never could separate the truth from the bullshit but he was lots of fun."

"Wasn't Lano Vana a long way to go for lunch?"

"Well, I think that he mixed business with pleasure. He had to pickup some parts from some company and when we got back to the airplane, there was a note from Greg so we gave him a ride back"

I don't know why I was so candid when I said,

"Well, if Greg hadn't been such a charmer, I could have gone for Jocko"

"Welcome to the club girl"

I looked at her for more information but all I got was a smile. We decided that warm beer wasn't so bad so we had another and maybe we had a little nap because when I was aware that Greg and Sammy were back they were drinking the last of the San Miguel.

"So what did you find Mr. Allenby?"

"It's do-able. The first job is to get the generator out of the shack but then it's a snap to haul it down the hill with the skip loader. Did you find Jocko's stash of snacks?"

"No, were are they?"

Greg disappeared into the hanger and came back with a large can of salted nuts and another six-pack of San Miguel.

"Bless the blooming Aussie" Susan said laughing.

Sammy was smiling and nodding but so far he had said nothing. Greg handed him a bottle of warm beer anyway and he pulled a chair up next to Susan. I guess that I hadn't noticed before but there was a familiarity between the two, which made me think that

there might be more to them than just fellow workers. I was still thinking about that when lightning flashed and thunder boomed and we all scurried into the hanger.

With no inside lights and the dark storm outside it was nearly dark in the back of the hanger but Greg led us to a sofa with a beat-up coffee table and a small TV set. It was a little small for the four of us but we were all friends or at least we were becoming friends.

Greg and Sammy sat on the ends and Susan and I were wedged into the middle. We continued to laugh and joke and soon I was cuddled up as tight to Greg as Susan was to Sammy. I noticed that his hand on her shoulder patted and stroked her all the time. After all of the beer was gone the guys dozed off for a nap and the world seemed very content.

When the rain was gone it was getting on towards dark and Greg was eager to get us back to the hotel before he had to use the last of his flashlight. I felt much more at ease with Susan and I thought that I would like Sammy if he ever spoke to me.

Day 3 - Home again

Lara

Back at the hotel we climbed the stairs and were surprised to find a pile of food next to the locked and unmarked door that led to the fourth floor. Greg mentioned that he had made a deal with some guys to bring us our rations but he hadn't expected them that soon. I was surprised at how much there was. Susan unlocked the door and we made several trips up and we put everything in room 403, which was unoccupied. Susan and I only made the first trip and while the guys brought the rest, we sat on the sofa and talked.

"So Greg's in 401 and you're in 402, where does Sammy stay?"

"He's with me"

"Oh, I see"

"No, it's not that way. Well it's a little. We aren't a couple, we just room together"

"Ok, but there's no connection"

"Oh maybe a little but he's just a kid. I'm thirty and he's twenty-two"

"Well he's not that much of a kid"

"Hell Lara, I'm trying to do the right thing here but I keep losing sight of what that is"

"He seems to care for you"

"Yes he does"

"Do you care for him?"

"I don't know"

Day 4 through 18 – A changing world

Lara

The next couple of week was lots of work for Greg and Sammy. Susan and I tried to help them as much as possible but the weight still fell on their shoulders. It took them three days with wrenches to take out the back wall of the generator shack and to get the generator onto the skip loader without damaging it. It took another two day to get it into place under the stairs at the hotel and to get a drum of diesel fuel connected to it and then Greg and Sammy were busy for a week working from dawn until dusk to rerouting wires in the utility control room.

While they were busy with the wiring, Susan and I had time to look around outside and we noticed a change in our fellow guests. Two distinct groups had formed and they had little to do with each other. There was no hostility between them but there was no contact either.

“Susan, I think that Sam Sheppard was right”

“Right about what?”

“He’s a professor of anthropology at USC and he told me his theory of how people in our situation might organize themselves the way the primitive hunter-gatherer tribes do. He said that one or more new leaders would emerge and they would attract males that wanted to hook with a leader and women who wanted to hook up with a good provider. He also said that the same thing has always motivated every primitive society leader. They need food, shelter, and ultimately women.”

“Why women?” Susan asked.

“I guess for some of the obvious reason. Women are usually submissive workers who do the mundane work and keep the men warm at night. In real primitive societies they also have babies but I doubt that’s desirable here”

Susan laughed and said,

“Well most of these people only packed enough stuff for two weeks. Pretty soon they’ll be running out of things like cigarettes, condoms and birth-control pills. That’s likely to cause a strain on peoples nerves”

“Well, it won’t bother me at all, damn-it”

Day 19 – Let there be light

Lara

Greg was finally ready to try the generator. Sammy and Susan had removed every light bulb from the empty rooms and unplugged every refrigerator in the building. Everyone had been cautioned against hair dryers and the use of more than one lamp so the building should have been ready.

Greg started the generator and closed the circuit breaker and it kicked off immediately.

“Damn, Sammy, we either have a short or we’ve forgotten something”

Greg went to the utility control room and opened the circuit breakers for the entire third floor. He called down the stairs for Sammy to close the generator breaker again and this time it was ok. The problem wasn’t with the generator; it was in the guests rooms. This time he closed the breaker for just the west wing and he heard TV static coming from the west hallway. He pulled the breaker again and yelled at Sammy.

“It’s the TV sets. They may say off but they are still drawing some power, let’s unplug them all”

Just as the sun was setting, Greg closed the breakers on the now TV-less building and the lights came on. All over the third floor he could hear cheering. When he walked up to the third floor hallway, most of the grateful guests were there to meet him. His hand was shaken, his shoulder was patted and he received many hugs. It gave him a good feeling to have overcome a monster problem. The first thing that he did was to recharge his flashlight and walky-talky and Sammy did the same.

That evening for the first time in nineteen days, it was possible to actually sit and visit after dinner. The guys moved the bed out of room 403 and moved the sofa in from room 404. It was like a lounge where we could eat together and now with the light we could talk about the day.

Susan and I took turns cooking and she had made vegetable stew. That was a popular dish because we had the ingredients and very little meat. Greg had made a place for a campfire on the roof and had set-up a tripod for our cook pot. The biggest problem was carrying all of that goddamned firewood up the five flights of stairs.

We had an extra treat after dinner. Sammy had found a can of Coke buried in the sand and the four of us shared it with several Hershey’s Kisses from the housekeeping closet. Greg and I sat on one of the sofas and Susan and Sammy sat on the other. As we laughed and chatted I snuggled next to Greg with his arm around me. Without thinking about it, Susan and Sammy did the same. The scene reminded me of evenings that Bruce and I had spent in our apartment with other couples except now my guy had a two-week growth of beard.

“Ok Greg, now that the lighting job is finished what are you going to do tomorrow?”
Sammy asked.

“Well, if things go right, I’m going to move Lara up here to the fourth floor”

“What?” I said.

“What a good idea” Susan added.

“Wait a minute, what’s wrong with me staying were I am?”

Greg had an answer and a smile.

“Look, the food that you eat is here, the friends that you have are here, why not be here with us?”

“Where would I move to?”

“404 is available” Susan said.

“Bull, you stole the sofa out of it”

“We could put it back” Greg offered.

“But then we wouldn’t be able to visit like this” Sammy complained.

“You could use the spare bed in Greg’s room” Susan offered with a smirk.

“Look, just because you and Sammy co-habitat doesn’t mean that I should, not that there’s anything wrong with it”

Greg acted like he was ready to compromise,

“Ok, if it’s such a big deal I’ll move to the sofa-less 404 and you can have my room”

“No, I can’t put you out of your home, I’ll make the sacrifice and use your extra bed but I get the bathroom first in the morning”

Day 20 - Voice from the ... missing

Lara

I spent the night in Greg’s room and I slept alone in the extra bed. It wasn’t the least bit awkward and we both kept our distance. The next morning we had a breakfast of cold, boiled potatoes and then we went down to my soon-to-be- old room to get my things. The plan was I was going to wash my face, brush my teeth and change into cleaner clothes and then we would pack my stuff and go up-stairs. When we walked into the dark room we had a surprise. The message light on the telephone was blinking.

“Oh, I screwed up. I forgot to turn off the telephone system,” he said.

“Where is it?” I asked.

“It’s in the control room. It’s completely automatic and I forgot it. I suppose that I can leave it on now that it’s working”

“Did you leave me a message?”

“No”

I picked up the phone and heard a dial tone. I pushed the message button and heard a recorded voice say,

“You have one new message ... First message ...”

I waited and was filled with curiosity.

“Hi Lara, did you get lucky?”

-Oh my god it’s Maggie-

“You didn’t answer so I hope that your in bed ...ha ha ... looks like me and my big Swedish meatball might sleep on the beach although I don’t plan for him to sleep much ... I’ll see you in the morning ... love you bye”

That's all I heard before the tears came into my eyes and I dropped the phone. 'Love you bye' she said in her happy voice. She sounded so happy and cheerful and she wanted me to be happy too. Love-you-bye was so easy to say and now she's ... gone.

I cried for a long time in Greg's arms. It was just so personal for me to have heard her voice that way. I went into the bathroom and blew my nose. Then I washed my face and brushed my teeth and then I went back and snuggled with Greg until we were both so aroused that we were ready to tear our clothes off. All I could think of was living for this minute because the next minute might not be so good. He was saying something to me that at first I didn't listen to. I heard words like 'stop' and 'can't' but I blocked them out with words like 'love-you-bye' but finally I heard what he was saying.

"Lara, we can't have sex because you can't get pregnant here and now. You just can't. It could mean the end of your life. Do you understand?"

I thought about what he was saying and finally it made sense and I knew that he was right but I still needed something.

"Can we just fool around?"

"That we sure as hell can do"

We finally moved my stuff to room 401 and I unpacked trying to be neat and tidy. I had brought the navigation charts and the user's manual from the plane and that interested Greg.

"What's that?"

"Maps and stuff from the plane"

"Why?"

"Hell, I thought that we could fly away somewhere but it's a hell of a long way to anywhere except Lano Vana"

"Ok tell me what you found in the charts," he said.

I laid the chart on the table and using the ruler from the plane I showed him where we were and measured the distance to the nearest airport in the Tahitian islands.

"Ok, here's Tapu Vana and here's Rontanga which is the nearest airport. It's just over fourteen hundred miles north of us. Now the plane can carry 86 gallons of gas and normally it burns thirteen gallons an hour. So that gives it a range of about 1050 miles. Even at the most economically settings the plane still would only fly little less than twelve hundred miles."

Greg thought about that and looked at the charts. Then he asked,

"If you had enough gas, could you fly you Rontanga?"

“I suppose, if the radio beacon was working and the winds didn’t blow me too far off course but you have to remember that at that distance and using just the instruments on this plane, Rontanga is a tiny, tiny target in a really big ocean”

“But you could do it”

“Sure why not, I haven’t got anything else to do”

“Tomorrow morning, take a ride with me, I want to show you something”

Sammy and Susan were on the beach looking through mounds of rubble for anything worth finding. It was the same spot that Sammy had found a can of Coke the day before and he was hoping to find more. Susan noticed that none of the other guests were on the beach that afternoon.

“What’s going on? Where is everyone?”

“I don’t know but it sounds like something is going on inside. Want to take a look?”

“Damn Sammy we spend 90% of our time in there now. Let’s take advantage of the solitude and walk up the beach”

That seemed odd to Sammy because Susan wasn’t a real fitness buff but he trailed along. About a half mile from the hotel there was an outcropping of rocks that formed a little cove that couldn’t be seen from the hotel and Susan took off her shoes and waded in the water.

“Hey Sammy, want to go swimming?” She said with a laugh.

He hadn’t heard her laugh much in the last few days and that made him happy.

“What, in our underwear?”

“No silly, we can go skinny dipping”

“Damn Susan, every time you undress in the room I have to close my eyes”

“We’re not in the room. Just turn your back and get in the water”

She turned around but he didn’t. He dropped his shorts and shirt on the sand and watched her undress. She looked smaller without her clothes. She was slender and getting thinner. Sammy thought that a thirty-year-old woman would look different, older and more mature but Susan looked like a girl in the girly magazines except she was nearly flat-chested. She started towards the water and then looked back at him. The both stared for a few seconds then she laughed and called out,

“Hey Sammy, you better get in the water before you embarrass yourself”

When Sammy and Susan returned to the hotel there was a lot of activity on the third floor. People were carrying suitcases and belongings up and down the hall. Susan saw a lady that she had talked to before and she asked her about the activity.

Hi Maryann, what’s going on?”

“I don’t know. Ben and Tony were in the ballroom talking and arguing and then the word came down that we were moving to the west end of the floor and Ben’s people were moving to the east. They said that it was because it was more convenient because we ate our meals together and we should all be in one place.”

“So is Tony the boss man of your group now?”

“Well he always has been but now we admit it. He’s a good leader even if he does holler sometimes. I know that he doesn’t get along with Ben so the farther away that we are from the others the better.”

Day 20 – After dinner

Lara

Dinner was, once again, vegetable stew but this time Susan said that she had added some protein. She had found several clams around the rocks on the beach and she had tossed them into the stewpot.

“You won’t have to wonder if you found one because I left them in their shells”

While we ate the conversation turned to the activity on the third floor and Susan told everyone what she had learned from Maryanne.

“See, I told you that Sam Sheppard was right. The others are forming gangs. Maybe not like east LA gangs but the organization is the same.” I said.

“So who are these leaders? Do any of you know any of them?”

Susan spoke up,

“I’ve talked to some of the women and I know a little. Ben Roberts run’s a crab fishing company in Alaska. I guess that he started when he was a kid and now he has a bunch of boats and a lot of people working for him. Despite all of his money he still acts like a tough-guy on the docks and the women seem to go for him. He came here with that older woman Shirley or Sheila or something. The story is that she a rich socialite from Seattle At the first meeting in the ball room they sat at the couples table but that’s over I guess because I see him with a brunet now”

“What about the other guy, Tony?”

Again Susan was the source of information.

“Tony Gonzales is a lawyer in east LA. He grew up on the streets and went to LA State. One of the girls said that he had been a gang-banger when he was a kid but he straightened himself out. He’s feisty and tough and not a guy that you want to tangle with”

Susan still had the menu that the guests had written their names on at the first of Dr. Howard’s meetings. For the next few minutes we all tried to identify the members of the

two groups and I wrote their names on the back of a fire-exit map that was on the back of the door.

East Group

Ben Roberts – leader – King Salmon Alaska/Seattle WA.
Ken Mason - 2nd in command – Las Vegas NV.
Jerry Wilson – Royal Hotel employee – Portland Or.
Bob Shembeckler – Redmond WA
Janna Myers – Ben’s new girlfriend? Reno Nv.
Shirley Bolter – Ben’s ex-girlfriend – Tacoma WA

West Group

Tony Gonzales – leader – LA Ca.
Sam Sheppard – 2nd in command – USC professor – LA Ca.
Max Cook – Galveston Tx.
Ron Silver (Lawyer) - San Francisco Ca.
Ann Barlow - Royal Hotel employee – Salt Lake City Ut. Maybe Sam’s girlfriend
Juanita Rodriquez – LA Ca. – Maybe Tony’s girlfriend
Maryanne Clark – Schoolteacher- Cleveland Oh.
Emily Marks – Snohomish WA.

Greg looked at the list and then made a comment.

“I see both of our wayward employees hooked up with the guests. Where’s Dr. Howard?”

Susan laughed a little at that,

“He’s writing his book I guess. He’s in room 349 that’s next to the ballroom but he almost never goes out. He picks through the warehouse and find’s enough to eat I guess and every time that I see him he has a yellow legal pad in his hand and he’s writing”

“So you think that he’s ok?”

“Probably as ok as the rest of us”

Greg thought some more and then announced that he was going to pay the gang leaders a visit, in a way. He picked up the telephone and dialed 301 and in a few seconds someone answered.

“Hi Ben, this is Greg Allenby, I thought that you would like to know that Sammy and I got the phone system working ...”

...

“Yes that right, just dial the room number, you can even leave a message if theirs no answer ...”

...

“Your welcome, call anytime if I can do anything for you ... bye now ...”

“Well he was surprised and he seemed genuinely happy for what we are doing for them”

Greg repeated the process with Tony in room 399 who was equally appreciative and seemed happy with the results.

“Make a friend when you can” Greg said with a smile.

Day 20 – Room 402 - bedtime

Susan had enjoyed their swim and the sight of Sammy standing bare-ass naked watching her had been worth the price of admission. She knew that she shouldn't tease him but he was so easy. He always blushed and was embarrassed. It had taken a while tonight to get all of the sand out of her hair but now she stepped out of the shower and was ready for bed. She dried off and called for Sammy to close his eyes.

“Why, you don't have anything that I haven't seen”

“That right but a girl likes some privacy”

“Ok, I'll close one eye”

She walked to her bed without looking at him and put on her nightgown and then she slipped into bed and smiled at him.

“Why don't you take your night gown to the bathroom when you shower? Then I wouldn't have to close my eyes?”

“Your funny hon, I really like you”

“Do you? When did you realize that?”

“That day that we had breakfast together”

“You didn't show it”

“I hardly knew you. I don't go around trying to pick-up strange guys”

“What about that pilot, Jocko?”

“What about him?” she said with just a touch of frost in her voice.

Sammy knew that he had made a mistake,

“No Suz, I didn't mean that you tried to pick him up. It just seemed strange that you made a lunch date with him so ... quickly”

“Good night Sammy”

Sammy turned off the single light and sat in the dark.

-Idiot, why do I always say the wrong thing. God damn-it anyway-

Day 21 – Airport

Lara

Greg and I had driven up to the airport in his work cart and he wouldn't tell me why. He just said that he wanted my opinion on something. We parked at the hanger and he opened the big front door. We walked to the back, which was pretty dark with the lights off so he used his flashlight.

In the corner we saw a pile of various things. There were extra tires for the Piper, an awning, and several boxes and in the back Greg found a big, pink plastic tank. He carried it out into the sunshine and then asked,

“What is this?”

You could actually see through the pink plastic and I could see compartments inside. On the top was a large cap, almost like a bottle cap and in the middle on the bottom was a connection and a valve that looked like a hose bib. I had seen one of these before. I had seen it at the airport in Van Nuys in a plane that was being flown to Alaska.

“Greg, it's a ferry tank that's used for long distance flights. It hold's twenty gallons of gas and it clamps to the plane's floor behind the front seats”

“Twenty gallons plus the eighty-six in the tanks, could you fly to Rontanga with a hundred and six gallons of gas?”

“Yes Greg. Yes I could”

I threw my arms around him and kissed him as hard as I could.

“YES GREG! I CAN FLY THIS SUCKER HALF WAY TO THE GOD DAMNED MOON ON A HUNDREd AND SIX GALLONS OF GAS!!! HOT DAMN!!!”

After we danced around and played kissy-face for a while we looked at the plane.

“So what needs to be done?” he asked.

“The installation of the cylinder head has to be done and the sparks plugs need to be cleaned and installed. The cowling has to be bolted on and ... and ... Greg, where are the fuel lines and tie-down straps for the ferry tank?”

We looked in the pile of stuff in the back and found the missing lines and straps.

“Do you know how to install the tank?”

“Not yet but I saw something about it in the Piper users manual. I'll check when we get back to the room”

“How long will it take to do the work on the plane?”
“Two or three days but do we have the gas that we need?”
“How much do we have now?” he asked.

I rechecked the tanks on the plane and there was just over seventy gallons of gas. There were some drums beside the hanger but they were all empty.

“Jocko probably filled the tanks every time that he went to Lano Vana but he must have had some extra gas here somewhere. What about those drums at the transport center?”
“We can check but they’re probably diesel. Only a few things on the island use gas.”

I was starting to get nervous.

“What uses gas?”
“Well the plane of course, the lawn mowers and the outboard motors on a couple of boats. I’m sure that the landscape workers didn’t come up here to fill their equipment. There has to be gas near the hotel. Lara, I think that we should keep this to ourselves for a while. If the word gets out that someone is flying to safety then lot’s of people will want to go along”

“Ok but let’s look for some gas”

Day 21 – All around the town

Lara

Greg and I looked everywhere without looking too suspicious and we had some success. We found three lawnmowers and a weed-whacker that yielded three gallons and there were more places to look. The back of the transportation center garage was still crammed with tree limbs, overturned golf carts and broken and twisted rubble from the hotel.

We spent time near the pier looking for the boats with the outboard motors and we located the wreckage of one of them high up on the rocks behind the ruined powerhouse. The motor was still attached to the boat but the gas tank was gone.

We looked under the pier and found only the mast and rigging of the sailboat that used to be docked there.

“Greg, where’s the sailboat?”
“I don’t know, why”
“It might have some gas on board”
“No, it’s diesel. After it was rammed under the pier it probably sank in the deep water that’s just out there. That was Jocko’s boat. He was responsible for it’s maintenance but I think that he liked to play with it. Rumor was that he took some of his lady friends sailing while he was checking the boat. Just like Jocko to turn work into pleasure”

When Greg and I returned to the hotel late that afternoon I really noticed the changes that had taken place over the last three weeks. When I arrived from LA it had been a deluxe resort with everything in its place. Now it looked like a gypsy camp. The hall on the third floor was littered with discarded suitcases, empty food cartons and potato sacks. There were makeshift clothesline strung across the hallway that were made from salvaged wire and where they were hung with pant's, shorts, shirts, men's and woman's underwear. The doors of the rooms were left open to get some ventilation and anyone who wanted to listen could hear the conversation of many people.

Up on the fourth floor things weren't much different. When we arrived Susan was hanging underwear that she had washed in her shower. At first she had used hotel soap and shampoo but we all soon realized that the supply of that precious commodity would run out soon. Now she did it the same way that I did. She laid it on the floor of the shower and turned on the water. There she walked on the laundry until she thought that she couldn't get it any cleaner.

"Hey Susan, I see that your washing Sammy's drawers. Shouldn't he be doing that?"
"Oh he would if I didn't do it but I figure if you're sharing a room with a guy you might as well make sure he smell's good"

Day 24 thru 30 – Hell week.

Lara

The next morning we woke to gray skies and rain. My elation over the airplane from the day before and then the frustration of the gas problem didn't prepare me for days of rain. We couldn't cook because we couldn't find dry firewood and we couldn't look for gas because everyone would have asked what we were doing.

Greg spent lots of time in the utility control room looking for things that he could fix and I scoured the trash in the third floor hallway looking for anything to read. I wandered the hall's looking for someone to talk to and when I found a live person, they were as frustrated as I was. Several times Susan and I locked ourselves in room 403 and told Greg and Sammy that we didn't want to be disturbed. We spent hours talking about Greg and Sammy and all of the other crap that was going on around us. We really became good friends that week.

The strain was showing on the east and west gangs also. One afternoon we heard yelling and screaming and we ran down the stairs to see a fistfight in the hall. We were sure that one gang had attacked the other but that wasn't the case. Two guys from the east hallway, Ken and Bob had got into a fight over a cigarette. Evidently Ken had one cigarette left that he had smoked only a third of it. Bob is his roommate and when Ken found the butt had been smoked down two thirds he accused Bob of the crime. It could have been a real disaster because both of the guys had sharp kitchen knives in their belts but no blood was spilled.

The more that I saw of this sort of thing the more that I thought that Sam Sheppard's theory of gangs was coming true. The strong were going to eat the weak.

Hell week - Sammy and Greg

Sammy was restless and he was driving Greg crazy with countless questions.

"Greg, what's at the bottom of the elevator shaft?"

"Probably a lot of mud and sand, why?"

"Is there a door?"

"Yeah there's an access door from the bottom but it's sure to be blocked by the ten feet of sand"

"Well when I was a Security Guard I had to check those doors and hallways and I thought that the access door to the elevators was in that little hallway that ran along the back of the office block"

"Yea, I guess ... so what?"

"Greg, that hallway leads to the kitchen area of the Kon-Tiki restaurant"

"Sammy, those hallways are full of sand and who knows what else"

"Maybe but maybe not. I'm going to go down and have a look"

"You can't go alone. It's too dangerous"

"Ok, then go with me"

"Damn I wished that it would stop raining because you have way too much time on your hands"

They both had their flashlights and their walky-talky's and went to look for Lara and Susan. The door to 403 was closed so Greg knocked on it.

"Lara?"

"Has it stopped raining?" Lara called through the door.

"No"

"THEN GO AWAY!"

"Suz I need your help" Sammy called.

"Ask someone who cares"

"Look, all you have to do is listen to the walky-talky in case we have a problem"

Susan opened the door,

"What kind of problem?"

"Greg and I are going down the elevator shaft to get to the Kon-Tiki restaurant"

"The hell you are, I've already lost one husband and I ... No, wait a minute, that didn't come out right. It's too dangerous"

After a while they all went to the elevator shaft access door and Greg showed them the catwalk and a stairway that they were going to use to get to the bottom. Lara used his flashlight and pointed it down into the hole and all she could see was black and wet. Finally everyone was satisfied that death wasn't eminent and the guys descended the four flights of narrow stairs into the black pit.

The two elevator cars were at the ground floor where they settled when the power failed. There was still five feet of space under the cars and there was some water but very little sand. Greg found the access door to the hallway and tried the knob. It opened with a little push and they felt a breeze of fresh air wafting through it.

“Feel that breeze, at least it isn’t a tomb in there” Greg said.

Sammy called up to Susan and told her where they were then he led the way with his flashlight. The first door that they opened was to the utility control room for the ground floor and there was nothing of interest there. The next door was a cross hallway that led to the lobby. There were several inches of sand where they stood but their light showed several feet at the lobby end. They continued towards the Kon-Tiki kitchen and at the far end of the hallway there were two doors. The one on the right was bowed in towards them with sand seeping out from under it.

“Be careful there Sammy. If that door gives way we are both in big trouble”

“Greg, I think that’s the door to the kitchen”

“Too bad, we just can’t go there”

Sammy carefully tried the other door and it opened. At first it looked like a dead-end but Sammy’s light found a second door on their right but to their disappointment it was bowed in like the one in the hallway. Sammy shined his light around the small room and at first it looked like the room was filled with litter but when Sammy shined his light in the corner he saw a bottle of Grey Goose Vodka half buried in the sand and trash. He looked back at Greg with a smile on his face. This was the dry-storage room for the Kon-Tiki restaurant.

Susan and Lara were standing at the top of the elevator shaft when Sammy called from below,

“Suz, toss down some pillowcases”

“Pillowcases? Ok wait just a minute”

She went to the housekeeping closet and took four clean cases. She laughed at herself when she thought that she should put the clean ones in her room and bring the dirty ones off the bed but she dismissed that thought.

“Ok hon, here they come”

After they had fallen away she saw Sammy’s light moving as he retrieved them.

“We’ll be up in a minute”

Hell Week – Happiness is in the little things

Lara

We waited at the top and saw their lights on the stairs and they looked like hobo’s carrying all of their worldly good in bags over their shoulders.

“What do you have?”

“You’ll see” Greg said and led the way to the sitting room.

Susan and I felt like kids waiting for Santa. The first thing out of the bag was a package of Ritz crackers. Next was a bottle of Grey Goose vodka and then an 8-ounce can of beluga caviar. A package of cocktail napkins, a jar of green olives, more vodka, several cans of cocktail wieners, a one-pound bag of after-dinner mints and four cartons of Camel cigarettes followed this.

An hour later, Greg was the only one sober and Susan and I couldn’t stop giggling while Sammy just sat there with a silly look on his face. Greg had indulged in everything except the caviar. He only had a couple of sips of the vodka and he didn’t seem affected.

Of course, being a silly drunk, I was trying to get him to try the beluga that probably cost a \$100 a byte but he would have none of it.

“Come on honey, its delicious, just try it”

“I don’t eat fish eggs, I don’t eat raw fish, I only like fish and chips and we don’t have any grease to fry our potatoes in ... or any fish”

“Aw baby look at this ... yum-yum ...”

I ate another Ritz loaded with the delectable snack to show him how good it was. This went on for a while and finally Susan licked the can clean. It was gone and Greg still hadn’t allowed a single egg into his mouth.

Sammy lay down on one of the sofas and Susan and I were dancing to music that we were humming when we heard the phone ring in room 401. Greg answered it and told us that Ben Roberts wanted a meeting in the ballroom. He said that Tony Gonzales would be there too.

“What the hell is that about?” I ask a little too loudly.

“I don’t know but he sounded friendly, I’ll see you later and don’t drink the rest of the vodka. We might need it to cure someone’s hang-over”

I yelled at him,

“I won’t have a hang-over because I ate the yummy-yummy fish eggs!”

Greg put two bottles of vodka and two carton of cigarette into a pillowcase when he left. Sammy was snoring so Susan and I went to her room and lay on her bed.

“You know Suz, I almost feel happy”

“Please don’t call me Suz”

“Sammy calls you Suz”

“He wants to get into my pants and he thinks it’s cute but he’s wrong on both counts”

“Well I don’t want to get into your muddy and torn pants so I’ll call you Mrs. Wong or Wang or whatever”

“Thank you ... whoever you are”
In a few minutes we both sleep.

Hell Week – The meeting

When Greg entered the ballroom, Ben and Tony were sitting at a table and they were arguing.

“What’s up guys?” Greg asked.

Ben looked at Tony and said,

“Look Allenby, Tony and I have a difference of opinion and we want you to help find a solution. We can’t seem to do it ourselves”

“That’s because you’re wrong” Tony added.

“Shut up, you’ll get your turn” Ben snapped back.

Greg could feel the real hostility here and he knew that they might settle the issue with the knives in their belts. He also knew that they were both bright guys and that a gang war would hurt them both.

“Ok, what do you want from me?”

“We want you to arbitrate the situation”

“You want me to be the judge?”

“Yea” the both said.

“Ok but I’ll just make a decision, I won’t enforce it. Ok?”

“Ok”

“Alright, Tony, you go first”

“Ok, your girl Susan told one of my girls that there were some fishing rods in a room under the stairs by the beach. I sent Sam and Max to get the stuff and when they got there Ken Mason and Jerry Wilson were digging the sand out of the way. They all worked to get the four rods out but Ken took three rods and left one for Sam. There was a ... discussion but they still have the rods. I talked to Ben about a fair distribution but he’s not sympathetic to our cause”

Greg thought about it for a minute and then said

“Ok Ben, what’s your take on this”

“It’s simple. We agreed to share the food in the kitchen equally and we agreed to provide support for you and you’re ... helpers, but that’s all. I never said that I would share everything that we found outside of the kitchen. Ken got the rods and he brought them to me. We have them and we want to keep them”

Greg thought for a few minutes then he gave his thoughts.

“We have three groups here that are divided for one reason or another. Let’s just consider this hypothetical situation. Suppose that we are all here months from now and let’s assume that one group has gained an edge on survival. What do the other groups do?”

Maybe they just go quietly into the night and die. Maybe they negotiate a place at the dinner table and the group in power take them in because it's the right thing to do, or maybe the 'have-nots' cut the throats of the 'haves' and find their own dinner"

They all thought about that for a minute then Greg gave his opinion.

"We are all going to be rescued together. It maybe soon or it may be a while but we will be together. The last thing that we need is a war between ourselves. What would you say to your rescuers when they asked about the other? 'Oh them, well we killed them and ate them'

Ben, give Tony one of the fishing rods, Tony give Ben something of value"

Ben grumbled and then motioned to Ken Mason to bring one of the rods to Tony.

"Ok Tony, it's your turn" Greg said.

"What do you want?" He asked.

"I want to ask Emily to come and live with us in the east hallway"

"Hell Ben, I don't tell people where to live. She's with us because she wants to be"

"Look Tony we both know that people will go where we tell them to go. I just want to talk to her and I don't want any crap from you"

"Ok" Tony conceded.

Ben left us sitting there and walked to the west end of the hall. He knocked on one of the doors and Emily opened it. Greg couldn't hear what they said but she seemed upset. There was some angry voices and waving of arms for a while and then they talked quietly together. Finally she stepped forward and he took her in his arms and they hugged each other for a while. Then she went inside and came out with her pillow and her roll-on suitcase.

As they walked back through the ballroom, he was pulling her suitcase and was holding her hand. She never looked at Greg or Tony.

"Tony, did you just trade a girl for a fishing rod?" Greg asked.

"It looks like it" he answered and he walked away.

Hell Week – Room 402 after the nap

Lara

I woke from my nap feeling good and I'm sure that the protein in the caviar had something to do with it. Susan was awake but still laying next to me looking content. I went to the bathroom and brought back a plastic cup of water. I took a sip and passed it to her. It seemed natural for us to share a glass of water, or a bite of food or clothes, or in this case, an afternoon bed.

Days before my bra strap had rotted through so she give me her's. She said that she had lost so much weight that she didn't need it anymore. I laughed and said that she hadn't needed one before she lost the weight. We were as close as sisters and we were spending more and more time together.

We needed to rest. We were expending more energy looking for firewood and trying to stay clean than we were taking in with our meager diet. I had lost so much weight that my ribs were showing and Susan had lost even more. Greg and Sammy were always trying to find food or thing's to make life easier for everyone and they expected us to help them. I hadn't told her about the airplane yet but I knew that if I really tried to fly out of here I had to do it while I still had the strength and that was fading fast.

"I have a treat, do you want some?" Susan asked.

"Yes please, what is it?"

"Oh you want it but you don't know what it is"

"I want lots of things that I can't have"

"Like what?"

"Strawberry's, pizza, bacon, more Hersey's kisses, hot chocolate, sex, cherry's ..."

"What?"

"What 'what'"

"What you said"

"Hot chocolate?"

"No"

"Oh you mean sex"

"Yes. I thought that you were ... that you and Greg were ..." she fumbled with the words.

"Doing it? No, not quite"

"What are you doing?"

"The same thing that we did when we were fifteen in high school but now we aren't parked in the drive-in movie"

"So you're just ..."

"Fooling around. It's not bad but it's not the real thing like you get from Sammy"

"Me? I don't get anything from Sammy"

"Oh, I'm sorry. I just assumed that you were in the same room and he seems so ... loving to you ... oh Susan, I'm sorry that I had the wrong idea"

"It's not the wrong idea, it's probably a right idea but it's just not true"

I looked at her for a while and then asked,

"Why not?"

"Good question but why not you and Greg"

"Oh I have a good reason. A very good reason. A goddamned good reason. He won't do it"

"What?"

"He said that pregnancy could kill me if we don't get rescued"

"Well there are ways to prevent the sperm and the egg from getting together"

"Yes but we don't have any of those ways"

"I do"

“You do what”

“I have condoms”

“I thought that you and Sammy were celibate”

“Well we are but I am prepared”

“So what are you waiting for? You don’t want to die a vir Oh, sorry. Don’t think thought’s like that ... so what are you saving it for?”

“Damned if I know but did you forget that I’m nowhere close to being a virgin?”

“Oh hell, ex-husbands don’t count”

She laughed,

“I love you Lara, in a platonic way of course”

“Of course”

It was well after dark when Greg returned to the room. He had spent a depressing hour in the kitchen with Ben and Tony looking at the dwindling stock of food. It was well below half now and to make matters worse, most of the good stuff was gone. They decided that we would have to cut back on portions and even then it would be gone in three to four weeks.

There was lots of discussion about increasing fishing and searching the jungle for tropical fruit. There were no big animals on the island but there were snakes and lizards and lots of clams, crabs, and mussels along the beach.

When their meeting was over, Greg gave each of them a liter of Gray Goose vodka and a carton of cigarettes. They were delighted but curious about where it had come from. Greg explained the elevator shaft and told them that there wasn’t any more treasure to be found down there. He also explained how dangerous the budging doors were and that it wasn’t worth dying for to get one more jar of olives.

“If a door goes while anyone was down there they would die on the spot. Sammy and I are going to make one more trip and we’ll share anything that we find but that’s the last time.”

Greg had expected Lara to be awake when he returned but she was asleep on his bed. Sometimes she slept with him but it was always tough on both of them. He sat on the bed and stroked her hair and she opened her eyes with a smile.

“Hi honey, time for bed”

“Oh not tonight, I have a surprise for you”

“Can you surprise me in the morning? Right now I’m so tired that I feel brain-dead”

Hell Week – The last day

Lara

Susan and I had spent five hours digging clams and mussels out of rocky crags along the beach and we were so tired that we could hardly walk. The work was hard enough but we had to walk nearly a mile down the beach to find the right location. At high tide we had to work up to our waist in the surf and the salt water had burned our skin and eyes.

When we had done all that we could do Susan lay face down on the sand with the water lapping at her feet and she looked so small. She was always small but now she must have weighed less than a hundred pounds, maybe less than ninety pounds. Her clothes were in tatters, she wore no underwear and even her once stylish sneakers were held together with duct tape. We were down to two small meals a day and looking at her I really didn't know how much longer she could last.

I walked a little way away to where she couldn't hear me and then I sat in the sand and cried. I cried for Susan and Sammy and Greg and for me. I cried because I couldn't see a future for any of us. I cried for the lost years that we were being denied and for the happy lives that we weren't going to have.

Then she was there and her arms were around me and she held me close and cried with me and after a while I felt better. I dried her tears and we ate some raw mussels and I felt a little strength returning. We each carried a bucket and we held hands as we trudged up the beach.

Thoughts and plans ran through my head and then the solution came to me. I actually felt happy because I had made a decision. There was enough gas in the airplane to go a thousand miles and there might not be any islands on the chart that close I was sure that I could find something. I was going to tell Greg that I was going work on the plane tomorrow.

Day 31 – The beginning of the end

Lara

I told Greg that I was going to fly north with the gas that we had and he went ballistic. “YOU’RE WHAT! That’s goddamned crazy. There’s nothing out there but ocean. No islands, no ships, nothing but a watery grave. Lara, there is no way that I’m letting you do this!”

“THEN FIND ME SOME GOD-DAMNED GAS!”

We stared at each other for a while, then he hugged me and I cried and we cuddled for a while trying to hold on to what we had because even that seemed to be slipping away then finally we came to an agreement.

“Oh honey, what do you need to do to the plane now?”

“It needs to be lighter. Every pound every ounce, takes gas to get it into the air. I’m going to strip out the back seats, the carpet, all of the inside paneling, and anything else that I won’t need for this flight. There’s even a LORAN antenna that can come off”

“What’s a LORAN?”

“It’s a long range navigation system that the ferry pilot probably took with him after he delivered the plane. There’s also the glide-slope radio and antenna that I won’t need. I found a roll of Mylar tape in the hanger. That like a strong and very sticky tape that I’m going to use to cover any holes, bolts, or gaps that might cause wind-drag”

“Ok, I’ll look in every nook and cranny on the island for gas but if I don’t find any then you’re not going”

-That what you think buster-

“One other thing Greg, I’m taking Susan to the airport with me. Send Sammy to dig for clams and mussels. If she has another day like yesterday she might be done for”

“Ok but take a radio with you”

In the morning I went to Susan’s room and Sammy met me at the door.

“She’s still asleep. I’ve never seen anyone this tired”

“I’m taking her with me today and I’ll make sure that she gets plenty of rest”

I went in and sat on her bed,

“Hey Susan, hey baby... are you awake?”

“Go away ...”

“Are you ok?”

“No I’m dead ... go away”

“Come on, what do you want for breakfast? I have a yummy cold potato here ... num-num”

“Chocolate ... I want chocolate”

“People in hell want ice water ... I’ve got some cold mussel soup ...”

She sat up in bed and pushed her tangled hair out of her eyes then she blinked at the light coming in through the window and said,

“Damn ... we’re still here. I thought that maybe it was a dream, I don’t think that I can dig mussels today”

“You’re not digging today honey, you’re coming with me”

“Coming where? There’s no where to go”

“It’s a surprise, now take a shower because you still smell like mussels and put on your cleanest dirty clothes and we’ll have a nice day to relax”

“How could I refuse an offer like that? Here, help me out of bed”

Day 31 – Airport

Lara

There wasn’t much light in the hanger even with the door open so I had Greg help me roll the Cherokee out into the sunlight. It was a hard to get moving because it had sat in the same place for a while but after the first couple of feet it moved easily. Greg left us after saying that we should call on the radio when we were ready to leave.

I pulled a lounge chair around from the back of the hanger and asked Susan if she wanted it in the shade of the wing or in the sun. She asked for the shade and I started installing spark plugs and she was asleep in minutes. I worked steadily for an hour and she didn’t stir. I worked for another hour and had all of the plugs installed but by this time my back was killing me. The problem was that I really too short to reach the engine so I had to stand on my tiptoes. I was thinking bad thoughts when I walked into the hanger and right before me was a stool that would have made the job much easier.

The sun was straight over our heads when I took a break and sat on the edge of Susan’s Lounge.

“Are you done yet? She asked.

“I’m done with the spark plugs”

“Lara, why are you doing this?”

“Well it beats digging clams”

“Lara, don’t tell stories to your ... your ... oh what ever I am”

“Friend Susan, loving friend”

“Are you going to kiss me?”

“No”

“Ok, don’t lie to me. What are you doing with this aluminum box-kite?”

“I’m going to fly it to Tahiti and get someone to rescue us”

“Oh shit, I’m still asleep”

“Wake up honey”

“You’re going to fly this tiny thing all the way to Tahiti? Why don’t you just fly to LA or to the moon or to god-damned Mars?”

“Well, I’m actually not going all the way to Papeete. I’m going to an island called Rontanga but that’s good enough.”

“Lara, can I go with you? I don’t want to be here anymore. I know that I’ll like Rowtanga better”

“Rontanga, and no honey you weigh too much”

“I don’t weigh anything. When I get to Tahiti I’ll have to buy clothes at a children’s store”

“Sorry baby”

I worked a while longer and then I brought her a drink of water.

“Ready for lunch?” I asked

“Oh be still my heart, are we going to have three meals today or is this the last one?”

I opened the little bag that I brought and asked what she wanted to eat.

“I told you this morning, I want chocolate”

I handed her a Hershey’s kiss.

“Where did you get that?” She said clapping her hands together.

“I saved it for a special occasion”

“And what’s the occasion?”

“Your day off. When was the last time that you had a day off?”

“Hmm ... I’ll have to think about that, what else is for lunch?”

I had another surprise for her. I handed her a small can of peaches.

“Lara, I truly love you. God, I dream about peaches”

I opened the can with Greg’s Swiss Army Knife and I gave them to her. After she had eaten three pieces she asked,

“Aren’t you going to have any? We can share”

“I’m allergic to peaches” I lied.

She ate them all and drank every drop of the juice. Now she looked relaxed and happy. She napped more that afternoon while I worked removing the inside paneling. I was very hungry but the peaches were all that I had brought with us. When the sun was low I called Greg on the radio and asked for a ride.

“Here Lara, help me up” Susan said.

She was sitting on the edge of her lounge waiting and I gave her my hand so she could stand.

“Well I feel rested and I’m going to pee. If I’m not back in five minutes send a search party”

She did come back and she even leaned against the wing of the plane as Greg and I pushed it back into the hanger.

Susan looked better and she joked with Greg as we drove to the hotel. She leaned over and whispered something into his ear. He laughed and whispered back into her ear then they both looked at me and laughed. When Greg and I were in our room I told him about my day,

“I told Susan about the plan to fly north” I confessed.

“Good because I told Sammy”

“What did he say?”

“With or without the swear words?”

“Without”

“He said that it was a risky thing to do”

“Too bad, did you find anything?”

“Maybe, the storage room on the end of the power plant is filled with junk. When the pier collapsed, the floor was tilted about twenty degrees so everything is smashed against the back wall. We couldn’t get through all of the mess today but we think that there are two drums in the corner. It’ll take us a while tomorrow to just get to where we can see what’s in them”

“What do you think’s in them?”

“Don’t know, could be diesel or motor oil or carpet cleaner for all we know but it might be gasoline”

“Oh god, I hope so. Did Sammy dig any clams?”

“No but he did something better. He went down the elevator shaft and found enough crackers and snacks to last us for two or three days.”

“Do we have to share them with the East and West gangs?”

“I gave them two more bottles of vodka and one carton of cigarettes. That should keep them happy for a while”

“Is there any more caviar?”

“Yes honey, should I see if our neighbors want to join us for dinner?”

“Greg what were you and Susan laughing about?”

“She asked me if I knew that you weren’t wearing any panties and I asked her if she knew that I wasn’t wearing any boxers”

Day 32 – Airport

Lara

I took Susan back to the airport with me and she looked much better than she had the day before. She had slept more the eighteen hours and she had eaten more calories than she used for the first time in many days. She pulled her lounge up to the plane's back door so she could talk to me while I worked. She chatted about her life growing up in San Francisco and she told me about her husband.

She confessed that she knew that he was into college girls when she married him but she thought that she could change him. She wasn't bitter about her failed marriage but she wasn't eager the repeat the experience anytime soon. I told her about Bruce and how he had hurt me when he left. I also confessed that I really didn't see him as my husband but I thought that we should have agreed to part friends instead of him dumping me.

“So he hurt your feelings. Too bad, get over it”

“Oh you're a cold woman”

“Not cold just practical. When we're rescued do you see yourself with Greg?”

“I don't see the future at all, at least not beyond the next few days. How about you?”

“I think that I need a change. Maybe I'll move south for a while. You know that people in San Francisco think that LA is just a big city filled with weirdoes. Well you seem ok so how bad can it be. Royal has several hotels in Southern California so maybe I'll try one of them for a while”

“What about Sammy?”

“I don't know, I think that Sammy needs some real-world experience. He's been in school his whole life except for his time here. If we ... when we're rescued I think we shouldn't see each other for a while and then see what we have in common in a normal world”

“So did you two 'do it' the other night?” I asked.

“Nosy”

“Yes”

“Oh we slept in the same bed and we snuggled for a while but it was just too strange and the reality of it was we were both too tired. It was nice sleeping with him though. How about you and Greg?”

“About the same”

“Too bad”

I worked for a while and Susan napped in the sun. I was making some progress and I was starting to see the rest of the tasks to be done. I thought I could finish everything by the next day. Susan was awake and she brought me a drink of water. After that she sat on the floor of the plane and surprised me.

“I think it was thirty-four or thirty-five days ago”

“What?”

“You asked when I had my last day off. Actually I had two days off. That's when it was”

“Ok, what did you do?” I asked.

“On the second day I went to the beach with Sammy”
“That’s all?”
“Well I went in the water naked to wash the sand off and Sammy wasn’t suppose to look”
“Did he look?”
“Probably but who cares”
“What did you do on your first day off?”
“I told you most of that. I had lunch on Lano Vana with Jocko”
“And you had a good time?”
“Yes it was very nice”
“Did you have dinner later?”
“No, he had arranged to have dinner with Greg”
“Anything else”
“Well we spent the afternoon in my bed and I enjoyed every minute of that”
“Susan! You’re such a slut”
“Yes I was or yes I am. Which ever fits?”
“Did you ever do it again with Jocko?”
“No, a god-damned tidal wave screwed that up”
“Yes, it screwed up lots of things”

Day 32 – The power plant

Greg and Sammy spent hours pulling broken beams and pieces of concrete out of the storage room. It was awkward because they had to stand on a floor that was tilted in a crazy way but finally Sammy thought that he could crawl over a jumble of boxes and read the writing on the first drum.

“Be careful Sammy. If you fall between all of the at crap it’ll be hard to get you out”
“No problem, I can nearly see the cap on the first drum”
“Any luck?”
“Shit. It’s diesel”

Greg felt like he had been slapped in the face and he sat on a box of motor oil and tried to hide his disappointment. Sammy was floundering around trying to get farther into the corner when he called to Greg.

“There’s a leak back here Greg, I smell fumes”
“Oh come on out. There’s nothing that you can do in there”
“Greg, I think that I smell gasoline”

Day 32 – Airport

I had the back seats and the carpet piled onto the tarmac and Susan was arranging it so it looked nice. That made no sense to me but it made her happy. With the inside paneling, carpet and the seats gone the plane’s cabin was looking pretty bare. The next task was to install the ferry tank but I needed a break before I started that.

I was resting outside the plane when Greg and Sammy arrived and Sammy was waving a six-pack of San Miguel beer.

“What did you find hon?” Susan called.

“There was lot’s of good stuff in the shed. There were boat cushions, paddles, an outboard motor, a drum of gas and a six-pack of beer”

“What?” I said

“What?” Susan said

“About thirty gallons of gas but it will take us a while to get it up here”

“Oh my God” was all I could think to say.

“Beer?” Greg asked.

Day 33 – Airport

I had Greg help me install the cowling that morning. It wasn’t heavy but it was big and awkward. With it in place, the Cherokee looked like an airplane again. It sat with its tail low and its nose slanted up just a little. It looked like it wanted to fly and it was just waiting for me.

I put Susan to work with the Mylar tape covering exposed bolts and sealing the joints around the doors and windows. I asked Greg to call me on the radio when he knew how long it would take to bring the gas to us but he said no.

“Why not?”

“Yesterday I heard a funny noise on the radio. It was just for a second but it sounded like a couple of guys talking. It was just a few words but it defiantly wasn’t you or Susan”

“Do you think that someone else has a radio?”

“Maybe. Lot’s of workers at the hotel had them. It’s possible that someone found one and is listening to us”

“Have we said anything incriminating?”

“I don’t think so but we haven’t been doing our normal routine. Just stay off of it unless there’s a big problem”

By noon I had the ferry tank installed and the fuel line connected to the auxiliary gas line that was under a plate in the rear cabin floor and then I sat in the pilot’s seat and made a list of everything to do. It wasn’t much different than any other checklist that a pilot made before a cross-country flight. I needed to check the oil and break-fluid, the tire pressure, and all of the controls to be sure that they were free and correct. I set the trim tab to the take-off position and I checked the propeller for dings and nicks and I looked at all of the hinges on the control surfaces.

The morning of the flight I would drain a little gas from the sump on all five fuel tanks to get rid of any water that might have condensed in the tanks. I had removed the life raft because it was too heavy but I made sure that a life preserver was next to the pilot's seat. I also took two white smoke flairs and a packet of shark-repellent from the raft and put them in the map-pocket that was next to the pilot's knee.

Greg had given me a two-gallon gas can that he found in the transportation center and I had flushed it several times with water. It was now filled with drinking water and was stores within reach of the pilot. I had taken the Sea Water Desalination Unit from the raft and stored it by the front door. It was a handy survival gadget that looked like a bucket but it could turn a gallon of seawater into drinking water in 24 hours.

I sat looking at my list for a long time going over and over the things that I needed for the flight. The last thing that I needed to do that day was to crank the engine but I didn't want to start it. The noise would be easily heard from the hotel and I didn't want people coming up to see what was going on.

I told Susan what I was going to do and I told her to stay well clear of the propeller. I took the checklist from the map pocket and went through each item just like I would when I really started the engine. When I got to the line, which said 'Mixture full rich', I made sure that the mixture was at full off. Then I opened the small window next to me and shouted 'Clear' and with both feet on the brakes turn the switch to 'start'

'CLICK!'

Nothing. The prop moved about an inch and stopped. The battery was nearly dead

"Shit"

About three o'clock Greg and Sammy arrived with seven jerry cans on the cart. They had brought thirty-four gallons of gas that we used to top up the wing tanks and to fill the ferry tank. There were two gallons left and Greg put them into a plastic can that the landscape guys used for their lawnmowers. He looked at the battery in the plane and said that it wouldn't be a problem. He said that we would take it down with us after dark and charge it with the golf cart charger. While we finished fueling, Susan brought out a stepladder and cleaned the windows with a bottle of Windex that she had found.

Then there was nothing left to do. We all sat on the tarmac and just looked at Cherokee N9009J. Tomorrow I was going to the Tahitian archipelago, which was nearly fourteen hundred miles away across the open sea. It never occurred to me that afternoon that I might die trying to find a safe haven but it has occurred to me many times since.

Somehow the world seemed very large and very very serious. Greg was talking to me but I wasn't listening. I was switching fuel tanks at the right time and sitting the radio beacon to the right frequency and watching the compass and watching the waves to see if I had a

cross wind and calling the emergency frequency on the radio and sitting the transponder to the distress setting and ... and ... What? What did he say?"

"I'm going with you. Don't give me any crap about this. You are going to need help"

"Ok"

"Ok?"

"Yea, ok"

"Good"

Day 34 – The last day

The alarm went off at 5:00 am but it didn't matter. I hadn't slept at all that night. Greg said that he hadn't either but I know that he did. I could tell by his breathing. I had gone over every detail of the flight a hundred times through the long night and the results were always the same. We never found Rontanga and we had to land in the sea and we both died.

The night before I had laid out the clothes that I was going to wear for the trip. I took a long time selecting them and I decided on jeans because they offered more skin protection than shorts. I had no underwear of course and as I slipped on the dirty jeans I thought of when I bought them at the Redondo Beach mall. They were the latest designer jeans with a rhinestone butterfly embroidered below my knee. They had sparkled and were so sheik that they had made me very happy. For a t-shirt I choose my blue Los Angeles Dodgers shirt because it hid the dirt and grime the best. My sneakers were falling apart but I intended to give them a fresh coat of duct tape when we got to the hanger.

I could hear Susan and Sammy getting ready in the room next door and Greg was dressed and ready to go.

"Do you want to eat something now?" he asked.

"No, I'll eat after we're in the air"

On the table I checked the things that I was taking with me. My passport, a credit card, \$200 in cash and a silver locket that I had taken from Maggie's stuff. I thought that I might give it to her mother.

Greg knocked on Susan's door and we were ready. We turned the light off and made our way outside. There was no talking at all.

The drive up to the airport took a little longer because it was very dark and the single light on the cart didn't show us much. When we got to the plane Greg and Sammy immediately started installing the battery and Susan and I had a chance to talk.

"You have your flashlight?" she asked.

"Yes"

"Your Walkie-Talky?"

“Yes”

“Lunch?”

“Yes”

“Make-up?”

“Sure”

“Ok, I’ll keep my Walkie-Talky on every day that you’re gone. Give yours to the rescuers so they can call me when they get here.”

“Ok”

“Are you scared?”

“No”

“Liar”

She put her arms around me and held me tight. She kissed me on the cheek and said,

“I’ll miss you honey, be safe, I love you”

One more kiss and she turned away. Sammy and Greg were shaking hands, as the sky was turning pink in the east. Sammy hugged me and gave me his Swiss Army Knife.

“Here you might need this,” he said.

“Greg has one”

“Just take it and here’s something else”

He handed me a dirty rag that was wrapped around four chocolate bars.

“Something to tide you over until your table is ready at the restaurant tonight”

It was light enough to see now and I drained a little gas out of the sump on each gas tank and checked it for water. Everything was clean. Greg was already standing on the wing next to the passenger side door and I had to get in first.

I stepped up and climbed over the passenger seat and settled into the pilot’s seat. Greg climbed in beside me and said one last goodbye to Sammy and Susan and then he closed and locked the door. I was the pilot in command now and I started doing my job.

I went through every item on the prestart checklist. I reached across and checked the locks on the door. I tugged on Greg’s shoulder and seat belt to make sure that they were secure. I set the trim-tab for take-off. I set the radio to the international emergency frequency and I set the transponder code to 7777 that would tell any radar site that we were in trouble. When I looked out through the windshield it was light enough for us to fly.

“Ready?” I asked Greg.

“Ready”

I read the last items on the list and said them out loud like I always did.

“Parking breaks on”

I checked that it was pulled all the way out.

“Fuel is selected to the proper tank”

I touched the selector valve.

“Mixture full rich”

I pushed the mixture control all the way forward.

“Area clear”

I opened the little window beside me and shouted ‘Clear’

“Select Left Magneto – Start”

Suddenly the back door opened and someone was getting in.

“What the ...”

The door slammed and Sam Sheppard was behind us.

“I’m going with you, let’s go”

“No you are not!” I yelled.

“Either I’m going or you’re not going. If we don’t go right now I’m cutting these fuel lines and these control cables and the plane will be done for. I’m not kidding, now let’s go”

“How did you know we were going?” Greg asked.

“Oh I’ve been watching you and when I saw the battery on the cart I knew that today was the day. I walked up here a couple of hours ago now let’s go”

I could see Sammy standing next to the closed back door but he could see the big knife that Sam had pointing at the fuel lines.

“Sam, we’ll never make it to land with your extra weight”

“Then leave him here” he said pointing at Greg.

“I can’t, he has to navigate or we’ll never make it”

“I’ll take my chances now start the god-damned engine”

I reached into the map pocket beside my knee and found a white-smoke flair that I dropped into Greg’s lap as I reached across to check the door locks. I went back to my reading of the checklist and saying each step out loud. I hoped that Greg saw my plan.

“Door is locked”

I unlocked both locks.

“Fuel is selected to the proper tank”

“Mixture full rich”

“Area clear”

I opened the little window beside me and shouted ‘Clear’

“Select Left Magneto – Start”

I turned the ignition to the left and pushed the start button. The propeller made two quick revolutions and then the engine roared to life. I close my eyes and held my breath and

then made a motion with my hands that Sheppard couldn't see. Greg pulled the tab on the flair and the plane was immediately filled with white smoke.

"FIRE! FIRE! GET OUT! GET OUT!" I yelled.

I heard the scramble at the back door and the cabin was suddenly filled with wind and noise. I released the break and pushed the throttle full forward. As the plane rolled away, Greg pushed his door hard against the prop-blast and tossed the flair away. That cleared the smoke away fast. When we were far enough that I was sure that Sam couldn't hurt the plane I slowed enough to make the turn onto the runway. Greg was looking back and he could see that Sammy had Sam on the ground.

"Has Sammy got him?" I asked.

"Yeah and it looks like he's beating hell out of him. The back door isn't latched, is that a problem?"

"Nothing that we can't fix in the air.

My heart rate was coming down but I wanted to get into the air before we had any more surprises. Greg slammed and locked the door and I pushed the throttle to full power. The big Cherokee accelerated like it couldn't wait to leave the ground behind. At seventy I could feel it getting light and at eighty it left the earth without a bump. One minute we were driving down the runway and the next we were in the air.

I've flown hundreds of times and I always feel elation when we leave the ground for the sky.

"Ladies and gentlemen, welcome aboard Royal's flight one. Our destination today is the island of Rontanga in French Polynesia. Our flying time will be approximately eight hours and twenty minutes and you will earn 1392 frequent flyers miles today. Have a nice flight"

Day 34 – The hotel

Susan and Sammy, with Sam Sheppard sitting in the back of the work cart, drove down the mountain to the hotel. Rain was starting to fall but no one cared.

"I think that you broke his nose Sammy"

"Too bad, I should have broken his neck. Do you think that anyone heard the plane?"

"Oh yes, I'm sure that they all heard it"

"When do you think that the rescuers could be here?" Sammy asked.

He didn't say the obvious. He wanted to say 'If they make it, when could they be here'.

"Well they will fly all day and a rescue plane wouldn't take off before tomorrow morning so tomorrow afternoon would be the soonest but it might take longer. I'll keep the radio on and we will wait" Susan said.

“How long will you wait?”
“Until there are no more clams”

When they saw the hotel, every guest was waiting for them. The rain was falling harder but no one went inside. Ben Roberts and Tony Gonzales were the first to approach the cart.

“What the hell happened to you Sheppard?”
“I fell down” Sam said as he walked away.
“What was that noise ... did a plane land?” Tony asked.
“Let’s get out of the rain. Tell everyone to go to the ball room” Susan said reasserting herself as the hotel manager.

When everyone was assembled, even the elusive Dr. Howard, Susan spoke.

“This morning Miss Lara Lee and Mr. Greg Allenby took the positive and very dangerous step of seeking help for all of us. The hotel’s small airplane was stripped of all unnecessary weight and loaded with every gallon of gasoline that could be found on the island. That airplane was only meant to travel between here and Lano Vana but Miss Lee is attempting to fly 1400 miles to Rontanga in French Polynesia. There are no navigation aides available and she told me that it was like trying to find a dime after walking ten football fields. The flight itself will take over eight hours and if things go well they will land on Rontanga before dark. If ... after they get there, a rescue flight should be here in two or three days. That’s all the information that I have, are there any questions?”

“Why did Allenby go with her?”
“Lara, like many of you, is suffering the effects of malnutrition. She has been very weak and she has worked very hard for the last few days getting the plane ready. She felt that she couldn’t make the trip alone”

“Who else worked on the plane?”
“Greg Allenby, Mr. Maliuna and myself”
“Mrs. Wang, you don’t look strong enough to have done much work”
“Yeah, do you want to see my blisters?”

Day 34 – Somewhere in the South Pacific

Lara

It had been seven hours and forty-five minutes since we left Tapu Vana and the radio beacon had found nothing. If we were within fifty or sixty miles of Rontanga I should be seeing something. Greg and I hadn't spoken for a long time because we were both worried that we had missed our target. We had been cursing at 7500 feet for the entire flight, which was the optimum altitude for the best fuel efficiency, but now I was faced with a dilemma. I could continue on this heading and altitude or I could climb higher to increase the range of the radio.

There wasn't a cloud in sight, which was a bad thing. In the tropics clouds tend to cling to the peaks of the larger islands. The water below us was a beautiful turquoise and there may have been tiny islands or exposed reefs below but at this altitude it was hard to tell. I had run three of the four wing tanks dry and the last one had about thirty minutes of fuel in it. That would leave about five minutes of flying on the ferry tank in back. I tried not to look desperate as I added a little power and eased the controls back to start a climb.

Greg looked at me with a question but he didn't say anything. I rechecked the radio beacon frequency for Rontanga and climbed towards the sky. Using the radio microphone and I called on the emergency frequency,

“Any station - any station - Cherokee niner-zero-zero-niner Juliet needs assistance”

I listened to static.

I called again. Nothing. Again. Nothing. Then Greg tapped my arm and pointed to the radio beacon receiver. The needle, which had been dead all day slowly, swung until it was pointing twelve degrees to the right of our course. My hand shook as I turned the volume all the way up on the beacon's speaker. There in the static I could hear the Morse code identifier, dt-dah-dt ... dt ... dah-dah-dt ... RTG ... RTG ...

I wanted to cry. It was the beacon at Rontanga.

I turned to the new course and Greg pointed towards the horizon.

“Clouds, could it be the island? He asked.

-God it must be a hundred miles away-

“Maybe. Greg, can you climb over the seat and pour the two gallons of gas that are in the plastic can into the ferry tank? Be careful not to hit the controls with your feet”

I dialed control frequency for Rontanga into the radio and called,

“Rontanga approach control, Cherokee niner-zero-zero-niner Juliet how do you read?”

Nothing.

I called again and again and again then I heard something through the static.

“Rontanga approach, say again”

“..... Chero.... pr... ident.....button”

I pressed the ‘ident button on the transponder that would cause our blip on their radar to flash.

“Cherokee 9009Juliet no joy. Please cycle transponder and ident” Came the clear response.

-Damn... I don't have time for this-

I hit the power button on the transponder and watched the light go out then I hit again and it came back on. As soon as possible I hit the ident button and answered the radio.

“Rontanga, transponder cycled squawking 7777 – 09Juliet”

“Contact 82 miles bearings 186 degrees ... say intentions”

A huge feeling of relief swept over me but it didn’t last long. The engine missed a couple of beats and then it was very quiet. The last wing tank was dry.

“Rontanga, I have five minutes of fuel. Going down now ... send help ... 09Juliet”

I trimmed the plane for my best angle of glide and the speed dropped back to eighty miles per hour. From this altitude I could glide another fifteen miles towards Rontanga but that wasn’t as important as finding a good spot to crash. The last thing that I wanted was to go down in the open ocean. Greg came scrambling back over the seat and buckled himself in tight.

“Look for an island while I fly the airplane” I said trying not to sound too hysterical.

I could tell that he was very concerned that the propeller was just turning in the wind and from the lack of sound he knew that the engine wasn’t running. I still had four gallons of gas in the ferry tank but I needed that to make a controlled landing. I would just let the plane glide until we were down to three thousand feet then I would restart it and land on the first airport that we came to. Of course the part about the airport was a joke.

“Lara, I see a couple of islands ahead but I can’t tell how big they are”

“I looked forward and saw some breaking water that was probably a half submerged reef.

“Keep looking honey”

“Over to the right, what’s that?”

Maybe three miles ahead I saw the island. I could see a little peak of hill or a big rock with palm trees and a lagoon. It was much too small for anyone to live on but it was big enough for us.

The altimeter read 3100 feet when I switched the fuel selector to Aux and waited. The propeller was still wind milling so the engine should start. Of course it took a half-second longer than I expected but that was long enough to scare hell out of me.

The engine came to life and I had three or four minutes of gas left. I flew directly over the island and verified that there was no place on the dry land to sit down. I needed to get down in a hurry because a plane could fly much slower with the engine running than when it was gliding. As we went over the palm trees I was able to see which way the wind was blowing. I made a gentle turn and lined up for a spot in the water very near and parallel to the beach.

“Ok Greg, get everything that we’re taking with us onto your lap and tighten you seatbelt as tight as you can. When I tell you to open the door, unlock both locks and hold it open just a little. The wind will keep it closed until we’re down. Any questions?”

“Yes, can I go home now?”

“We’re on our way. As soon as we’re down, get the hell out of the airplane before it sinks and remember that I can’t get out until your out”

“Ok” he said and he didn’t sound very brave but I still thought that I was more afraid than he was.

At one mile I was at eighty feet above the water and flying at eighty miles an hour. At a half mile I was forty feet and sixty miles an hour. At a quarter mile I had the flaps down and the nose well above the horizon. I had to add power to keep us in the air and I had to skid a little sideways to see forward. We were just above the water at fifty miles an hour and we were on the very edge of a stall. I could see my landing spot coming and I pulled the controls back a bit more and felt the airplane shudder as it started to stall. I heard the tail hit the first wave and then make contact with the water. The last control that I had was to pull the controls all the way back stalling the plane completely. It stopped flying and started falling. We just mushed down and the propeller hit the water. That jerked the nose sideways and threw me hard against my shoulder belt. I hit the master power switch, which was completely unnecessary. I learn to do that in my pilot training to prevent fire in a crash but we were more in danger of drowning than we were of burning. Still, it couldn’t hurt. One last big bump probably tore the right landing gear off of the plane and we settled at a funny angle.

“OUT! -OUT! -GO! -GO!... MOVE!!!”

Greg had the door open and was scrambling out with the emergency stuff in his arms and I was right behind him. Fear made us both lighting fast until we were standing on the wing. My heart was pounding and I was sure that the plane was going to disappear from under us at any second. But it didn’t. It just sat there and we just stood there. I looked at Greg and Greg looked at me and then he said something that at first made no sense at all.

“Where’s your jacket?”

“What?”

“Your jacket, where is it?”

“Well, I don’t think that it’s cold enough for a jacket”

“No honey, where’s your life jacket?”

-Oh shit-

With all of my planning and attention to detail and professional flying, I forgot to put on my goddamned life jacket. Sheepishly I reached back into the cockpit and retrieved it. Then when it was secure I looked around to see why we weren't sinking. We both could see that we were sitting on a coral reef. The water was about four feet deep and was evidently falling. Looking at the beach it was obvious that we had landed at high tide so in a few hours the plane would be nearly out of the water. Greg sat his stuff down and gave me a big hug.

"You did a hell of a job honey. You got us nearly to our destination and they know where we are. Good job"

"We are in the middle of the god-damned ocean but I guess that it could have been worse. I wonder how Susan and Sammy are doing back at the resort?"

"Yeah, some resort"

Day 34 – Welcome to French Polynesia

The sun was low in the western sky when we got ashore. Our most important job was to get firewood. Everything else could wait. We know that in the tropics when the sun went down it gets dark right away. We quickly found dry palm fronds, and drift wood. We picked a spot out in the open where we could sleep on the sand and build a fire and we were hoping that a rescue plane would be looking for us at dawn the next day.

When it was dark the fire raised our spirits and we used the flashlight to select our gourmet dinner. Greg opted for two boiled potatoes but I went straight for the caviar. I tried one more time to introduce him to the delights of the Sturgeon eggs but he refused. Oh well, it's was his loss.

There was no moon and it was very dark which only made the stars brighter. I don't think that I ever saw so many stars at one time. It was warm with a gentle breeze blowing as we lay in the sand. We were still marooned on a tiny island but we both had a good feeling. Looking up at the stars we talked about the future.

"So Lara, what are you going to do after we're rescued?"

"I'm going to have a hot shower and shave my legs"

"No I don't mean that. What are you going to do with your life?"

"Oh go home I guess. The California Bar results don't come out until September ... is it September yet ... anyway I guess that I'll just hang around and try to get my head straight about all of this. How about you?"

-I hadn't said anything about 'us' -

"Go home to Australia and recoup and then I'll go back to work."

-He didn't say anything either-

“Have you thought about working in the states?”

“I worked there before. It was ok. Who knows what’s going to happen”

“Do you think that you’ll have any problem getting over all of this?” I asked

“No, I don’t think so”

-I do, I think that I’ll have lots of problems. I have a problem thinking about it now and it’s not even over yet-

Sometime in the night I woke and Greg was piling wood on the fire.

“What are you doing honey?”

“I heard an airplane off to the south. I think that they are looking for us with infer-red. You know that night-vision stuff that we used in Vietnam”

“No honey I don’t know what it is”

“Go back to sleep Lara. It’s ok”

-Is he having bad dreams or did he really hear a plane? -

Day 35 – The tiny island

Lara

Dawn came and we lay in the sand. We were both very tired. The day before had been emotionally draining and the last month had taken its toll on us. We were both suffering from malnutrition and now from depression. From yesterday’s high of escape and survival to today’s realization that we were marooned on a tiny island that couldn’t possible keep us alive for more than a few days. Perhaps the most telling thing about our situation was that although we lay within two feet of each other, we both had our backs turned.

Finally I had to pee. Greg and I had shared the same room for a month and we had slept in the same bed for a while but we had always had a bathroom with a door. Now I needed to find some privacy to relieve myself.

I walked through the palm trees until I was out of his sight and I noticed that we weren’t the first ones to visit the island. There were signs of several campfires but they all looked old. There was some trash and rusty cans and a torn page of a newspaper that was a couple of years old. I don’t know why it had such an effect on me but I started to cry. I sat in the sand and I cried until I couldn’t cry anymore. At some point I wondered why Greg hadn’t come to comfort me but he didn’t. When I was calm again, I peed in the bushes and then I dug some clams from the beach. I didn’t need the food but I did it out of habit. Then I sat on my side of the island and looked north towards Rontanga and waited for rescue.

Day 35 – Night on the tiny island

Lara

Greg and I hardly spoke that day and at dark we built a huge roaring fire. Greg said that he had heard a search plane a couple of times that day but I didn't believe him. We slept well away from each other that night and I did wake when he was throwing more wood on the fire. I had no idea what time it was but soon I was back to sleep.

I had tortured dreams about Tapu Vana. I was trying to find Maggie. I called to her over and over to come back to the room. I saw her on the beach and I was running towards her when the wave came towards us across the lagoon. I called and called but my voice was drowned out by the sound of the wave. It was going to catch me and the noise was deafening.

I woke with a start and the noise was still there. A low flying plane with flashing lights had just gone over us at a very low altitude. Greg was up and throwing all of our firewood onto the blaze. The plane circled around and with its landing light on it came over us again. Greg and I were dancing and jumping around the fire. He hugged me and swung me around. The plane made one more pass and then departed towards Rontanga. We clung to each other and I think that I cried. The isolation of the day was gone and we kissed and kissed until some spark of passion was aroused but soon we settled for holding each other and talking excitedly about the coming day. Sometimes towards morning we dozed off in each other's arms and didn't wake until the sun hit us.

Day 36 – The last day

For breakfast we ate all of our remaining food and drank the last of our water. If they didn't come for us today we would be in trouble although I knew where we could dig for clams. For no reason at all I waded out to the Cherokee and looked inside. It was wet and the landing had dislodged the battery, which was lying on its side next to the ferry tank. That tank had only a trace of gas in it, which meant that I had landed with the last drop. I was still standing on the wing when I heard it. 'Thump-thump-thump-... it was helicopter.

From the north I watched a helicopter approach the island and then fly a circle around it. It was a grey French military helicopter and they were looking for a place to land. I didn't want to get in their way so I just stayed where I was. Finally it settled onto the beach about a hundred yards away with a cloud of flying sand and palm fronds.

I had just waded back to the beach when a young man in a flying suit came running to me. He gave me a quick little salute and said,

“Bon Jour Mademoiselle, do you need a ride?”

-God the French have a way with words-

Rontanga – 0830, Monday, August 19th, 1974

As we approached the island I could see the airport. On one side of the single runway was a small terminal with several commercial jets parked on the ramp. On the other was the French Air Force base. I could see a few grey helicopters like the one that we were flying and a couple of four engine military transports that I recognized as the C-130 Hercules. Except for the round red-white-and-blue emblems on the wing, they were the same airplane that the California National Guard flew from Van Nuys airport back home.

We landed near the operations building and an ambulance and several French officers met us. A young lieutenant looking very dapper in his powder blue coveralls came to attention and gave one of those casual open-hand salutes that looked so very European.

“Welcome to Rontanga” he said in French but when he heard my high-school French reply he switch to English. I suppose that he thought that Greg was the pilot because he directed his questions to him.

“Sir, the radio communication was very poor so we don’t know where you were flying from. Can you enlighten us?”

Greg and I knew that we looked like two Hobo’s that just fell off of a boxcar but Aussies never stand on formality so he stuck his hand out and introduced us.

“Hello, I’m Gregory Allenby from Accord Hotels and this in Miss Lara Lee from Los Angles. I’m the passenger and she’s the pilot. We are survivors of the tsunami that struck the island of Tapu Vana on the night of July 14th and we have come a long way to find help for the others that are still there”

The officer looked confused.

“You say that you flew here from the Vana Islands? How did you fly over two thousand kilometers in such a small plane?”

Greg looked very impatient but smiled as he said,

“We flapped our god-damned arms. How the hell do you think that we did it ... Mate?”

We were saved from further embarrassment when a jeep arrived with a passenger wearing the flight suit of a pilot. He quickly introduced himself and with no questions he put us into the ambulance and off we went to the med-center.

A doctor examined me and found nothing wrong except malnutrition. While I was standing there in my little paper exam gown I stepped on the scales. I weighed one hundred and seven pounds. Just five weeks before I had weighed one hundred and twenty pounds. At that time I thought that I could probably lose five pounds if I seriously dieted but I had lost thirteen pounds, five of fat and eight of mussel. No wonder I had trouble climbing the stairs back on the island.

The doctor had me dress in my rags and he handed me off to a nurse who escorted me to a private room where I took a very long and very hot shower. When I came out of the bathroom, there was fresh underwear, socks and a pair of powder-blue coveralls like the lieutenant had worn. When I dressed I found that the underpants weren't the usual panties that I had worn all of my life. They were silk French knickers with loose legs and they were so elegant that I could hardly stand it. There were no shoes and while I was looking under the bed for something to put on my feet the nurse came in.

"Do you feel better?" she asked in accented English.

"Yes Thank you but I can't find any shoes"

"That's because I knew that we didn't wear the same size. I have always worn very small shoes"

"So this is your room?"

"Yes, I though that you needed to clean-up and I knew that you had no other clothes. These are mine"

I was really impressed by her hospitality.

"Where can I get shoes?"

"Put on my slippers and we will walk to the Base Exchange and then the Capitan wants' to see you. Do you have any money?"

"Yes, in my bag where ever that is"

Captain Louis Renault

I felt almost human again when I knocked on the Captain's door.

"Entree"

"Bon Jour Mon Capitaine, Mon nom est Lara Lee de California"

"Thank you for using my language but we can speak English if that's more convenient"

"Oh thank you, I know that my French is poor"

Greg wasn't there and he motioned me to a chair.

"Your friend will be here soon. My Lieutenant tells me that you flew a Cherokee-six here from the Vana islands. Is that right?"

"Well I tried to fly it here but I fell sixty miles short. Greg and I are survivors of the tsunami that destroyed most of Tapu Vana on the night of July 14th. We believe that it was caused by an eruption of the volcano on Lano Vana but you would probably know more about that than we do.

The Royal hotel on the island was nearly destroyed and there were just twenty survivors. We waited for rescue and none came. I believe that there is an error in the charts of the area that mistakenly identifies the island of Tapo Vana as our island.

All of the survivors are starving including Greg and me. The Cherokee was there and I am a pilot. I knew that Rontanga was a long shot but we were going to die soon unless something was done, so here I am”

“A remarkable feat of airmanship Miss Lee. Frankly, without long distance navigation equipment I would have thought that your flight was impossible. I was the pilot on several flights that searched the Vana islands for survivors a month ago. I’m sad to tell you that we found none. Lano Vana was completely destroyed by the explosion that now they are saying it’s the largest since the island of Krakatau in Indonesian was obliterated by a volcanic explosion in the 1800.

We flew over what we thought was Tapu Vana and saw the wreckage of a large building but we saw no signs of life and no heat signatures on the infer-red equipment. The Navy sent a ship to Lano Vana but the volcanic gases were still so strong that no one could have lived through it. We will, of course, send a rescue party immediately if you will show us where the island is on our charts”

“There is a 5000 feet long runway on the island. We could fly there today in one of your C-130’s”

The Captain looked at his watch.

“It is a bit late to go today. The flight will take about three hours and I’m sure that it will take some time to get the survivors together and on the plane. We will take a doctor with us and some of your people will probably need treating before we leave. I think that a better plan is to leave here at 0400-tomorrow morning and arrive over the island just after dawn. That way we can stay there for most of the day if necessary”

“I have to go with you”

“And why is that?”

“I have a walky-talky that I can use to talk to the hotel manager. If there’s cloud cover, by talking to her I can determine the ceiling, visibility, wind direction and speed. She can’t tell you that the wind is out of the west at sixteen or that the cloud base is twelve hundred feet. I can tell you by what she tells me”

“Will your friend also want to go”?

“I don’t know, you will have to asked him”

“Hmm ... well we will go in the morning and he can accompany us if he wishes. Now, I have arranged rooms for the two of you in the Bachelor Officers Quarters and the Colonel has asked you to join him for dinner tonight if you are not too tired.

Captain Renault and I were having a light lunch in the Officers club when Greg arrived.

“Sorry I’m late. I telephoned home and I couldn’t get my family off of the phone. I understand that we are going to the rescue tomorrow morning”

“Yes if you don’t have anything better to do” I said and then immediately regretted it.

-Why was I so hostile to Greg? He did everything in his power to keep me safe and now I went out of my way to hurt him. I think that we probably just need a break from each other-

After lunch Greg and I walked to the BOQ but a strange sight interrupted us. We heard the thump-thump-thump of a helicopter and when we looked up there was N9009-Juliet dangling from a sling. Perhaps it was appropriate that as the helicopter was lowering the Cherokee towards the ground it was moving tail first. It had arrived on Rontanga flying backwards.

It seemed strange to be alone in the room at the BOQ. In the last month about the only time that I had been by myself was in the bathroom. Now, sitting in my room alone, I couldn’t decide if I liked it or not. I wished that Susan was there with me, and that brought a little tear to my eye but I quickly got over it.

I picked up the telephone and in my best high-school French asked about placing a call to the United States. After several attempts to give the operator my credit card number the phone at my patents home was ringing.

“Hello, you have reached the home of

It was the answering machine.

“Mom, dad, it’s me I’m on the island of Rontanga and I’m ok. I’ve got some stuff to do tomorrow but I’ll call tomorrow night. I don’t know what the time difference is so it might be late. I love you ... I’m ok ... I love you ... all of you ... ok, bye”

Fifteen minutes of fame

That afternoon I got a call that said a French newspaper reporter wanted to talk to Greg and me. We met at the hanger where N9009-Juliet sat looking very forlorn and the reporter took several pictures of Greg and me and the airplane. In one we were standing by the bent propeller. In another I was in front of the wing and Greg was getting into the cockpit. The last was of me sitting in the co-pilot’s seat with Greg in the back leaning over my shoulder. When that was done he conducted an interview in his very poor English.

“So Monsieur, you are the pilot ... no?”

“Miss Lee was the pilot,” Greg answered.
“And what did you do on the trip?”
“I helped Miss Lee”
“So you fly the aeroplane also”
“Only a little”
“Did you sleep?”
“I didn’t but Miss Lee took a nap”
“So you did fly the aeroplane”
“No, the auto-pilot flew and I watched to make sure that it was ok”
“You have an automatic pilot? So Miss Lee didn’t need to fly?”
“Yes she did, the auto-pilot was just to help her”
“But you said that you watched the automatic pilot”

These words of confusion continued for a while and finally he was satisfied. He turned to Greg and said,

“Merci Monsieur” he said shaking Greg’s hand and he nodded to me as he walked away.

“So what was that all about?” I asked.
“Beats hell out of me and right now, I don’t care”

Those were my thoughts exactly.

Before we could walk away a French Sergeant came to us.
“You are the pilots?”
“Yes”
“I found something strange”

He showed us an eight-inch chief’s knife.

“It was wedged down inside of the back-door”

Colonel Russo

The commanding officer was very gallant and very French. When we were introduced he kissed me on both cheeks and then he kissed Greg on both cheeks and then he kissed my hand. I thought that it was great fun but Greg looked cross. His English was very correct but he sounded like an actor with his zee’s and zat’s. When he was seated beside me he asked,

“So you are Mademoiselle Lara Lee. I know your father”

-What? -

“You are a very lucky girl to have a father who cares so much for you. When the disaster struck the Vana islands he called me every day to see if you had been found. Within a week he was here demanding that we send a ship to search the waters. After we found nothing from the air, he chartered a plane and did his own search. We became quite good friends. I believe that he’s in Papeete now arranging for a large sailboat to take him to the search area. If you like, I can give you the number of his hotel?”

The South Pacific – 0530, Tuesday, August 20th, 1974 – Rescue day

Lara

I was sitting in the navigator’s cubbyhole with a very nice young man and we were going over the charts for the 10th time. It was still dark outside but from this altitude the sky in the east was turning pink. The navigator was explaining his long-range navigation system to me. I had read about LORAN (LONg RANge Navigation) but I had never seen one. It had some great features and we were going to use some of them this morning. The one that was the handiest was the waypoint. You could just push a button and your exact location on earth was recorded and given a name, like way-point-15. Then at anytime you could set a course from anywhere to that waypoint and the LORAN would guide you back to the right place.

“Alright Miss Lee, here is the waypoint for the airport at Lano Vana or at least where the airport used to be. When we get there, we will fly the course that you’ve marked on our chart. That’s 98 miles on a heading of 291 degrees. That will put us exactly over Tapu Vana airport. Ok?”

“And you will be at what altitude?” I asked him.

“Four thousand feet or just above the clouds if necessary”

“Right, how much longer?”

He turned a knob on the LORAN and said,

“Twelve minutes to Lano Vana”

I had my nose to the window and it was light enough to see and there was a solid deck of clouds below us. We were flying just above the clouds and the navigator was calling out the distance to me. My walky-talky had a range of about four miles or maybe just a little more because of our altitude.

“Nine miles”

“Susan, can you hear me?”

“Eight miles”

“Susan come inSusan”

I heard nothing and at one mile I told the pilot to open the throttle and wake them up. We continued for four more minutes and then turned back on the reverse course.

“Six miles”

“Susan, come in”

“Five miles”

“Susan are you there”

“Lara I’m here ... oh god ... LARA!!! I’M HERE”

“Listen honey, get on the roof and we’ll come back. You need to tell me if we are to the left or to the right of you or straight up ... back in five minutes”

We made that pass and the navigator made a new waypoint that was just south of the original course. One more pass and we had Susan directly below us and then I asked one more question.

“Susan, look at the mountain peak. Are the clouds close to it”?

“The top of the peak is below the clouds”

“It is it a long way below?”

“It’s not really close. You won’t have any trouble flying under it”

The pilot went away from the island for several minutes and then came around to the heading for the airport. He slowed the plane and descended into the clouds but he told me that he wouldn’t go lower than one thousand feet above the water. At thirteen hundred feet we came out into the clear and, looking over the pilots shoulder, I could see the airport four miles ahead and five hundred feet below. The landing was smooth and routine. He rolled to the end of the runway and taxied back to the hanger. When he killed the engines he stood and smiled at me.

“Welcome to Tapu Vana Mademoiselle. Good job”

The big ramp in the back of the C-130 was lowered and four all terrene vehicles were rolled off of the plane. These would be used to bring the survivors up to the airport. Greg and I walked down the ramp in our spiffy looking power blue coveralls and we saw his work cart coming towards us with Sammy and Susan in the front and two men in back.

The first one off the cart was Ben Roberts and he enthusiastically shook Greg’s hand.

“Great job Allenby I knew that you could do it”

He turned to me and extended his hand,

“I’m Ben Roberts and we are really glad to see you!”

-He didn’t recognize me-

Susan rushed up and hugged me with Sammy joining in. It was then that Ben and Tony Gonzales realize who I was.

“I’m, sorry Miss Lee, you look different in clean clothes, if you know what I mean”

“That ok Mr. Roberts, in a few hours I won’t recognize you either”

It took a long time to get everyone on board. The first priority was to feed everyone but that made a couple of them sick. One of the women was near tears because she couldn't find her make-up. Dr. Howard kept counting his yellow legal pads with all of his writing and he never was sure that he had them all. When Sam Sheppard boarded the plane he wouldn't look at me.

For a while it was thought some one was missing and it took a while for the doctors to do the quick exams. Finally everyone was on board but before the ramp was raised Sammy told Greg that the Generator at the hotel was still running. Greg laughed and assured him that it would be ok.

When we were all seated, in the fold-down seats along the walls of the big plane, everyone was in their proper place. The East Group was clustered around Ben Roberts and a few seats away the West Group was clustered around Tony Gonzales. Greg, Sammy, Susan and I were together and by himself in the back, Dr. Howard was scribbling on his legal pad.

I had spent most of my time at the hotel in my room or Susan's room or gathering firewood or digging clams and I really didn't know most of these people. The only one that I ever talked to was Maryanne Clark so the rest of them were strangers to me.

I had always bought into Sam Sheppard's theory that the survivor's would divide themselves into two gangs that would be run by the strongest men in the group. From what I had seen from a distance, that is what had happened. Sheppard had said that food; shelter and women were the driving force and that looked true to me. Ben Roberts seemed to have his own harem of three women. They all seemed affectionate towards him and it looked to me like they were competing for his attention. I wasn't so sure about Tony's group. When I asked Maryanne about it she said that what went on in private was none of her business.

That's not what I saw on the airplane.

Each group clung together. Ben sat in the middle and the women in his group sat tight against him. The older woman was on one side and the two younger ones were on the other. The men were just as close to the women in their seats along the side of the plane.

It was the same with the west group. Tony was in the center with girls on both sides and the rest leaned against them. They looked more like close families than the gangs that Sam Sheppard had described.

This bothered me and I thought about it all the way back to the air base. If I had been wrong then perhaps I would have been more willing to associate with the others. I was afraid of these gangs and they didn't know me at all. I didn't like the idea that I had isolated myself from the others and I knew that it was too late to do anything about it.

The Rontanga Celebration– Noon, Tuesday, August 20th, 1974

Lara

At noon we landed at the French Air Base there was a great feeling of relief for the survivors. They now could believe that it was over. All of the pain and anguish, the hunger and the desperation was finally gone. We could see a crowd through the plane's windows but I didn't expect the welcome that we got.

There were cameras flashing and people waving. I guess that the News Services were trying to get pictures and interviews because there were lots of people with microphones. Several executives from Royal Hotels were there along with several high-ranking officers from the French Military. The only thing that meant anything to me was the man at the foot of the stairway. It was my dad.

“Welcome back honey”

“Oh daddy, I knew that you would come for me. I waited and waited but the food was running short and I was afraid that some of the people wouldn't make it. I know that it was a bad thing to do... to fly all that way but I didn't know what else to do. Don't be mad daddy, but I really needed to see you and ... and ... is mom here ... did I pass the Bar exam ... oh daddy I love you so much...”

“You did a great job honey ... mom's flying from LA to Tahiti right now ... now lets get you to your room so you can rest”

Homeward bound ... a little at a time

I thought that we would all stay on Rontanga that night but I was wrong. The Royal Hotel people had arranged a chartered flight to Tahiti late that afternoon and a bus was waiting to take us to the hotel. What a rag-tag band of hobo's what must we have looked like as we drove along the edge of the bay that was in front of the Royal Hotel Papeete. We could see the hotel across the bay and the bus was filled with laughter for a while and then it fell silent. There were murmurs and whispers when we all realized that the hotel looked very much like the one that we had left in ruins on the beach at Tapu Vana. Greg was sitting behind dad and me when he leaned forward and said,

“There are seven Royal Hotels that were built on that same floor plan. It's a little spooky to look at it now”

I couldn't take my eyes off of it and bad memories started coming back. I guess that it was the same for the others because by the time we arrived there was complete silence on the bus. Things got stranger yet when we were taken up the elevator to the third floor ballroom but we had a nice surprise there.

There were tables of clothes and shoes. There were toothbrushes and razors and combs and deodorant and all of the things that we had missed for a while. We were each given a

Nike warm-up suit and a pair of sneakers. There was fresh, new underwear, socks and t-shirts. Everyone received a carry bag that said 'Royal Hotel' on it. On the next table were twenty room keys and a sign-up sheet where we wrote our name and room number.

The first sign of reality was another sign-up sheet for those without passports. They would have to wait a few days before they could fly home and Sammy and Susan were on that list.

Dad helped me settle into my room and then he left to book his room. I asked him to stay with me but he wanted a room for him and mom when she arrived. He told me to take a nap and he would be back at 6:30 to take me to dinner. About 6:00 there was a knock on the door and when I answered it was Greg. He had showered and shaved and he looked a little apprehensive. I hugged him and asked him in. I knew that I hadn't been very nice to him for a couple of days but I was getting over it.

"Hey you clean up really well. Now if you had a haircut and some tan where your beard used to be no one would ever know that you had been stranded on a desert island"

"I could say that same for you Skinny-Minnie, where's your dad?"

"He's in his room. He'll be here soon. What's up?"

"Honey ... Lara, I'm flying to Sydney tonight and I came by to say goodbye"

-Don't leave,.. it's too soon-

"Well ... I ... I guess that I knew that you would go home ... I just hadn't thought about it ... so ... will you call me?"

"Of course I'll call Lara ... I just need to get my head straight and recuperate from everything"

We exchanged home phone numbers and sat together on the sofa.

"When do you leave, do you want me to go to the airport with you?"

"The taxi will be here in twenty minutes and you should stay here with your dad"

"I'll go if you want me to"

"Of course I want you to but it's better if you stay here"

We sat on the sofa and cuddled for a while. We didn't say anything and I know that we were both wondering where our relationship was going. I kissed him and things started to get out of hand when there was a knock on the door.

"There's your dad, I need to be going"

"No just stay for a minute"

I opened the door and there was my mom. We hugged and tears were shed. Neither of us could talk and finally dad was holding us both. Then I remembered Greg but he was gone. He had left without saying goodbye. I wanted to go after him but I couldn't leave

mom and dad. I had his phone number and I thought that I would call him as soon as I got to LA.

California calling- Wednesday, August 21st, 1974

Lara

The next morning everyone except Susan, Sammy, Ann Barlow and Jerry Wilson were flying to Los Angeles on a chartered jet. We were to board the bus to the airport at 10:00 so I called Susan at 8:00 and asked her to have breakfast with me.

“Good morning skinny-girl, you look like you need lots of pan-cakes” I joked.

“I don’t think of it as skinny, I think of it as trim”

“Oh yea, very trim. Did you weight yourself yet?”

“Yes and it’s your fault. If you had dug more clams I wouldn’t have wasted away to ninety-four pounds”

“My god Susan, how much did you weight before?”

“Before what, puberty?”

“No before the ... you know”

“One-ten ... or one-nine ... I’m sure that it was at least one-oh-eight”

“You don’t know do you?”

“No, it’s never enough to give me any figure so what does it matter”

“I’m sorry that you’re not flying with us today. I’m going to miss you”

“Yea, me too but I have Sammy to pester me”

“Is that a good thing?”

“I don’t know. He’s pissed at me because I wouldn’t let him sleep in my room and I didn’t have dinner with him last night”

“Where did you eat?”

“Room service. I told them to send anything that didn’t have vegetables or clams in it. I had pork with salad and rice. Do you know that we didn’t have a bite of pork for the whole time that we were ... there?”

“I’m not sure, we had those little cocktail wieners, and they were made of something that might have been pork”

“Bullshit, they were mystery meat”

“What did you have for desert?”

“Are you kidding, I had two pounds of Cadburys chocolate” she said with a smile.

“I had dinner with mom and dad. They’ve already left for their flight to LA and they’ll be there when we arrive. Greg left of Australia last night.”

“How do you feel about that?”

“Bad and good ... who knows ...”?

Susan got the hint to change the subject.

“How did you sleep?” She asked.

“Not well. I dreamed about ... you know”

“You can’t say it either”

“Yes I can ... I just don’t”

“Yea, me too. I just don’t want to talk about it and that’s all Sammy wants to talk about, maybe that’s why I don’t want to see him just now”

This time I changed the subject because I didn’t want to remember the island.

“Have you talked to Royal about your job?”

“Yes and they’ve been very fair. They gave me a thirty-day recuperation leave with pay and asked me to submit a request for my next assignment”

“So where would you like to work? Are you going back to San Francisco?”

“No, at least not to live. I thought that I might try LA”

“Oh please do, you can stay with me until you’re settled”

“Well, I’m going to stay with mom and dad for a while and then I’ll call you. After you get back to the real world you may not want a reminder of ... of Tapu Vana. See I can say it”

“You’re a silly girl and I love you, in a plutonic way of course”

“Of course”

The flight home was very comfortable. There were just fifteen of us on a United DC-8 so we had plenty of room. As soon as the Captain turned off the seat-belt sign everyone was up in the aisle and it was a much happier group than the one that boarded the rescue plane two days before.

I sat in the front row of first-class and Sam Sheppard sat a few rows away. Several times he tried to talk to me but all that I saw was the man threatening my airplane and me with a knife, the very knife that was in my baggage right now. He had a bandage across his broken nose and two black eyes but I had absolutely no sympathy for him. If Sammy had killed him it wouldn’t have bothered me in the least.

After a while Rosemary Clark came to visit.

“Aren’t you lonely up here by yourself? Come back and sit with us” She said showing the effects of the two glasses of wine that she had already put away.

“I’m ok, maybe I’ll be back in a bit”

“Lara, I confused about your flight to Rontanga. Did you fly the plane or did Greg Allenby fly?”

“I did, Greg’s not a pilot but he did help me with stuff on the flight. So why are you confused?”

“Well, because of the story in the newspaper”

“What story and what newspaper?”

“The paper that was under my door at the hotel this morning, didn’t you read it?”

“No, thought that it was in French so I tossed it in the trash. What did it say?”

Sam Sheppard came up behind Maryanne and said,

“Here Rosemary, you can have my copy”

She smiled and thanked him and I didn't look at him. The story was on page three and there was the picture of Greg and me standing by the bent propeller of the Cherokee.

Tahitian Times

Tsunami survivors fly small plane to safety

Rontanga - August 21st

Authorities on this southern island were surprised yesterday by the arrival of a single engine airplane from the island of Tapu Vana. The pilot and his passenger were survivors of the deadly tsunami that nearly destroyed the island on July 15th of this year. It was thought that all inhabitants of the Vana Islands had perished in the volcanic eruption and tidal wave that destroyed Lano Vana. French Air Force officials were at a loss to explain how their search failed to find the twenty survivors who have been marooned for the last five weeks.

The planes pilot, Gregory Allenby 31, of Sydney Australia and his passenger, Lara Lee 25, of Los Angeles California were in fair condition although both were suffering from malnutrition. Allenby said that the long flight was only made possible by the use of an automatic-pilot instrument that they used to find Rontanga.

I read the article and I was astonished that the reporter could have written everything so wrong.

“This is a load of crap! The goddamned reporter hardly spoke English and he just made most of this up. He assumed the Greg was the pilot because he was a man. He asked Greg all of the questions and hardly looked at me. Greg told him exactly what happened but I guess that story wasn't what he wanted to hear”

Maryanne was a little shocked at my reaction but she understood my frustration.

“Come to the back with me Lara and let's drink a lot of wine and tell a few jokes. Everyone back there wants to meet you”

“Thanks Rosemary but let me just sit here and be pissed for a while. I'll come back soon”

She left me alone but that didn't last very long. A woman that I didn't know, and Ann, the cocktail waitress walked up to visit.

“Lara, I’m Juanita Rodriguez and this is Ann Barlow. We really want to thank you for what you did for us. You were so brave to fly so far to bring help to us”

“Thank you Juanita, I remember Ann from the first day in the ballroom. You work for Royal Hotels I think”

She looked a little weary and then smiled.

“Yes I met you at the Professor’s meeting. We sat together at the head table”

Now I knew why she had looked a little worried. She remembered that I knew what she had been doing in the guest rooms after midnight.

Juanita sat next to me and Ann sat across the aisle. The both had glasses of white wine with them and Ann offered to bring me one.

“Thanks Ann, maybe in a while”

“I’m sorry that we didn’t meet on the island” Juanita said.

“Me too but we were so isolated from each other with me living on the fourth floor and you two being in the West ... group”

Juanita laughed,

“You were going to say the West gang ... that what Sam called us. He has some cockamamie theory about gangs. We were more like a family than a gang”

“Did you know Tony before you came to the island?”

“Yes, he brought me and two others guys with him”

“Are you ‘friends’?”

“Yes but not that kind of friend. My ‘friend’ stayed home in LA because he had to work. I’m Tony’s paralegal and, as a reward for a very good business year and a very bad personal year, he brought me and two associate attorneys to the island for a vacation”

I was getting a little confused, were the other two guys in the West group?

“Did you all make it through the ... that night?” I asked.

“No, just Tony and me, Ron and Bill were on the beach that night”

She wiped a little tear from her eye and I put my hand on her arm.

“I’m sorry”

“Yea, me too, why don’t you come back and sit with us Lara. It’s not good to be alone right now?”

“I’ll come soon, Ok?”

“Ok, here is my phone number in LA. Call me if you want to talk”

We stood and she hugged me and walked away.

Ann stayed and waited until we were alone. Sam had given up on talking to me and he was gone.

“Miss Lee, I want to explain why I was in the guest area that night”

“You don’t need to explain anything. It’s your business ... you know ... consenting adults and all of that ...”

“I do need to explain. I nearly did something that I’m ashamed of and I want to tell some one”

I had enough demons of my own to deal with but she was so upset that I listened.

“What happened Ann?”

“I took the yearlong job so I could save money. I have a three-year-old daughter living in Phoenix with my mother and the only way that we could get a place of our own was to do this. Guests often give me tips even though the drinks and snack’s are free. That night Sam Sheppard flirted with me and finally he gave me a big tip.

A few minutes before I got off work at midnight he gave me a fifty-dollar bill and asked if I would come to his room for a drink and some conversation. I knew what he wanted and I told him that we weren’t allowed in the guest rooms but he said that no one would know and he was a very generous man. Oh Miss Lee, I did a terrible thing. I agreed to go with him and I rationalized that we were just going to talk of maybe make out a little. I know now that I was taking a step towards being a whore”

She stopped to cry a little and then continued,

“When we were walking upstairs, because I didn’t want to be seen in the elevator, he changed. He started talking dirty and touching me. A couple of times he slapped my butt really hard and he sacred me. When we were at his door I told him that I had changed my mind and I walked away. He called me some really dirty names and threatened to tell the hotel manager that I had offered his sex for money. I was afraid that he was going to hurt me when a guy came out of the elevator. Sam went into his room and closed the door. The guy in the hallway was Jerry Wilson”

“Jerry told Susan that day in the ballroom that he had been in bed with a guest. Was he alone?” I asked.

“Jerry had a key to a guest’s room but she wasn’t there. I went to him because I was afraid that Sam would come after me and he unlocked room 318 and pulled me inside. Jerry and I knew each other and we had flirted and danced together at dungeon parties but nothing more. I asked him what he was doing there and he laughed a little. He said that a guest had sent him to her room to get something”

Jerry was a social director and they are allowed to mingle with the guests. He was expected to dance with any lady who wanted to dance and he could have drinks with them but he wasn’t supposed to be in their rooms. I asked what she sent him for and he laughed again. He looked in the dresser drawers and the nightstand. I asked if she had sent him why she hadn’t told him where he was supposed to look.

Well he found what he was looking for. It was a baggie of marijuana that was hidden in her make-up bag. There were four joints already rolled and he lit one. He offered me one and we lay on her bed and smoked them. The real story was this lady and a guy from the second floor were dancing and flirting and nearly making love on the dance floor. Jerry heard the guy ask her to go to his room and she asked if he wanted some marijuana. The guy said that he had some and they left a few minutes before one am. After they were gone, Jerry found her room key on the floor under the table and decided to help himself to her marijuana. We were both a little high and were fooling around on her bed when the wave hit. Miss Lee, I made some bad decisions that night but nothing really happened”

She seemed relieved to have told me her story and I had no idea why she picked me but I was glad to help, I guess.

“Ann, your going be alright, you made some mistakes that night but nothing happened. How about the rest of the time on the island, did you and Jerry get together or were there other men that you were with?”

I knew that I was asking things that I didn’t need to know but curiosity does strange things to a person.

“No, not that I wouldn’t have like a man to take care of me but I was never really alone with anyone. Later I was too tired and dirty and my only thoughts were how hungry and miserable I was. Right now, I don’t think that I would ever want to see any of these guys again”

“Ok Ann, here’s my phone number if you ever want to talk and please stop calling me Miss Lee. My name is Lara, Ok?”

“Ok Lara and thanks”

Meet the family

Lara

I walked into the back cabin and I was embarrassed by applause from everyone. Well nearly everyone. Dr. Howard never looked up from his writing. The first to greet me was Ben Roberts who offered his hand and then thought better of it and hugged me.

“Lara, I really want to thank you for your heroic flight. I’m sorry that I didn’t recognize you on the rescue plane but I recognize you now. Come and meet my family”

-Family, do you mean your harem? -

We walked to the seats where the women from the East group were sitting.

“Lara, this is my mother, Shirley Bolter”

-Mother? I thought that she was some older girlfriend-

“It’s nice to meet you Mrs. Bolter” I said.

“Likewise but call me Shirley. This is my daughter Emily and my daughter-in-law Jenna Myers ... Jenna Myers-Roberts”

I was shocked that they were all family. I had Ben pegged as a philanderer who liked his women in bunches but now I saw him in a different light. I had heard the story of his trade of a fishing rod to Tony for Emily Marks but now I was confused. I had heard her say to Ben that ‘It was all his fault’ and I knew that she had gone to the West group. Now it made sense. Her husband, Ben’s brother-in-law had died that night and somehow she thought that it was Bens fault.

I chatted with the ladies for a few minutes and Jenna handed me a glass of white wine. Except for Emily they were all in a good mood and were ready to return to Seattle. Emily was quiet but considering what she had been through I couldn’t blame her. When I stood to leave Ben walked with me to the back of the plane.

“Ben, was your sisters husband with your group?”

“Yes Lara and we had an argument that night. When we all came upstairs just before one am, he stayed so he could cool off. Emily was pissed at him and she came up with us. That was just before the wave hit”

“I’m so sorry Ben. I didn’t know. What about Jenna’s husband?”

“My brother Don’s back in King Salmon watching the store but he’ll be at the LA airport tomorrow morning”

“That’s a blessing”

“Lara, are you and Greg Allenby still ... together?”

“Who knows? The world is different now”

“Well I hope that it works out for you. Here, let me give you my phone number. Call me if there is anything that I can do for you”

He hugged me and kissed me on the cheek and then returned to what I know now is his loving family.

For the next hour I drank wine and chatted with everyone except Sam Sheppard. By this time he was avoiding me so if I was in the back of the plane he was in the front. Even Dr. Howard had a few words for me and he wished me luck on the California Bar Exam.

The interview

My last visit was with Tony Gonzales. We sat alone in the first-class cabin and he paid me perhaps my best complement,

“You’re a tough kid Lara, most people would have just folded up and waited for the end but you did something. I talked to that French Air Force guy and he said that you and Allenby should have died on that flight. You’re a smart cookie so I know that you were aware of the risk but you went anyway. If I’m ever in a knife fight I want you on my side”

-Damn ... this guy's got a way with words ... I wonder how he really feels-

“Thanks Mr. Gonzales. I did my best and it paid off. Greg helped but still we were lucky. It means a lot to me for you to say these things”

“Look, I hear that you took the California Bar before you left for the island. The results are out in a few days, how do you think that you did?”

“I passed”

“No bullshit, how do you know that?”

“I know, I was ready and I did my best so I passed”

“Good girl, do you have a job?”

“I think so. I interned for Barns and Slitter for the last two years and I’m sure they’ll offer me a job”

“Yea, so you want to work in an office with fifty other lawyers all doing high priced divorces? I would have thought that you would have wanted more”

A flight attendant came by with a basket of those little bottles of booze and Tony took two plastic glasses with ice and four little bottles of Jack Daniels sour-mash whiskey. Without asking he poured a double for both of us and since I was already a little buzzed from the wine I figured that the whiskey would be a good thing. After we both sipped our drinks he continued,

“Look Lara, I saw you with your parents at the hotel last night. I’ve lived in LA all of my life and you may think that I’m a low-life gang-banger but I know who people are. I read all of the LA Times everyday and I know that your dad is Larry Lee as in Laurence Lee Enterprises and Larry Lee – Home Builders. I’ve read a lot about him in the business

section. I've read about your mom too in the society pages. She's the one with all of those named that start with 'L'”

“Yes, her name is Laska Lara Langtree Lee”

“That's right, I like the name 'Laska' ... I don't think that I've ever heard it before. Anyway I read that during the war she inherited a lot of money but she spent the war building dive-bombers because it was the right thing to do. So Lara I know that you aren't taking a job at a divorce factory because you need the money. Let me ask a personnel question. Are you smart?”

-Damn this guys like the Aussies, he just says that first thing that pops into his mind-

“Well Mr. Gonzales, I thought I was but maybe I'm not as smart as the average low-life gang-banger”

He laughed and took a big sip of his whisky.

“You know that your cute for a white girl. I guess that I was like you once. I grew up in Boil Heights in East LA and I was on the fringe of the gangs. I was lucky that my mother married a good guy that moved us to the south bay. We stilled lived in a Mexican neighborhood but it was more civilized than the old place. I was lucky again when I had some teachers that weren't just going through the motions and luckier still when I was arrested for fighting and a good judge told me to join the marines or go to jail.

When I didn't die in Korea I went to school on the GI Bill and got a degree from LA State. You went to law school at USC and I went to LA-Western. I was lucky again when a big firm wanted a token brown face in their all white stable of young lawyers. They paid me a lot of money and I had a new car and an apartment in West LA. I wasn't the only Latino in the neighborhood. There were gardeners and pool cleaners and of course nannies and maids, so you see, I fit right in.

So I was the success story. I had risen above my lowly roots, I was educated and living the American Dream. All I had to do was marry the girl next door and have a cocker spaniel and 2.1 beautiful children. I dated lots of pretty white girls from UCLA and I was on the right 'team' at the law firm and I hated it. I had sold out and I was ashamed of myself.

I quit the firm and moved back to the south bay. I did marry the girl next door and I opened a storefront law office on Torrance Boulevard. My clients were my neighbors who were being evicted from their apartments so the landlord from West-LA could convert the building to condos. They were poor Mexicans who had signed a contract for a used car that was worthless and the dealer still wanted his money. They were maids and nannies that were cheated out of their wages or worse. One girl had to sleep with her boss just to keep the honor of sleeping in his attic and cleaning his house. I was very good at

what I did and my poor Mexican neighbors never had to pay me. The fat cats that we sued were given that honor and I made them pay through the nose.

Things were going pretty well for me. I hired some associates who felt the way that I did and my wonderful wife Rosita, blessed me with a fine son and a beautiful daughter”
I noticed that when he said the name of his wife, Rosita, he crossed himself. Catholics only do that when they say the name of someone who has passed on.

He continued without really looking at me. I wasn’t sure that he was still talking to me,

“Everything was wonderful but my streak of luck ran out fourteen months ago when the angles came and took my Rosy”

He crossed himself again. We sat for a long time saying nothing. Finally I had to say something,

“Tony, I’m so sorry”

He looked up with a little surprise and realized where we were.

“Thank you Lara. Rosita is gone and she made me promise that I would get on with my life and that someday I would find a new mother for our children. So that’s enough about me. Tell me about yourself”

-Is this a job interview? -

“Well I grew up in Redondo Beach in the house where my dad grew up. My parents may be well off but they didn’t cut me or my brother any slack. We went to public school and we always had after-school and summer jobs. My Uncle Chris is chief of detectives for the Redondo police department. My Uncle Bobby is a lawyer with an office in San Pedro. I went to USC because my dad and my brother went there and now I’m not sure about Barns and Slitter”

“Your uncle’s a lawyer in south bay, what’s his name?”

“Roberto Ortiz”

“Bobby Ortiz? You’re his niece? I didn’t realize that you had Spanish blood”

“Well I don’t really, he and Aunt Maria are as much a part of my family as my parents and brother but we’re not related by blood”

“That to bad, Bobby Ortiz has grit. If you had any Latin blood I might consider you for the new mother for my children but I don’t suppose that you speak Spanish”

“Of course I speak Spanish, both kinds, Castilian from Spain and Mexicano from California”

Again he looked at me for a while and then he said,

“Look Lara, you are going to do what you do but let me give you two thoughts. You did a brave thing on the island but I believe you did some things that you are not proud of. You relied on Greg Allenby to take care of you when you could have taken care of yourself. You isolated yourself from the rest of us when you should have been with us. I think that you regret this and I’m sure that you will deal with it in your own way”

-How did he know that? Is it that obvious to everyone? Is it that obvious to mom and dad? -

“So here’s my last advice to you young lady, look life in the eye, do your best to help others, break the bread, drink the wine and be somebody”

He stood and found his mildewed wallet and took a yellowed card from it and handed it to me.

“Here is my office number. I’ve lost two associates to that goddamned island and I need to replace them. Call me if you want to be somebody”

We shook hands and I kissed him on the cheek. He had just turned my life upside-down.

Home again – home again – LAX - Wednesday, August 22nd, 1974

Lara

The flight home ended with hugs and kisses from mom and dad, my brother Luke and his fiancé Angie, my Uncle Chris and Aunt Ginny, Uncle Bobby and Aunt Maria and all of my cousins.

Everyone wanted to feed me and to hear my story. They didn't ask about the island but I knew that they wanted to. The only person that I ever told much of the story to was my brother Luke because since we were little kids I could always tell him my secrets. Sometimes he didn't like what he heard but he always listened and he was always on my side. There were things that I didn't have to tell him and he just knew.

He knew how scared I was on the flight to Rontanga. He knew the shock of suddenly losing a friend. For him it hadn't been a volcano, it was his year in Vietnam and he had suffered the same withdrawal pains that I was feeling.

I stayed in my room at the house on the cliff with mom and dad for a few days but I wasn't very comfortable. For one thing, I didn't get much time alone. They meant well but they were doing more harm than good. I told my dad that I was going to find a place of my own and he had an immediate solution. Larry Lee – Home Builders maintained a two-bedroom condominium at the King Harbor Marina. It was used to entertain visiting clients but he wanted me to take it for as long as I needed it.

I supposed I could have been all grown up and independent and found a place on my own but I took his offer in a heartbeat. The place was beautiful with gracious furnishings and a wonderful view. It was on the third floor with a view of the boats and the ocean. I suppose that if I used binoculars I could see the Palo Verdi house from the balcony. The best part was I could be alone and away from all of those curious people.

I moved my things into the condo in September 7th and I really enjoyed the solitude. The first day I laid on the lounge on the balcony and read a romance novel. In the evening I watched some TV and I was sure that I would get my first really good nights sleep since before the tsunami hit but I was wrong about that. I woke many times and heard strange things in the night. I had bad dreams and at five in the morning I walked along the seawall looking for a coffee shop.

Back in the condo I opened the morning paper and turned the TV to the Early Morning Show. I was reading the paper when I heard something that made me look up ...

“ Tourist at a beach resort on the French Pacific island of New Caledonia were surprised early this morning when they woke to find the wreck of a sailboat on their beach. The boat, which appeared to be a derelict, had washed ashore during the night but the biggest surprise was the two survivors that were found in the tiny cabin. The pair was in bad shape suffering from severe malnutrition and dehydration. Doctor's revived the

couple that was later identified as Jason Street 31, of Sydney Australia and Miss Margaret Roundtree 36, of Wommer Springs Australia.

After the couple had been treated, the hotel officials announced that the pair was survivors of the tragic tsunami that destroyed the islands of Lano Vana and Tapu Vana on July 15th of this year. The disabled boated had been adrift for fifty-five days and had drifted some four thousand miles towards the west ...”

-OH MY GOD ... Jocko is alive ...-

The first thing that I did was cry. I cried because I was happy and because I was very sad. Sad for all of us who had survived and for those who didn't. I remembered that handsome, crooked faced Aussie and his wise-ass attitude. I also remembered that he was Greg Allenby's closest friend.

I hadn't thought much about Greg for a while. Maybe I didn't want to think about him but I knew that he would be happy that Jocko wasn't lost. I didn't know who Margaret Roundtree was but I assumed that she was one of Jocko's 'special' friends.

I looked through my collection of phone numbers that I had brought back from the island and I found Greg's. He had tried to explain the time difference between us but I couldn't remember what it was. The biggest problem was the International Date Line, which made it tomorrow in Australia or was it yesterday. Finally I decided that it was on the other side of the world so if it was nine-am here it must be nine-pm there.

After lots of clicks and buzzes the phone rang. In fact, it rang several times and I was ready to give up when he answered with a very sleepy voice,

“Yea ... who's this?”

“Greg?”

“Yes ...”

“Greg, it's me ... it's Lara, have you heard the news?”

“Lara? Oh Lara, I glad to hear from you ... what's wrong ... is there a problem?”

“Wake up sleepy-head ... I obviously got the time thing wrong, have you heard the news?”

“What news he said sounding a little irritated”

“Jocko's alive. His boat washed up on some island this morning ... He's! ALIVE! ...”

“Oh my god, are you sure? It's been two months. Where did you hear the news? What island? Oh my god ...”

“I heard it on TV and the island is New California or something like that”

“Could it be New Caledonia?”

“That's the one, its French I think”

“Was he alone?”

“No he was with a girl named Margaret Round... something”
Margaret Roundtree?”

“That her, do you know her?”

“Yes, Peggy Roundtree has hung around with Jocko and me for most of our lives. Is she ok?”

“I think so”

There was a pause now that we had run out of thing to say about Jocko so I broke the ice.

“How are you Greg? Are you well?”

“I suppose and you?”

“Ok I guess. Have you heard from anyone else from the island?”

“Yes, Ben Roberts has called a couple of times and Tony Gonzales talked to me for quite a while recently. He said that he likes you”

“Did you see that article that was published in the Tahitian Times about our flight?”

“I saw it, what a load of crap. I wrote a letter to their editor setting the record straight but I don’t know if they ran it. I saw other papers that got the facts right.”

“Greg, I’m not sleeping very well”

“Me neither Lara, it was the same when I came back from Vietnam. I hope it passes soon”

“Me too, look I better go but I promise to call you when I feel better. I don’t want to forget you”

“Ok Lara, you take care”

“Bye Greg ... Bye. Bye ...”

When I hung up the phone I cried for a long time.

Good news or maybe not

The results of the Bar exam were published and I passed. They don’t tell the scores if you pass, just if you fail. Jake passed but that was no surprise. I wasn’t as excited about it as I thought I would be. I thought that the first thing that I would do was celebrate and then look for a job but that didn’t appeal to me at all. Mom and dad wanted to take me out to dinner but I put them off claiming that I was getting a cold.

-What’s wrong with me? I should be happy and I’m miserable ... there’s something wrong and I’m not handling it very well

A few days later I received a call,

“Hello Miss Lee, this is Ron Gold at The Law Offices of Barns and Slitter. First I’d like to congratulate you on passing the California Bar. It’s a fine accomplishment. I don’t know if you have heard that only 47% of the applicants passed this time. You know Miss Lee, we were very impressed with the work that you did for us as an intern. The partners have asked me to arrange an interview where we might talk about employment opportunities with our firm. If you like I can schedule that for you now”

-Oh shit, I don't want to think about this now-

"Thank you for calling but I'm going out of town for a while, I'll call you when I get back and thanks for your interest"

"When do you anticipate being available of an interview" he said a little irritated.

"I don't know exactly but within a month or two"

"All right Miss Lee, I look forward to hearing from you, Goodbye now"

I knew that I was in trouble and I fell back on an old habit. When in doubt, call Luke. It had always worked in the past so I hoped that it would work now. I asked him to see me at the condo and to come without Angie. I really liked my future sister-in-law but this time I need it to be just between him and me.

When I opened the door to my big brother, he hugged me and asked,

"Hi Pip, why is it so dark in here?"

"Oh the drapes are closed and I haven't opened them yet"

"So what's up? How's the recuperation going?"

"Oh just fine ... well ... maybe not so fine ... could I ask you something?"

"Since when do you ask permission ... what happened to my little sister that used to ask me questions that embarrassed me" he said trying to keep things light.

"Luke, when you came back from Vietnam, did you have ... bad dreams ... bad thoughts?"

He was more serious now. Without answering, he opened the drapes to let in the light and I realized what I looked like to him. I was still wearing wrinkled pajamas and my hair needed combing. I hadn't had any make-up on in days and I guess that I looked like hell.

"Have you had breakfast?" he asked

-I don't guess the shot of vodka that I had this morning counts as breakfast-

"No ... I'm ... not hungry"

"Look honey, go take a shower and get dressed and I'll cook something. Do you have any food in the place?"

"Not much"

"Ok, I'll be back with something before your dressed"

-Don't go-

"Ok but don't be long"

When I was finally able to look at myself in the bathroom mirror I could hear Luke opening the door onto the balcony. He has set a place for me out in the sunshine and fresh air and he had even found a flower somewhere that he had put on the table in a water glass. Breakfast was a Big-Mac and French fries along with coffee in a paper cup.

It was a beautiful fall day with a cloudless sky and a deep blue ocean. The air was surprisingly warm the way that it can be in LA in the fall. Despite my uneasy feelings, it was a pleasant place to sit with your favorite brother. I wasn't hungry until I took a bite of fries and then I was ravenous. Luke sipped his coffee and watched my Big-Mac disappear. Finally he spoke to me.

"I had a lot of bad dreams and bad feelings and the worst part was that I didn't understand why I wasn't happy. For the year that I was there all I could think about was being home. After I came home all that I could think about was Vietnam.

Remember how you would ask what it was like and what I did over there and I'd tell you that it was fine and I just did my job. You wanted to hear the details and I wanted desperately to forget them. Mom and dad never asked. They said later that they thought that I'd talk about it if I wanted too. Lara, I did want to talk about it but I knew that I could never tell the story in a way that you would understand. It was kind of like taking a picture of the Grand Canyon. Even when you're clicking the shutter you knew that the photo would never show what you were seeing.

I really needed to be with people that understood what it was really like. The guys in the reserve unit were no help because they still saw themselves as warriors. They were all blood and guts and all they saw was glory. Someone told me about the VFW. The Veterans of Foreign Wars and been around forever and it's a social place for vets to hang out.

At first I thought that it was just a place for old retired guys that served in Korea and WWII but that's because I went during the day. The Vietnam vets have jobs so they come later. I met ex-army and marines and air Force. There were navy vets and others. There were men and women. Some were happy and some were sad but what they had in common was they had all been there and they had all done that.

The guys at the reserve center used words like 'didn't make it' and 'blown away'. The vets said the real words like killed and died and crippled and maimed and scared and terrified.

Lara, I wasn't a brave pilot doing his duty for god and country. I was scared most of the time and I was terrified the rest of the time. When I landed at the base after a mission my first feeling was that I was glad to be alive, my next thought was hoping that my underwear was wet from sweat and not because I peed my pants from fear. After I talked to other pilots and they admitted their fear to me I found that I wasn't the only one that went through that. I wasn't alone in fact I was normal.

Honey, I don't know what a tidal wave looks like. I don't know what you felt. I can imagine what you felt on your flight to Tahiti. You need to talk to someone who understands. You need to share your feelings with someone who was there"

Luke seemed so calm but I could imagine what it had been like for him. He would walk through fire right now for me but he knew that he couldn't feel what I felt.

"Luke, what about seeing a doctor, did you know anyone that did that?"

"Yes I knew several and for some it worked fine but most complained about the drugs that made them listless and emotionally numb. I think that you should do that as a last resort. Is there someone that you can talk to now?"

"Yes, now would you like to hear what I did on my summer vacation?"

I told him all of it from the beginning until now. I told him about Maggie and her quest for pleasure, about Sammy's obsession with Susan, about Greg and my mood swings regarding him and all of the other things. I showed him Sam Sheppard's knife and the charts with all of my writing and scribbling while I tried to find a way to reach safety, I told him that there was a nearly empty bottle of Grey Goose Vodka in the freezer that had been full two days ago, and when I was finished I felt better. He had been right about always telling my big brother everything. After all, who else would I tell?

Susan San Francisco October 1st, 1974

The phone rang and Susan ignored it. She didn't want to talk to Sammy or anyone else. She wanted to lie on the couch and read an endless stream of mindless romance novels. She liked the ones with lots of graphic sex because they took her mind off of her present life and Sammy and the memories of the island but she was curious enough to listen as the answering machine pick-up the annoying call.

"Hello, you have reached Susan Wang, I can't come to the phone right now but leave your name and number after the beep and I'll get back to you beep"

"Pick-up the goddamned phone Susan, I know that your there ..."

Susan scrambled to get the receiver.

"Lara, is that you?"

"Who else would it be, you don't have any friends ..."

"With a friend like you, one is more than enough... how are you?"

"Just like you... are you coming to LA?"

"I don't know ..."

"Look I called Pacific Southwest Airlines and they have a flight out of Oakland at 4:07 this afternoon. Get your skinny little ass on it and I'll meet you at LA airport"

"You are in a hurry aren't you ... don't you think that I may have already made plans that didn't include you?"

"4:07 now get moving"

LAX 5:40 PM

Lara

I guess that I should have given Susan a little more notice but after I decided to call her I just couldn't wait any longer. She hadn't said no and I was sure that she would be on the plane. I looked out the window of the arrival lounge as the PAS 727 taxied to the gate. They were a funny little airline and their planes had a smile painted on it. I guess that if the plane was happy then the passengers would be happy.

I watched the double doors open from the jet-way and passenger came struggling out. The first ones were from the first class cabin, which on the 727 meant about twelve people. After that came the typical mom's and dad's that got to board first and they were followed by the low-lifes that filled the coach/cattle-car. The stream of rumpled flyers with their carry-bags and their paper-back books had slowed to a trickle and I was starting to think that Susan really did have better things to do when she appeared.

-My god, she looks awful-

"Hey good-looking are you looking for me?" I called.

"Good looking my ass, give me a hug and take me away from this maddening crowd"

"Did you check your bag?"

“No, you didn’t give me time to pack. I have clothes for two days in my carry-bag and I have a credit card to cover the rest”

As we walked towards the parking lot I got a good look at her. She had gained back a little weight but she still couldn’t weigh more than a hundred pounds, her long, black hair was showing some grey around her face and she was wearing what looked like a floor length bathrobe. A pair of flip-flop sandals that plopped along with every step set the final picture.

When we got to the condo I showed her the guest room and she brightened up a little. She liked the view of the marina and the convenience of being able to walk nearly everywhere that we would need to go.

“Are you hungry?” I asked.

“Sure, I’m always hungry, why don’t you go dig some clams” She actually made a joke.

“I’m not digging clams or mussels or looking for firewood and I’m sure as hell not cooking vegetable stew”

That got a little laugh out of her,

“You want to know something funny, I thought that I would never want a clam again but I still like them” she said.

“Yea, me too but I don’t like peanut butter and lima beans. There are some thing’s that are just better left alone”

This time she did laugh.

“Lara, I’ve had a hard time getting over the island. I still have bad dreams nearly every night and I feel blue most of the time”

“Well, hon, you’re not alone. I feel the same way and maybe that’s why I wanted you here with me. I need someone who understands how I feel. I need you because we went through it together and there’s no one else that I trust with my secret feelings”

“Have you talked to anyone else about it?”

“I’ve talked to my brother who went through something similar when he came back from Vietnam and that helped a lot but even he admits that he doesn’t really know what we went through”

“Lara, I drank a lot of vodka for a while but I’ve quit that now”

“Really, I still drink pretty much everyday”

“Well, it’s time to stop and I have the remedy”

“What remedy?”

“Green tea”

“You’re kidding”

“Look my grandmother swears that green tea cures anything so I tried it and I don’t know if it’s the caffeine or what but it really helps. I have some in my bag. Do you want to try it?”

“Do you mean the tea that they serve in the Chinese restaurants? You know, tea and fortune cookies”

“Hell, who knows what they serve here in La-La land but most Chinese restaurants serve black tea just like the stuff that the Brits drink for breakfast. They don’t serve green tea because most of you round-eyes think that it looks too weak. Just sit still and I’ll make you a cup”

Susan and I talked long into the night and I wasn’t sure that green tea was really a replacement for vodka but I tried it. It was after midnight when Susan settled in her room and I went to bed. Maybe the tea did have some soothing effects because I was in a dreamless sleep when I woke with a start.

A rare thunderstorm was moving down the coast and half of LA was probably up watching it. Thunder was only heard in Southern California every few years and I could see flashes of lightening in the black sky through my open bedroom drapes.

Maybe I was drifting in and out of sleep when the memory of the thundered storm that passed near the island the night of the tidal wave came back to me. It had been early in the evening and I had sat on the balcony with Maggie and watched the lightening. I couldn’t remember any rain and the crowd at the pool was partying as strong as ever.

By the time Greg came to my room the storm had passed. I suppose that I dreamed some more and I had that happy, warm, feeling about Greg. It was all new then and I remember that special tingle in my belly. I wished that I could have that feeling now but no such luck. I hoped that it wasn’t gone forever. I heard a phone ring somewhere in another condo and Greg was gone from my dreams.

I was starting to get the dreaded feeling of impending doom. Greg had gone to the airfield and I asked him to come back when he was finished with his job. The wind was blowing the palms near my balcony and I couldn’t tell if I was awake or asleep. I covered my head with my pillow. After a few minutes I looked at the black sky through the open drapes and the sky suddenly lit up with a bright flash. It was white light but in my sleep addled mind it was red, the red of a volcanic explosion. I covered my head and I felt my bed move. Susan had slid into bed beside me.

“Are you frightened?” I asked.

“No”

“Yea, me too”

I wanted to snuggle down beside her and hide from my thoughts but, of course, I didn’t. I wanted her to cuddle up next to me and maybe hold me and keep me safe but, of course, she didn’t. So we lay there eight inches apart and waited for the storm to pass.

“Where were you that night?” She asked.

“Haven’t I told you that already?”

“If you have I’ve forgotten, so tell me”

“I was in my room alone. Greg had left twenty minutes before and I was feeling disappointed that he had to work”

“It was my fault. I called him on the radio”

“You were a bad person”

“Maybe I was a bad person then but I’m not now”

“No, not now, where were you?”

“I was on the roof. I didn’t see the light in the sky but Greg called me on the radio and asked me to go to the roof and look around. Almost as an afterthought, he told me to take Sammy with me. He saved Sammy’s life with that thought”

“So you were on the roof when the wave hit?”

“No, I was talking to Greg on the radio when the thunderclap hit us and Greg told me to run for the stairs. Sammy grabbed me and half drugged and half carried me back inside. We both fell down the stairs to the fourth floor when the wave hit. The lights went out and he held me really tight. When the wave started breaking the building apart we could hear the walls collapsing and he told me that he loved me. I thought that we would be dead in seconds and I told him that I loved him too”

“Do you love him?”

“No, I like him and I enjoyed his company before the wave but I wasn’t in love. If he hadn’t taken everything so seriously we might have had a little fling, you know, something that would have made both of us happy for a while”

“You mean sex?”

“No I mean knitting ... of course I mean sex but it never happened”

“Nothing?”

“Nothing but frustration and disappointment. I like him, I really liked him but that’s all. Still, on the island I thought that if we were going to die together I would make him happy but I was sure that we were going to die very soon. Later, when I thought that it was a strong possibility, I was too tired and too dirty and too ragged and too skinny and ugly and I couldn’t have found one tiny little bit of passion. The only thing that I wanted was food and sleep”

“Did you see him after you came home?”

“Yes, he came to mom’s house and she let him in. He was nice and he told me that he loved me and that he wanted to marry me. Oh god Lara, I just couldn’t face him. I thought of all of the reasons that I wanted him to go and lead his own life but it made me tired just thinking of how I could make him believe me. I finally took the cowards way out and told him a lie. I said that I never cared for him and that if we hadn’t have been on that tiny island I would have never looked at him twice. I lied and said now that we were back in San Francisco I had a boyfriend that was getting all of my attention.

Well, he didn’t believe me of course but he left me alone for a while. Just before you called and ordered me to come and save you, he called to say that he was going to work for the Royal Hotel - Palo Alto and that he was going back to Stanford next fall. When you called I thought that it was him”

“I called for you to come and save me? I called so I could save you”

“Sure you did”

Time slips away

October in LA can be spectacular and it was all of that. The Santa Anna winds brought clear, nearly hot days and cloudless nights filled with stars. Susan and I became closer and closer until we were like sisters that had been together all of our lives. My family took her to their hearts and my dad did his best to spoil her but mom was the biggest surprise of all. One Saturday she invited Susan to go shopping and to have lunch out. She didn't exactly exclude me from the invitation but I had a feeling that mom wanted to be alone with her. Late that afternoon I heard Susan's key in the lock and she and mom were laughing as the door opened. Wow, was I in for a surprise.

Susan was there with several bags from big department stores but her appearance was what got my attention. Her long black hair was gone. The grey around her face was gone. She looked very stylish with a new haircut that left her with brown hair with lighter highlights cut above her shoulders. She was wearing tight, designer jeans and a new, low-cut sweater that turned her sexless figure into a bit of a mystery that showed what little cleavage she had. She looked absolutely beautiful and that look was topped off with a winning smile.

“Hello honey, I'm home” she called.

“Just who the hell are you and what have you done with my Susan?”

“Oh shut up and kiss me, I feel too good to explain”

I hugged and kissed her and then I hugged and kissed mom and we all hugged and kissed each other. Finally I realized that I was really happy and that I hadn't been this happy in a long time. Without consulting my new-look friend, I brought out a bottle of red wine that I had hidden away for emergencies and we all sat together and had a civilized drink. I decided that we had outgrown our need for the dreaded green tea.

November came and Susan decided that she had malingered long enough so in twenty minutes on the telephone she arranged a new job at the Royal Hotel – Playa Del Ray that was just five miles up the beach. When I asked why she picked that hotel she said that she could take the city bus to and from work.

“Does that mean that you're staying with me?”

“Only if you want me to”

“Of course I want you. I was afraid that you were going to leave”

Occasionally she had talked about renting a place of her own and I had always told her to stay with me for as long as she liked. Now, with a new job I was afraid that she would actually leave and I didn't even want to think about that. The truth was that we were both getting over the trauma of the island and I was sure that we would both be ok eventually

but not yet. There were still times, usually in the dark of the night that I needed to go to her bed or she needed to come to mine. It was what I had done with my brother when the monsters that lived under my childhood bed came to get me. I needed a safe place to go. Now I was happy that she was going to stay. She must have realized what I was thinking because when mom left she gave me another hug and said,

“I’ll move to my own place when you’re ready for me to leave”

“You can’t leave. Next week is your turn to do the dishes”

“Thanks hon but I’ll have to go someday”

“Someday, but not today”

I suppose that Susan inspired me to find a job so I called Ron Gold at Barns and Slitter and set up an interview. When the day came I dressed in my new ‘lawyer suit’ that I bought at a place in LA that was way too expensive and I was carrying the empty, but very nice briefcase that dad had given me and I presented myself at the law offices on Wilshire Boulevard. Of course I had worked two summers in these offices but that had been in a cubical in the back room. Now I was sitting in a corner office of one of the firm’s partners.

Oh yes they had been very pleased with my work as an intern and yes they were impressed that I had passed the bar on my first try and yes they were impressed with my grades at USC and bla-bla-bla ...

They offered me \$27,500 a year to start, I would share an office with another associate attorney and while the standard work week was forty hours with all of the normal holidays, they thought that perhaps the other associates were working a little more.

-Yea, about twenty to thirty hours a week more-

I thanked them for their very generous offer and while I was considering my options I would give them my highest priority. We shook hands, and the receptionist validated my parking.

“So what are you going to do?” Susan asked.

“Damned if I know. It’s a good offer and it’s the kind of job that I had always planned on while I was in law school. The pay’s good and I would only have to cut the throats of a dozen other associates to get promoted. The bosses are all men so I might be able to sleep my way to the top”

“Oh sure because you’re so good with men”

“Well there is that I guess”

“You don’t want the job do you?” she asked.

“Sure I do. I’d be doing good things for my community. I’d be helping my fellow man and woman. Hell Susan, you’re divorced, didn’t you feel warm and fuzzy towards your lawyer?”

“We didn’t have a lawyer because we didn’t have any asset’s to split. We just signed a paper at the courthouse and went our separate ways, but the clerk that gave us the papers was nice”

“So there you are. I feel like a true humanitarian and you have to admit that I do look very good in my lawyer’s uniform of the day”

I spent most of the rest of the week watching daytime television and waiting for Susan to come home from work. All I had to do was to pick-up the phone and I’d be the newest automation in the divorce brigade of Barns and Slitter. Finally, Friday I got off of the couch and picked up the phone.

“Law Offices, how can I direct your call?”

“Tony Gonzales please”

...

“Tony Gonzales”

“Tony, this is Lara Lee”

“Well, the long lost Miss Lee. How have you been sweetheart?”

“Better and you?”

“Better, I’m getting married”

“That great Tony, when’s the happy day?”

“Next week, it’s a good thing that you called today, so are you ready to go to work?”

“I don’t know, maybe, can we get together and talk?”

“Sure thing sweetheart, how about today at five ... no, better make it six”

“Should I come to your office?”

“No, meet me at Flanagan’s by the South Bay courthouse. You can’t miss it. It’s the only Irish Pub on that block”

“Are you sure I shouldn’t come to your office?”

“Six o’clock and don’t be late”

I wasn’t sure how to dress for a job interview at an Irish bar so I wore slacks and a nice sweater. I found Flanagan’s with no trouble but finding a parking place was harder. It was your typical Irish Pub except this one, besides being filled with cigarette smoke, was filled with lawyers. Not just lawyers but cops, marshals, law clerks and the other courthouse people that you would expect at happy-hour on a Friday afternoon. I stood near the door looking helpless when a secretary type with a big glass of beer touched my arm and pointed towards the far corner of the room.

There was Tony standing and waving. He was at a big table with several guys and young women all wearing cheap suits. There was another familiar face in the crowd. Juanita Rodriguez from the West group on the island stood and hugged me. Tony also gave me a little hug and then introduced me to the crowd at the table.

“Listen everyone, this is Lara Lee and she’s going to join us in our little search for clear thinking and happiness in this troubled world”

The reaction at the table was warm with no holding back,
“Hi Lara ... you’ll be sorry ... good girl ... buy us a beer ... “

It was all fun but I hadn’t committed to anything with Tony and I had no clue where my search for happiness would take me. Still, a beer with a bunch of happy lawyers couldn’t be all bad Tony pulled a chair up to the table next to him and someone gave me a big glass of black beer. Being an Irish pub I knew that it had to be Guinness from the old country. I never quite understood why legal people all became Irish at happy hour. I guess that it was a cultural thing from the time when all cops were Irish.

There was lots of laughing and telling of stories, some of which would have made a prostitute blush but it was all in good fun. I quickly realized that I needed to eat something or the black beer was going to get the best of me. I had no sooner had that thought when steaming plates of hot appetizers arrived and everyone helped themselves.

Although I didn’t order a second glass of beer, one appeared in my hand and I joined in the singing of several Irish songs. Tony finally stood and quieted the crowd,

“So now that we have seen how Miss Lee behaves in a civilized group like ourselves, it’s time to vote. All who think that she would be a benefit to the firm vote by saying ‘Welcome Lara’ ...”

“WELCOME LARA!!!”

“Well since I saw all of your mouths move, I guess the vote is unanimous. Come along Lara and we will go and talk business”

Tony led me through a door in the back and down a hall to an office. I was prepared to tell him that I hadn’t decided anything when we sat at a small conference table and he asked some questions.

“How much did Barns and Slitter offer you?”

“\$27,500 a year”

“You can get more. If you want to do that kind of work, tell them that you won’t agree for less the \$35,000 and then settle for 32.5”

“Why are you telling me this?”

“Because you’re a dumb kid just out of law school and you need someone to look after you”

“Bullshit”

“Ok, because I like you, and we have been there and done that together, and of all of the millions and millions of people around us, we are special. You and I and Juanita are special. Ok?”

“Ok”

“Do you want to work for them?”

“No”

“Do you want to work with me and Juanita?”

“Yes Tony, I do”

“Ok sweetheart, here’s the deal. There is no firm. We’re a bunch of independent contractors who have banded together to share expenses. South Bay Law Offices has three employees, a reception-typist, a file clerk-typist and Juanita who’s a paralegal. The rent for the building is shared by all of us. We help each other when we can. A lot of business walks through the front door but very little money comes with it.

All of our cases are on contingency. If we win a suit then we get paid. If we lose then we learn something. I guarantee that you will never get rich working with us but I guess that’s ok because you already come from money. Most law firms take contingency jobs for 33% of the settlement. We never charge a poor client more than 20%. If one of the other guys helps you, then you need to work out the split of income between yourselves”

“What would be my share of the rent and the office help?” I asked.

“\$400 a month”

“So my choice is between \$2700 a month income at Barns and Slitter and \$400 a month payout at South Bay Law Offices”

“That’s it”

“Damn Tony, you drive a hard bargain. I’ll make you a deal. I’ll join your happy little band of truth-seekers on one condition”

“What’s the condition?”

“That you never call me sweetheart or honey or baby or any other demeaning chauvinistic name again”

“Did you burn you bra in college?”

“You god-damned right”

He stood and extended his hand to me,

“Welcome to the real world Lara Lee. You’re going to be a fine lawyer. By the way, your share of the beer and appetizers is twelve bucks. You can give the cash to Juanita”

After another hour of visiting and drinking three cups of coffee I said good-bye to my new colleges and was heading towards the door when I heard a familiar voice. I turned to find my Uncle Bobby standing there with his arms open for a hug.

“What brings you to the south bay Lara?”

“I came for a glass of Guinness and I found a job”

“Really, we don’t get many new bar members fresh out of USC down here. Who are you working for?”

“I’m not working for anyone, I’m working with that bunch at South Bay Law Offices”

“You won’t make much money” he warned.

“I know”

“I’m very proud of you honey and I love you more than you know”

“No you don’t I know how much you love me unless you’ve change your mind”

“Never ... now go out there and make me proud”

Celebration

Saturday night I decided that Susan and I needed to celebrate my new position in the legal profession. She wanted to stay in and watch a movie from Blockbuster but I dragged her out to a real movie in a real theater. I even suggested an early dinner in the mall.

We walked from the condo to a good little seafood that overlooked the marina and we nearly split our sides laughing when we found clams and mussels on the menu. The waitress gave us a very strange look when she brought an appetizer size portion and two glasses of white wine.

“We should have ordered warm San Miguel beer,” she said.

“Damn, do you remember how good it tasted when we found some of Jocko’s stash at the hanger?”

“I remember how drunk I felt after a half bottle. I guess that my resistance had dropped from lack of food,” She said.

“You know, I’ve thought about that later and I don’t think that it had anything to do with food. The same thing happened to me and I think that we wanted to escape the realities of where we were and that was the way that we did it”

“Maybe, I remembered that you smelled better after a couple of bottles”

“Yea and you looked good enough to Well ... well, we won’t go into that”

The movie was a sappy love story where the boy found the girl, the boy lost the girl and the boy found the girl again. I guess that it made me happy in some way but most of it was a lot of crap. We walked out of the theater into a warm evening and Susan heard excitement calling us.

“Lara, do you hear the music?”

“If you call it music, it sounds like country and crying stuff to me”

“There’s nothing wrong with country music. I listened to it all the time when I was in college”

“Tears on my guitar tonight little darling ... all of it sounds the same”

“That’s because you’ve never listened to enough of it to tell the difference. Some of it is the lying, cheating, momma got run over by a truck stuff that you think that all country music sounds like, but there are ballads and folk songs and songs about the stories that were told around the camp fires by men who lived there lives sleeping under the stars. All of it tells a story and I like it”

“Well I grew up on rock-n-roll”

“Just listen to the music hon and you’ll hear a lot of rock-n-roll. Remember until he made all of those movies, Elvis was a country singer”

“My Elvis? Tell me it isn’t so”

We followed the music and found a lively place called In-Cahoots. There was a bar and lots of small tables around a large dance floor. There was a stage that was empty at the moment and a DJ who was spinning dance music. There must have been fifty couples dancing with their hats on. Big hats, blue jeans and cowboy boots were the uniform of the day.

We sat at a table next to the stage and a waitress in a short denim skirt and a low-cut blouse came to take our order.

“Hi girls, we offer pitchers of Budweiser or long-neck bottles of Bud so what will you have?”

“I’ll have a Bud please,” I said smiling at the irony of her question.

“Please bring us two bottles and forgive my skeptical friend here for her bad manners”

The waitress was shaking her head as she walked away.

“What?” I said as Susan gave me the ‘look’”

“Oh just be nice. That sign says there will be live music at ten. What time is it?”

“Suz, if I tell you that it’s ten after ten you’ll accuse me of having a bad attitude”

“Don’t call me Suz”

The lights dimmed in the room and a voice from nowhere announced,

“Now folks, put your hands together for THE SLADE BROTHERS!”

The level of conversation dropped a little as the stage light brightened some, and two guys wearing all black including the required cowboy boots and hats hit the strings on their guitars. For the next forty minutes they played and sang a wide variety of music. They did this without stopping for applause or for a rest. The waitress brought our beers and later she brought us two more. Susan was really into the music and at first I tried to maintain my haughty disdain but after a while I decided that Susan was right. I had never really given it a chance.

When the set ended there was a long round of applause and the brothers, Slade took their bows. As the DJ started the dance music, the two entertainers strolled through the room shaking hands and signing autographs. The first one to our table was Buck Slade and he chatted for a moment and then moved on. A few minutes later the other brother came to our table.

“Hi ladies, I hope that you enjoyed the music”

“Yes very much Mr. Slade” Susan answered.

“Please, Jack Slade is just my stage name. My real name is Hank Williams”

Susan and I both laughed. I didn’t know much about country music but I knew that Hank Williams had been the biggest name in the industry at one time and that he had been dead for years.

“It’s an honor to meet you Mr. Williams and I have to say that you look very good for a man who died in 1953” Susan said with a smirk.

“So I’m that obvious, what gave me away?”

What was obvious was that this guy was far more interested in flirting with Susan than he was with me. She seemed happy for his attention and she offered to buy him a beer.

“Thank you but I don’t imbibe on the nights that I’m working. Jack Slade is my stage name and I’m not Hank Williams, I’m Jack Reynolds from the San Fernando Valley”

“Hi I’m Susan Wang and this is Lara Lee. Would you like to join us”?

The waitress came by with two more longnecks and a bottle of water for Jack. They talked and I listened. They danced and I watched and finally it was closing time and it was time to go home.

“Can I offer you two a lift home?”

“We walked” Susan replied.

“Do you live far?”

“No, just over at the marina”

“It’s late to be walking alone”

-Well I think that I would rather walk alone than to go with a guy that we just met in a bar-

“What time is it?” Susan asked.

“It’s after two, please let me escort you home” he answered.

“Thank you Jack, that would be very considerate of you” Susan answered ignoring my kick under the table.

The walk to the condo was interesting. They strolled and chatted and I trailed along behind. Half way home she put her arm through his and I might as well have been on Mars for all of the attention that they paid to me.

At our door I shook his hand and thanked him for his help and as I unlocked the door I heard Susan invite him in for a cup of green tea. Inside I excused myself and went to bed but I doubt that they heard me. As I lay in bed in the dark I could barely hear them chatting and laughing. I was happy for Susan but I was leery of a stranger paying so much attention to her. I had grown up in LA and I wasn’t very trusting when it came to strangers.

Sometime later I was awakened by the sound of the front door closing. I couldn’t see the clock but it had to have been after four. Minutes later, Susan, now in her nightgown slid into my bed and put her arms around me and squeezed. Then she kissed me on the cheek and slid out of my bed.

“I love you Lara Lee, in a plutonic way of course”

“Of course sweetheart now get the hell out of my room. Do you know what time it is?”

“Who cares?” she said as she left for her own bed and her private thoughts.

The Slade brothers played early the next night at the honky-tonk and Susan begged me to go with her. I finally agreed to go to the eight o'clock set but I left her to her own devices for the ten o'clock rendition. At mid-night they were in my kitchen drinking coffee while I was in my bed thinking about Monday at the South Bay Law Offices.

Susan and I finally got some time together Monday evening but only because he had something to do that night. They had already arranged a dinner date for the next night.

“So what’s with you guys, is it love?”

“Lust ... I don’t know ... who knows but I feel good ... I feel special”

“You feel horny?”

“Why yes I do”

“What do you know about him?” I said with barely concealed suspicion.

“Everything, what do you want to know?”

“Everything you twit, I’m going to get my Uncle Chris to run him through the FBI. You know that you have to be careful, there are a lot of bad guys around”

“Ok but while your doing that I’m just going to enjoy the glow”

-God I wished that I could feel the glow-

“Ok give me the details”

“Ok, Jack Reynolds is thirty-one years old. He was married at eighteen and divorced at twenty. They really weren’t in love, they were just friends who went to the prom together but things got out of hand and she came up pregnant. He did what he thought was the right thing and they were married. He has a twelve year old son who lives with his ex-wife and they’re still good friends. He sees the kid whenever he wants and he even baby-sits his ex’s eight-year-old daughter when she needs help. Both he and his ex-wife went to UCLA on full scholarships and he has a master’s degree in Music. He’s a teacher at the LA Academy of Performing Arts and he plays professionally on the weekends. He says that he does it for fun but the money doesn’t hurt either. Buck Slade is a buddy’s named Roger Peterson who he’s played music with since his sophomore year in college”

“And how many hearts has he broken in the years since his divorce?”

“I don’t know but he’s a good looking guy with nice manners so I’m sure that there have been a few”

“Are you next on his list?”

“Don’t be mean. Be happy for me and if it all goes to hell then you can say that you told me so, and then you can hold me until I stop crying”

“Ok, I’ll hold you as long as you need me too. When are you seeing him again?”

“Tomorrow night”

“Look hon, I’m not your mother but if you decide to sleep-over, call me and let me know so I don’t think that you’re dead in a ditch somewhere”

“Yes Mom ...”

It was a real romance and they saw each other every night that week. Friday the Slade brothers played at In-Cahoots and Susan went alone. I might have been asleep when I heard them in the kitchen and soon I could smell brewing coffee. There were sounds of happy people that I could faintly hear through my door and then I heard no sounds at all. I thought they were making out on the couch but Susan came into my bedroom and sat beside me on the bed.

“Are you asleep?”

“Yes, are you a dream?”

“I feel like I’m in a dream. Lara I have a favor to ask”

“Ok”

“Do you mind if I have a slumber party?”

“What? Do you mean the kind that we had when we were kids and we invited a bunch of giggling girls over, and we painted each other’s toenails and talked about sex all night?”

“Well hon, not exactly. This is more like inviting Jack to sleep over and talk about sex all night”

“Why Susan Wang, you are a shameless slut. Here I thought that we were sisters in abstinence together and now you want to give your virtue to a man that you hardly know leaving me as the last virgin in California”

“Lara, you’re not a virgin”

“I’m not? I guess I forgot that part. So you’re leaving me to soldier on alone in celibacy?”

“Yes”

“Bless you my child now go fourth and be joyful in your quest”

“I love you Lara Lee, in a plutonic way of course”

“Of course”

Work

I loved the work with Tony and the rest of the bunch at South Bay and I was much busier than I would have expected. After a couple of days some of my colleges gave me some advice. My elegant lawyer clothes were intimidating my poorer clients and my car set me apart from them. Following Juanita’s advice, I took Susan and we did some shopping at Sears and Montgomery Wards for suits and shoes and some nice but reasonable priced jewelry. As much as I wanted to fit in I couldn’t give up my silk, French style knickers but I doubted that any of them would ever see me with my clothes off. My car had been given to my by my dad when I graduated from USC and I couldn’t bear the sell it so I bought a VW bug for work and parked my car in the garage to use on the weekends.

Susan was with me at the car dealer when we did the deal and I asked her to drive one of the cars back to the condo. That’s when I got a surprise.

“I don’t drive”

“What? Everyone drives”

“Oh I did drive when I was a teenager but I’ve sort of got out of the habit”

“How do you live with out driving?”

“Well when I got married, we lived a block from where he worked and I took the bus to work. That’s why I got the job in Playa del Ray. So I could take bus”

“Does Jack know this?”

“No”

“Susan, he’ll think that you’re a retard so next weekend I’m going to teach you to drive” I said.

“Well ok but let me give you some advice”

“What?”

“Be afraid, be very afraid”

Tis the season to be jolly

As Christmas neared I found myself think about Greg. I was remembering more about his charm and less about the tragedy on the island. I must have said his name a few times to many because Susan finally talked to me about him.

“Why don’t you call him?”

“What would I say?”

“Oh how about, ‘Hi Greg, how are you?’”

“Oh yea and what do I say when he asks why I haven’t’ called or written? Or worse yet when he says ‘Lara Who?’”

“Ok then don’t call”

“Susan, what a heartless thing to say. We went through a lot together”

“OoooK... then call”

“But what if”

“LARA! YOU’RE DRIVING YOURSELF AND ME CRAZY!!!”

“It’s hard”

“Honey, what do you want out of a relationship with him?”

“I don’t know, friendship, romance, happy memories of that time, instead of the memories that I have now”

“Do you really want a romance with him?” she asked with a doubtful look on her face,

“Maybe or maybe”

“Maybe what?”

“Maybe I just want romance with someone”

“Hello Greg, this is Lara Lee”

“Hello Lara ... it’s nice to hear from you ... how are things?”

“Good And you?”

“Good So what are you doing these days?”

“I have a job as an attorney and I’m living with Susan”

“That’s nice ... how’s Susan ... does she still see Sammy?”

“No that’s completely over ... She has a new boyfriend and I think that she’s in love”

“How about you Lara, do you have anyone special in your life?”

-I thought that you might be special but I guess not-

“No ... no one special but I work with a lot of nice people ... how about you Greg? ... Is there anyone new?”

“Nowellmaybewho knows”

-Ok, now what do I say? -

“Well Greg, it’s been nice talking to you and if you ever get to LA give me a call”

“Ok Lara, I’ll let you know how thing are going”

“All right, bye for now”

“Bye Lara ...”

-Well, that’s over Damn! -

1975 at last

Winter finally came to LA with cold mornings and sunny afternoons. The romance between Susan and Jack was going well with one of them sleeping over at the other’s place a couple of nights a week.

It took the entire Lee family to get Susan a driver’s license and it was mom who actually got her over the preverbal hump. As soon as she had it in her hand she wanted to borrow my car. After some begging and whining on both of our parts we were confronted with the unlikely situation that I was driving a VW Bug and she was driving my Mercedes convertible. It was a damned good thing for her that I loved her so much because that car is very high on my list of treasures. Still she did look very good in it.

Work was going good and my social life was showing some signs of recovery. I met some new people at the Friday happy hour and I actually had a couple of dinner dates. Nothing special but it was a start. Jack was spending a lot of time with us at the condo and one evening we were watching TV when a surprise came our way. It was a commercial for the upcoming Sunday night movie. None of us paid much attention until Susan saw the title. It was ‘Tsunami in Paradise – Ripped from today’s headlines by true events’.

“What is that about?” Susan asked.

“I have no idea but wasn’t Dr. Howard always writing on that yellow legal pad that he carried everywhere?”

“How could he have written anything? He was always in his room. I don’t think I saw him more the twice the whole time that we were there”

Jack was just staring at us with that ‘What the hell are you talking about’ look.

“You didn’t tell him?” I ask Susan.
“Well, not yet ... I was going to ... soon”
“Tell me what?” He asked.

Susan had ‘the deer in the headlights’ look and she looked at me as if I was going to say something.

“What?” Jack said impatiently.

I looked at Susan and she finally told him the story. She told him about Greg and mentioned Sammy with no details. She spent most of the time talking about being hungry and digging for clams and she talked a bit about my flight. He remembered the story in the news but not much about it.

“So this Sammy worked for you?”
“Yes and later when we all moved to the fourth floor, we shared a room. Everyone shared rooms and food and we all tried to help each other”
“So you slept ... in the same room?”
“That’s right but we didn’t sleep together.... He was a fellow worker and a fellow survivor. Just like Greg and Lara. We did what we had to do to survive and I’m not sure that I would have survived without Lara”

I could tell that he wasn’t completely satisfied with her story but he was going to wait and see what happened. The funny thing was that if she had just said that she had an affair with Sammy and it was over now, he probably would have completely understood. It was just Susan’s story that had him confused.

Curiouser and Curiouser

At work the next day I couldn’t stop thinking about this new movie and I talked to Toni about it.

“So Toni, do you think Dr. Howard wrote a screen play of a book or something?”
“Maybe, he did take a lot of notes”
“I wonder what the movie’s about”
“Us I suppose, I wonder who will play me”
“I wonder how it will make us look”
“Why don’t you call Howard and ask him”
“You mean now?”
“Sure, what can he say? He wrote it or he didn’t”

“Dr. Howard’s office”
“Hi, this is Lara Lee. May I speak to Dr. Howard?”
“Just a minute and I’ll check. He’s very busy so he may need to get back to you”

Tick tick tick

“Hello Miss Lee, It’s nice to hear from you”

“Hello Dr Howard, hope that you are well and have fully recovered from our ... adventure”

“Yes, quite well and Miss Lee ... Lara, I never had the opportunity to thank you for everything that you did for us”

“Thank you for saying so. I appreciate it. Do you have a minute to chat?”

“Do you mean do I have a minute to tell you about the movie?”

“Yes”

“Your about the sixth member of our little band to call this morning so let me bring you up to date. As you probably know, I kept a journal while we were on the island with the intention of adding it to my memories. Evidently that information got out because I was approached by NBC who wanted to make a movie of our story.

They said that it was important to do it soon before the public forgot about the news stories. After I was offered an obscene amount of money it wasn’t hard for me to make my decision. The studio provided me with a professional writer who turned my notes into a screenplay and a paperback book. I really have to stress that these are works of fiction and it is in no way an accurate portrayal of what really happened. I haven’t seen the movie or read the book so when we see it on TV we will all be in the same boat.”

“Well I hope that it doesn’t make us look cheap or stupid. The newspaper stories on the whole incident were confusing. That story that was printed in the Tahitian Times was reprinted around the world and it was grossly inaccurate. Later the story was fragmented with different survivors telling different stories”

“You know Lara, Sam Sheppard has taken a leave of absents and plans to write an academic paper on the incident from an anthropological standpoint. If the movie is misleading, maybe Sheppard’s paper will sit the record straight”

-I’ll bet that he leaves out the part where he threatened me with a knife-

“Well thank you Dr. Howard. Enjoy the money from the studio”

“Thank you Lara and I’ll promise you that I won’t spend any of it on a trip to a Pacific Paradise”

Sunday night at the movies

Susan and I would have preferred to have watched alone but Jack insisted that he be included so Sunday night, armed with two quarts of Hagan Dais ice cream and the VCR preserving it for posterity we watched the epic. It was crap.

There were lots of scenes of Hawaii and the hotel staff all looked like Polynesian natives. The party before the tidal wave looked like a cross between a spring break college party

and a roman orgy. All of the girls were very young, very pretty and all had large breasts and plunging necklines'. The volcano was on the island and there was lots of lava and screaming girls with the appropriate large breasts. Somehow the volcanic eruption caused a tidal wave that killed most of the remaining big-breasted women and left a handful of survivors to cope with the aftermath.

Three men emerged as the leaders. Two gangs were formed and they fought each other for food and the remaining big-breasted women. The third man was a swashbuckling Aussie who looked like he could wrestle a crocodile without getting his 'great-white-hunter' clothes wet. The Aussie's love interest was a nearly naked Polynesian girl who required having her life saved several times.

The volcano was about to erupt again when somehow the hero found a fully fueled and functional airplane that was large enough to hold everyone, and just as the island disappeared into a sea of smoke, lava, and steam the plane took to the air at the last second. After a while they all arrived at an airport that looked like Los Angeles and they all lived happily ever after. The very best part of the movie was the ice cream.

Jack looked a little confused.

"So which one of the girls were you?" He asked Susan.

"I was the one with the sarong and the great body"

"But she was a blond"

"That's right, I was a blond then"

"Susan she had very large ... "

"I wore falsies. I still have them ... would you like to see?"

He gave up on her and turned to me,

"Lara, you were the hero's girlfriend?"

"Yes I was but I also flew the plane"

"So this movie was nothing like your real time in the island?"

"Not in the least but I like this version better. I didn't see a single person digging for goddamned clams"

Los Angeles Times

Editorial Section

Once again the story of the Tsunami that struck the pacific island of Tapu Vana has been muddle by the media and the public still isn't sure what actually occurred in that South Pacific tragedy. The made-for-television movie and accompanying book that are loosely credit to Dr. Edwin Howard, the esteemed Dean of the University of Southern California Law School, certainly bring no clarity to the situation. Yesterday, I interview Dr. Howard in his office at USC and we talked at length on the subject.

Times: Dr Howard, I understand that your work on the book and movie doesn't portray the actually events of last summer. What are your thoughts on this matter?

Howard: That's correct. The movie studio wanted something that could be produced quickly and told a story of a tidal wave in the pacific. From that standpoint both the movie and the book accomplished that objective.

Times: Don't you think that you had the opportunity to set the record straight on the actual events that occurred on Tapu Vana?

Howard: Well yes and no. I'm not sure that I have the time or the writing style necessary to tell the story but I agree that it should be told. At the time of the rescue there were conflicting accounts that were printed in various newspapers. The record should be set straight once and for all and credit should be given to those who deserve it.

Times: Where their hero's on the island?

Howard: Oh yes, in some ways everyone was a hero, well everyone except me. There were several individuals who stood out.

Times: Would you care to name them now?

Howard: There were four but the last didn't become apparent until the end. In the beginning Ben Roberts and Tony Gonzales organized us into groups that would help each other. It became apparent right away that our fate also depended on the considerable skill of Greg Allenby who provided us with food, water and lights. Without Greg I'm not sure that we would have survived more than a few days.

Times: The groups that Roberts and Gonzales organized have been described by some as gangs, similar to street gangs. What are your thoughts on that?

Howard: Nothing could have been farther from the truth. Ben gathered his family about him and helped anyone who needed him. Of course he and Toni had to make tough decisions but these are tough men and they did what was needed to survive.

Times: I understand that you kept yourself apart from the others?

Howard: Not by choice. At first I tried to use my administrative skills to assist but it became apparent that I wasn't up to it. I have a history of heart problems and I have an embedded pacemaker. I found that I lacked the energy to even climb the three flights of stairs necessary to get to and from the beach. When Ben and Tony became aware of this they provided me with the necessary food and supplies to survive. The same was true for Greg and his people. He agreed to continue to improve our situation if he could have some help for his people. As far as I know, that assistance continued until the rescue.

Times: I understand that Allenby's people kept to themselves, apart from the rest of you. Was there any animosity over this?

Howard: Yes, I think so. Looking back, it was probably a mistake on their part. When we were finally rescued, we didn't actually know the people that made it all possible.

Times: You mentioned a fourth hero.

Howard: Yes that would be Lara Lee who actually flew the airplane to Tahiti to bring help. Lara Lee, Susan Wang, Sammy Maliuna, and Greg Allenby worked in secret for quite a while to find enough fuel for the flight. Lara is a pilot and was slightly familiar with the type of plane that was at the airport. It was never intended for a flight of that distance and she made several changes to it to extend its range.

Times: Why did they keep the plan a secret?

Howard: To avoid trouble I suppose.

Times: There have been rumors that there was trouble when someone tried to force their way onto the flight.

Howard: I don't think that I will comment on rumors.

Times: I understand that Miss Lee used an autopilot to find her destination.

Howard: I talked to a representative of the Piper aircraft company and he dispelled this falsehood. The plane was equipped with a wing-leveler. All that it did was keep the wings level but it had no navigation capability at all. Miss Lee's feat was remarkable and we all owe our lives to this remarkable young woman. In the end she was the bravest of us all.

Times: Thank you Dr. Howard.

A funny thing happened on the way to Wichita

An interesting thing happened in February. I received a letter from the Piper Aircraft Company with a proposition.

Dear Miss Lee

The Piper Aircraft Company has bought the salvage right to the aircraft (N9009J) that you flew from the island of Tapu Vana to Rontanga last August and we intend to put it on permanent display at the Piper Aircraft Museum in Wichita Kansas. The airplane is currently being prepared for display and has attracted a lot of attention from the local press. A representative of Private Flyer Magazine has contacted me about a full article with pictures and they have expressed their desire to have you participate in this endeavor.

If you agree, Piper will pay all of your expenses and will provide you with transportation and lodging here in Wichita in April 1975, N9009-Juliet will go on display at that time. You will be flown from Los Angeles to the Piper factory in a Learjet model 25 and I think that you will find that an exciting part of your trip. Your stay in Wichita will be in the VIP quarters of the Piper Guest House and during your stay we hope that you will take the opportunity to test fly the latest in Piper Aircraft's full line of business and personal aircraft.

If this is agreeable to you please call the toll free number listed below.

Sincerely

Robert Barker
Promotions V.P.

Of course I hadn't flown at all after the incident in the Pacific but like most pilots, I missed the sky. It's a hard habit to break and I had been thinking about scheduling my biannual flight review. Here was the incentive that I needed to get going. I needed a medical exam but that should be no trouble. After that I would get my brother to put me through my paces in dad's plane and then I would schedule a couple of hours with an FAA inspector. Pilots don't forget how to fly but the regulations change often and that's what I needed to catch up on. The prospects excited me and I hadn't been excited in a long time.

Beware the Ides of March

Things seemed to be going well until I came home from work in mid-March only to be met at the door by a crying Susan.

“He asked me to marry him”

“And that’s a bad thing?”

“Yes. I don’t want to be married. I’ve been married and I didn’t like it”

“Well hon, maybe you didn’t like it because of who you were married to”

“Probably true but I didn’t know that I wouldn’t like it before I married him. How do I know that I’d like being married to Jack?”

“Well I guess that you know or you don’t. Do you want to dump Jack?”

“Hell no, I want thing to stay like they are now”

“Did you tell him that?”

“No”

“What did you tell him?”

“That I’d think about marrying him”

“So you tell me that you don’t want to be married and you told him that you’d think about it”

“That’s about it”

“You know hon, being married to him might have its good parts”

“Oh you mean like me sitting home and him staying out late playing country music and getting flirted with by groupies in cowgirl boots”

“Well I was thinking about love and security and sharing things and you might want to have a baby”

“Lara, I’m nearly old enough to be a grandmother now. Women have babies when they’re twenty not thirty”

“How old?”

“Ok, thirty-one but that’s still too old”

“Has he asked you to meet his family yet?”

“Well, in a way”

“What way?”

“Well his dad is long gone and I’ve already met his mom and son but he wants me to meet his ex-wife”

“What?”

“I told you that they are still friends and it’s important to him. They’re more like brother and sister than a divorced couple. I guess that they were like that in high school before the ‘mistake’. They were the smartest kids in their class. She was the valedictorian and he was number two. They studied together and rode to school together and they went to the prom together, mostly because neither of them had a social life. He said that they were both virgins and they did it just for the hell of it and she got knocked-up. So he wants me to meet her. I asked him if she would approve of the race thing and he laughed and told me that her grandmother was raised in Hawaii and is half Portuguese and half Japanese.

Happy birthday

March 29th was going to be my twenty-sixth birthday and I wanted to celebrate. Mom and dad would have my relatives over for cake and ice cream but I wanted something special. I asked Susan if she would go to Las Vegas for a couple of night so we could have a girls-weekend-out. She was still wrestling with that marriage thing and she thought a few days away from Jack might be a good idea so she agreed.

The Rangoon Lagoon was the newest and most luxurious hotel on the Las Vegas strip and I reserved a two-room suit. Of course the hotel had all of the expected features with a huge gambling casino, pools, spas, shopping, two show rooms, three restaurants and, of course, the all-you-can-eat buffet. Even with all of this, what set it apart from the other hotels was the lagoon. There in the midst of the Nevada desert was a tropical lagoon with palm trees and white sand beaches, an underwater coral garden complete with tropical fish and a surfing beach. A wave machine produced two-foot high waves that carried the surfers along on a perfect wave every thirty seconds.

Susan was excited and I was excited and things couldn't have been nicer except the day before we were to leave, Susan was introduced to Jack's ex and she loved her. Susan accepted Jack's proposal and the loving couple started to plan their wedding and of course, the Las Vegas trip was forgotten.

I was too happy for her to remind her of my birthday and there I was with a two-day reservation that was too late to cancel. I called my brother and tried to get him to go with me. I asked my mom and my dad all to no avail. I had just about decided to eat the loss on the whole thing when the phone rang.

"Hello"

"Miss Lee ... Miss Lara Lee?"

-That's a familiar accent but it's not Greg-

"Yes this is Lara"

"Hello Lara, this is Jason Street"

-Jason Street?-

"Jocko! What are you doing in LA?"

"Oh just seeing the sights. I talked to Greg and he said that you two had ... gone your separate way ... so I thought that I'd give you a call. I thought that we might have lunch or something"

"Sure when would you like to get together?"

"Today's good"

"Ok, where are you staying?"

"Well, I don't have a hotel yet"

-What's going on? -

“So Jocko, where are you now?”

“I'm at the international terminal at the airport. I just got here”

-My you are eager aren't you-

“Ok, let me come and pick you up, what kind of sights are you interested in seeing”

“Well, to tell the truth, the only thing that I would really like to see is the Grand Canyon and Las Vegas”

“Las Vegas ... really”

-Oh Jocko, have I got a deal for you-

A little good taken with a little bad and some of the rest

Seattle Times

Prominent Seattle business leader Weds

Yesterday prominent Seattle businessman Benjamin Roberts of Seattle and King Salmon Alaska wed Mrs. Angela Downing of King Salmon in a private ceremony at the Roberts family home. Mrs. Downing, the widow of Mark Downing who was killed in a fishing boat accident five years ago, and Roberts have been acquainted for twenty years. Roberts is a survivor of the Tsunami that struck the island of Tapu Vana in the south Pacific last summer. The couple are said to be honeymooning in Europe.

Tony Gonzales married the older sister of his paralegal, Juanita Rodriguez.

Sammy Maliuna graduated Stanford University *Summa Cum Laude in accounting on June of 1976.*

Los Angeles Times

USC professor - survivor found dead

The body of USC Professor Dr. Samuel Sheppard 41 was found dead in his home in Santa Monica yesterday. Sheppard had been on an extended leave of absents from USC following his rescue from the pacific island of Tapu Vana, which was struck by a tidal wave last July. The medical examiner said that an autopsy would be performed and that there was a large quantity of prescription drugs in the apartment. A colleague, who only spoke on condition of anonymity, said that Sheppard was working on a paper describing the interaction of modern and educated men and women who were placed in a survival situation. He also said that Sheppard was suffering from depression and was trying to cope with feelings of guilt over the events that occurred on Tapu Vana. The cause of death has yet to be determined.

Susan married Jack in the fall of 1975 and the wedding was held at the Lee Compound in the Pales Verdes hills. The actual service took place on the cliff top that overlooks the Pacific and Susan had added a bit of irony to the situation when she renounced her married name of Wang and returned to her maiden name of Le. The irony arose because Le and Lee are pronounced the same by non-Chinese speakers. This brought some confusion as to who were the actual parents of the bride. Again, with a bride named Le

and maid-of-honor named Lee, some thought that they might be sisters although it was obvious that one of them must have been adopted.

On the night of July 14th, 1976, Emily Marks died of an overdose of sleeping pills on the second anniversary of the death of her husband. It was never determined if the cause was accidental or suicide.

Lara spent five days with Jocko and then he moved on to wherever his sense of adventure was taking him. She never, for one minute, took anything that he said or did seriously but he did her one good turn. She had always wished that she and Susan were sisters and Jocko provide a very close and intimate bond for them to share. It was a lifetime inside joke.

The hotel on Tapu Vana was never rebuilt.

A conversation with the authors

The joint authors of 'The true and uncensored story of the catastrophe at Tapu Vana', Lara L. Lee and Hal T. Mayberry met one final time to talk about their shared experience.

Mayberry: Now that the book is finished Lara, is there anything that you left out that should have been included?

Lee: I suppose that I could have put in much more but the complete story couldn't and shouldn't be told. The one thing that I should have included was my meeting with Maggie Taylor's mother.

Mayberry: Why did you leave it out?

Lee: It was too sad and private. I had talked to her a couple of times on the phone but I hadn't visited her until the first anniversary of the death of her daughter. I drove to Reseda, out in the valley, and found her house. It was a nice house on a nice street in an older suburban neighborhood. I suppose her mom and dad bought it when it was new in the forties. I learned that he had served in the Coast Guard during WWII and had gone to school on the GI Bill.

Maggie's mom is a widow who lived her later life through the eyes of her only daughter. The house was a museum of the life of Margaret Anne Taylor. The walls are covered with pictures of her and her family and friends. Her bedroom is untouched since the morning that she left for LAX and the vacation in the South Pacific.

Her mom proudly showed me the unopened letter from the California Bar Exam. She told me how proud she was that Maggie had passed on her first try and I said that I was happy too even though I knew that she had failed. I gave her the locket that I found in Maggie's things after the wave hit and it took a long time to tear myself away from her. I cried all the way home and that's why I left it out of the book.

Mayberry: Well, something's are better left unsaid. Is there anything else that should be included?

Lee: Nothing that I can think of. How about you?

Mayberry: It's not my story, I just wrote down what you told me.

Lee: Oh sure, I told you that I walked down the beach and you wrote that I left my footprints in the wet sand as the warm water washed over my suntanned feet. After I read what you wrote I was sure that it happened just the way that you described it. I'm not really sure if it's my story or yours.

Mayberry: You could have written it without me if you could spell better.

Lee: I spell better than you but you have that thing. What is it anyway?

Mayberry: Spell-Check? It's something ... new. It's not ... available to you yet.

Lee: You seem to have a lot of things that aren't available to me yet. You said that you write everything on a computer. My dad has a computer at his office but it takes up a whole room and it makes too much noise to work around. So how do you do these things?

Mayberry: Be patient Lara, you're living in 1975, you'll understand someday.

Lee: Hal, you seem to know everything about me. You're like all of my uncles that really aren't uncles. Are you one of my uncles?

Mayberry: I can be anyone that you want me to be.

Lee: Do you know my future?

Mayberry: Of course.

Lee: Will I be happy?

Mayberry: I have a friend who says that all stories don't necessarily have to have a happy ending but, in your case, I'll give you some insight. You will be as happy as you want to be. Your life, like the game of golf, won't always be fair. The harder you work the luckier you will be. There will be times of incredible joy and other times of incredible sorrow. My best advice is the same as Tony Gonzales gave you after the rescue. Look life in the eye, do your best to help others, break the bread, drink the wine and be somebody. If you follow this advice then I guarantee that you will be happy.

Lee: I love you Uncle Hal, in a plutonic way of course.

Mayberry: Of course.
