

A Joni Lincoln Mystery

Trigger Fish

by David M. H. Butler

All was calm. A flat ocean of deep blue surrounded them. A few fluffy clouds road low on the horizon, accenting an otherwise clear blue sky. In the distance, almost at the horizon's edge, rose the Big Island. It's coast defined by a white streak where the ocean swept the shore. The warm Hawaiian air felt as smooth as silk. Their boat sat at anchor.

"Come on, Gordon!" Joni Lincoln called out to her husband, as she bobbed in the ocean next to their boat. "Mark said he saw a couple whales. I don't want to miss a minute of the show!"

"Joni. We see whales just about every day! It's our business!" Gordon sighed. He was carefully cleaning his regulator after filling his scuba tank with a fresh supply of oxygen.

That was mostly true. Gordon and Joni had moved to Hawaii almost a year and a half ago and bought a whale watching business that worked out of Kona on the Big Island of Hawaii. But whale season didn't really start until November, almost three weeks away. For the last week they had been scouting for early arriving whales and they had been rewarded for their efforts with a glimpse of whales, several times now.

Connected to their business was a large sea-aquarium that they had named "The Pool of Refuge." A play on the ancient Hawaiian temples called Heiau or "Place of Refuge," where a person in trouble could go to seek refuge from his pursuers. Joni liked to think that any fish that made it to their aquarium was seeking refuge from the fishermen who plied the beaches of the islands with their nets.

For their age; Joni was 22 and Gordon had just turned 24, they seemed a throw back to the Hippy days of the late sixties. But that fit right into the atmosphere of the Kona side. Among other indicators, Joni had kept her maiden name and Gordon felt most comfortable in a light blue work shirt and a pair of faded jeans. Gordon's sandy red hair fell to his shoulders, Joni's blonde hair streamed with a slight wave below her shoulders.

"Okay. Look. I'll stay by the buoy line. I'll see you below. Je t'aime!" Joni had her mouthpiece in place, waved and was under water before Gordon could say another word.

He shook his head. That was Joni; ready to plunge into anything with all her joyful spirit. It was what he loved most about her and at the same time it was what drove him crazy. "I love you too," he called to the rippling water left by her plunge.

"What was making him drag his feet this morning? Usually he would be one of the first into the water." Joni wondered. "It was almost like he had some sort of premonition of danger." She shrugged it off. Besides she was the one who had premonitions. At least she and her twin brother Peter seemed to have an uncanny ability to sense what the other was up to. Like this summer when she'd had this image of Pete being hunted. It took several days before she found out he'd been off in the highlands of Scotland trying to find a kidnapped woman before the police did.

"Anyway, If there was danger, Gordon had better get down here and be with her." She looked up and saw the eerie water-distorted image of Gordon as he clambered over the side of the boat and jumped in.

As the stream of bubbles cleared from around Gordon he saw the sunlight filtering through aqua-marine water and Joni's lithe figure shimmering up to him. It was a beautiful moment. It was moments like this that had turned him to a degree in Oceanography and then with Joni's unfettered enthusiasm to move to Hawaii and start their sea-shaped business. Sure enough not far below a pair of female gray whales and their calves glided smoothly through the water. As they met, Gordon could see the smile radiating like light from Joni's eyes.

Several meters below them Mark, their friend and only employee, was steadying an underwater camera and taking pictures of the great smoky leviathans who were showing little or no concern for the intruders. Mark was at least a quarter Hawaiian. They had met him at the beginning of the summer when he answered their advertisement for a part time helper. Soon after he moved into their garage and they'd become friends as well. Besides feeding the fish in the sea aquarium and helping out on the whale-watching boat, he had a small business selling whale photos through a couple of galleries in Kona and Hilo.

They stayed below for almost half an hour, twice watching as their giant companions slid past them to the surface to spout a spray of water as they cleared their air canal and refilled their lungs with oxygen. Joni would do a back flip each time they went by. Unable to speak, she had to show her joy somehow. Mark captured one of her spirited loops on camera.

Suddenly Mark motioned upwards. Joni and Gordon looked up. A second boat was floating next to theirs. That seemed weird. Gordon motioned for them to start up and to spread out until they knew what was up.

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Breaking surface, Mark immediately recognized the boat and its pilot, who currently was on Gordon and Joni's boat. "Hey, Devon! What brings you here? I thought you had a job today?"

"Oh uh, yeah. I thought so too! But the guys we were suppose to take fishing got sick or something. We took them back early. So I took a chance that I could catch up with you."

Tensions relaxed among the trio and they climbed onto their boat and started stripping off their tanks, masks and flippers.

"So the club let you take the boat? Pretty cool!" Mark had recently joined a diving club called the Trigger Fish. Like Mark, a number of his new buddies worked various jobs, scraping up enough money to live in small shacks and pay for food and diving gear. Many were native islanders and would catch their supper using the traditional method of net fishing.

"Yeah," he laughed. "But I gotta pay for the gas of course. The other guys went to play pool."

Joni still felt a little uneasy. She'd met several members of the Trigger Fish. They were mostly great people, even if they were a bit rough around the edges. But Devon seemed different. For one thing, he was a recent transplant from the mainland and like Mark he was a newcomer to the club, but he seemed to find little ways to take advantage of the others. Taking the boat seemed a good example.

"Well I guess I'm too late to join you," Devon said hunching his shoulders. "I think I'll go see if I can catch up with Thomas and Lono. They were going to do some net fishing up the coast a bit."

As they watched him pull away, Gordon said. "I'm surprised he didn't ask us for something to eat or drink!"

"Looks like he didn't need to ask," said Joni, opening the cooler. "It would appear he took a sandwich and one of the drinks while he waited for us."

"On top of that, he left his scuba tank behind," added Mark. "That guy is so careless with his stuff; and everyone else's, for that matter."

They shook their heads watching the carefree pirate sail away. They knew his actions weren't malicious. He just felt entitled to things like food and favors for which others might feel compelled to ask.

"Let's get back to shore. The fish will be looking for their food pretty soon." Gordon put on a faded baseball cap and a pair of sunglasses and started up the engines. Joni pulled a bandana from her duffel bag and tied it around her head. She grabbed a pair of

sunglasses and joined him at the controls. She set a drink in his chrome cup gimbal and handed him a sandwich. Mark started taking his cameras and some extra gear down below to get it out of the sun.

"Do you think you got any good shots today?" Joni called down to him.

There were a couple of loud thumps and banging noises from below, but no answer. With the sound of the engines, tanks rattling, and the noises he was making putting things away, it wasn't very surprising that she didn't get an answer.

"Hey, Mark!" she shouted down a minute or so later. "You coming back for some lunch or should I put this stuff away?"

There were no thumps or noises this time.

"Do you think he tripped or something?" she asked Gordon.

"Maybe he's just in the head," he replied. "Give him a few minutes. He'll be up."

"I don't know. I think I should check on him."

As she went down the steps into the cabin, her first impressions were of total incongruity, She couldn't make expectations and reality dovetail. It took several seconds for the scene before her to resolve itself into a distinguishable image.

Mark sat crazily at the galley table. His feet were spread across the table top, one arm was flung over the back of the seat, the other below the table. His head lay flopped against the bulkhead. A nasty gash on his cheek and forehead oozed blood. A scuba tank lay on the ground, its regulator missing. A whitish mist hung in the air.

She started to move towards Mark, but the air made her choke and she recoiled. A noise from Gordon brought her back to her senses.

"Oh God! Oh God!" she cried stumbling up the steps. "I think Mark is dead!"

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It took several minutes before they were able to enter the cabin. Whatever was in the white mist made it nearly impossible to stay in the confined cabin for more than a few seconds, even with moistened handkerchiefs. They opened the forward hatch to get some circulation going through the cabin and waited anxiously as the minutes ticked by. Finally Joni couldn't wait another second and still wearing her handkerchief she ran into the cabin.

Mark was definitely dead. No breath, no pulse, no heart-beat. The missing regulator head lay next to him on the seat. It was Devon's scuba tank that had apparently exploded, sending the regulator straight into Mark's face and sending the two of them over the table.

Not being certain of the chemical nature of the mist, Joni decided not to remain in the cabin. She hurried back out and closed the back hatch.

"The police are going to want to get a fix on what that mist is all about," she said. "We'd better close up the hatches to make sure it isn't all blown away."

Gordon sat white-faced in the pilot seat. He'd made an attempt to go into the cabin, but the sight of Mark had stopped him as much as the mist. Joni came back from closing the hatch and asked if he wanted her to take the wheel.

"God, Joni! Have you got ice running in your veins? Mark is dead and you can act like this?" Gordon went from stunned silence to shock as soon as he began talking. "I know your father is the 'famous detective, Walt Lincoln,'" He crunched his fingers in the air making the sign of quotation marks, "and your family heard about his cases constantly. But this is Mark! How can you act like this?"

"Precisely. This is our friend Mark. If he has been murdered by that slimy Devon, then I want the police to have every bit of evidence they can get their hands on to convict the little runt." There was a tear tugging at the corner of one of Joni's eyes and she wiped it angrily away. "For now it is better if I don't think about Mark, just the situation."

At the mention of the word 'murder,' Gordon snapped to attention.

"You think it was murder?" he gasped. " Couldn't it have been just a faulty tank?"

"I suppose it's possible. But you saw that it was Devon's tank that killed Mark. It sure makes me wonder if he didn't leave that tank for a very specific purpose. And just what was in the tank that caused that mist?"

Gordon sat down at the wheel and restarted the engines. Joni looked at him and knew exactly how he felt. She had the same big hole in her heart. She'd gone to one of her father's friend's funeral. She'd known the man for years as a child and admired him. She'd felt almost the same emptiness back then and had watched her Dad and how he had coped. She had used almost the exact same words about him, that Gordon had just said to her: "He must have ice running in his veins."

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The police impounded their boat, leaving them to scramble to find ways to accommodate their sea-faring clients. Even outside of whale season they still took people out on chartered tours. They had two choices: Rent a boat and lose almost all their profits or contract with one of their competitors to take the passengers. They had a second problem as well. Without Mark they had no one to take care of the Pool of Refuge while they took their clients out on the boat.

"We talked about having a contingency plan last fall when we thought we had a valve problem with the engine," Gordon sighed. "I guess this has finally forced us to deal with making a plan."

"I say we make a deal with 'Ghostly Giant Tours' and give ourselves a bit of a vacation," replied Joni. "I wouldn't mind looking up Devon and seeing what he has to say about all this."

"Joni! That's police work." Gordon knew better. She grew up in the house of a flamboyant detective and she could only see this as an adventure not to be missed. Gordon was more inclined to focus on the present. "Now, I'm willing to agree that as long as we can get our boat back in a week, asking Roland Diamond over at Ghostly Giants makes sense ..."

"Then that's settled! I'll call and make the arrangements right ..."

"Whoa! Can we think this out for just one minute? We should consider doing one of two things: asking Roland for a small commission or maybe giving our clients a discount to the Pool of Refuge, so we don't totally lose them."

"Good ideas. I'll call Diamond and make the arrangements."

Gordon laughed. "And while you are on the phone you might want to call the police and let them know our charges for renting the boat by the day."

Joni looked up from dialing the phone. She wagged her head and mouthed "nyah nyah nyah." She suddenly snapped to her business voice. "Mr. Diamond. This is Joni Lincoln over at the Pool of Refuge. A very horrible thing happened today. You know our employee, Mark Haleahkala. Right? I'm afraid he died in an accident on our boat this afternoon."

"Oh my word!" exclaimed Diamond, "You must be in shock."

"More than we can tell you. But as you can imagine this leaves us in a tight spot and we were hoping we could make some arrangement with you. We feel yours is the service to which we feel most comfortable directing our customers."

"Such flattery! You must be hoping for something: One of my boats? A loan perhaps?" He wasn't exactly gloating, but his sympathies had clearly been for their loss not their salvation.

"Oh no," Joni kept cool. "We just wondered if we sent customers your way, if you might consider letting us have a small 'finder's fee?' Or perhaps consider us in the future when you have too many customers."

"Ms. Lincoln, your customers will come to me whether you tell them or not. I am in business to make money, not give it needlessly away. I won't have you muscling in on my business."

"Oops. I hear the tea kettle boiling. Nice talking to you. Mahalo" Joni said sweetly and hung up the phone. "To hell with him!"

"Sounds like he wasn't receptive to the idea," Gordon said.

"Worse. There was almost a note of glee in his voice." Joni fumed. "I tell you. Next month when business really starts mounting, I would love to see his boats resting on the marina floor."

"Woof! That bad, huh? Well we can probably make it a week or so, by giving people who do come to us some sort of discount."

"One thing he said, however, did give me an idea. He used the words 'muscling in' and that reminded me of my Dad's friends, Dave and Mike Muscle who live over on Oahu. It's a double whammy cool thing too!"

Gordon grinned at her, waiting for the explanation.

"Dave is a Lieutenant in the Waikiki police force. He can get us the 411 on our boat. Maybe even help cut through some red tape. Mike on the other hand has been a surfing bum ever since they got out of the Coast Guard. He's got a boat and maybe even some free time to help us out!"

"You know them well enough to ask that?"

"Don't you remember? They came to our wedding. They are pretty wild guys especially when they are around my Dad."

"Oh those guys!" Gordon let out a chuckle. "The three of them ended up in the pool. Your Mom and their wives stayed as far away from them as possible."

"That's them."

"I see your point. I bet they would be willing to help if they can."

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Before she could pick up the phone it started ringing. Joni picked it up. It was her twin brother Peter who was studying at a university in Scotland.

"Joni. It's Peter. Are you all right? I just had a very unsettling dream about you."

"Hey Pete. I'm fine, but we did have a terrible thing happen. Our friend Mark, who I was telling you about, was murdered. At least that's what I think. We were out on our boat and a scuba tank exploded."

"Oh man, I'm really sorry. Have you talked to his family?"

"It just happened a few hours ago. I think the police will contact them. But you know, that's a nice idea. Though I'm not sure what I would say." Joni tried to imagine the conversation, she supposed that once the first awkward words were spoken, it wouldn't be too bad. She glanced at the clock "So what's up? It must be like four in the morning over there!"

"Yeah. I just had this weird dream. You were choking and calling out for help and a man brought you a steaming pot of water. I just had to call."

Joni shook her head smiling, but she was use to this crazy connection to her brother.

"That's not so far from the truth. When the tank exploded it left some kind of mist in the cabin of the boat and it was very sharp and caused me to choke. Then I just made a call asking a guy if he could help out, but when he started getting nasty I told him I heard the tea kettle. There you have it: Choke, help and hot water. Or maybe it's just that we are in hot water without our boat."

"Maybe. But watch out. I was left feeling that the steaming hot water meant something."

"I will Pete. I promise. But how are things with you? School going okay? Your emails seem to talk more and more about this Sita who you met this summer. Getting serious?"

"Uh-huh. I hope so anyway. She's really something Joni. I can't wait 'til you can meet her. Do you think you'll go home for Christmas? Maybe we could descend on Mom and Dad."

"Um. I don't think we can leave at Christmas. There should be a lot of business going on that week, what with tourists and whale season. But maybe we could get everyone to come here for a very non-traditional Christmas."

"It sure would be a long journey, but, dang! It would fun and it sure would be great to see you. Let's see what we can work out with the rest of the family. Okay. I should get going. Love you, sis. Tell Gordon to give you a kiss from me. And do be careful"

"I love you too, you big goof ball. Take care yourself."

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The call to Dave Muscle at the Oahu police department was short. He promised to look quietly into the status of their boat and see what he could do. When he asked if there was anything else she needed, she asked what he thought about asking his brother, Mike, to come over and help out. He wasn't sure but said to give it a shot. She thanked him and hung up.

"I was thinking. Before I call Mike, maybe we should go out for a bite to eat." Joni said.

"I see a gleam in your eye. What are you getting at?" Gordon asked.

"It's just that I thought pizza sounded good and Kialua Tavern has great pizza."

"Oh and say! Isn't that where the Trigger Fish usually go to play pool?" Gordon asked sarcastically.

"Why, Honey! I think you're right." Joni replied innocently. "Maybe we could find out where Devon is. He might want to know where his tank is."

"After what happened this afternoon, the only reason I want to know his location is to steer clear of it."

"See? One more reason to go and see if we can talk with some of the Trigger Fish." Joni was picking up her wallet and keys from the counter top. "But if someone is waltzing around with a pot of boiling water, you let me know!"

Gordon still hadn't heard the details of her conversation with Peter and he gave her a quizzical look.

"Something my brother said. I'll tell you about it on the way over to the tavern."

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At the tavern Gordon found a table as far from the kitchen door as possible. They ordered a pizza and a couple of beers. Sure enough, several of the Trigger Fish were there. A couple at the pool table, a few others sitting in a group at a table having something to eat. Joni recognized one as Lono, who Devon had said he was going to see when he had left their boat.

"Rrrowrr." Joni purred as she watched him lean over the pool table to take a shot.

Gordon swiveled his head to see what she was looking at. He had to admit Lono was a good-looking guy. He looked back at Joni and raised his eyebrows.

"We may be married, but I'm not blind." she said. She leaned over and gave him a kiss. "Besides I would never trust him with my money."

"Now that makes me feel a whole lot better!" Gordon laughed. He turned serious for a moment. "We can't exactly go up and say 'have you seen Devon?' I mean, we have to tell them about Mark first don't we?"

"I've been working that over ever since we walked in here. My plan is to go over and ask if they've heard about Mark. You hang back and see if you detect anyone acting suspicious. I mean, maybe it was the club who put Devon up to it. So keep your eyes on them. I will tell them that we came to let them know what happened. Maybe I'll say that I was hoping to catch all of them, but since I couldn't, did anyone know where Devon was. Maybe... You know what? I'm just going to wing it."

Gordon and Joni got up and went over to the group at the table. They motioned to the two guys at the pool table who were between shots and rubbing chalk on the head of their pool sticks.

"Have you guys heard about Mark? About what happened to him today?"

As far as either Joni or Gordon could tell, no one knew what had happened.

"This is pretty hard to say," Joni started and then took a breath. She suddenly wished she didn't have to say the words. But she had started and there was no turning back. "Mark died in an accident on our boat this afternoon."

"He what!" one of the men at the table gasped. The others seemed equally stunned. They put down their utensils and set aside their pool cues, but they maintained a stony composure.

"What happened?" Lono asked. "Did he wreck the boat?"

"No. Not that kind of accident. A scuba tank exploded and the regulator hit him. I think he died almost instantly." Joni closed her eyes and took another breath. Was she acting? Even she wasn't sure. "Devon had been out to the boat earlier and had talked about meeting up with Mark after supper. I was hoping we could find him and let him know what was up."

Gordon surveyed the group to see how they took Joni's stretching of the truth. They showed no sign of distrust.

"I saw him a couple hours ago," said Lono. "Thomas and I were fishing up a little north of Keahole point. I was packing up to go when he arrived, but he and Thomas decided to keep at it for a while. Knowing Devon, he'll probably forget that he made the plans anyway."

A couple of others started arguing about how a scuba tank could explode. After rust or cracks were thrown out as impossible for anyone in their group, they were stumped how it could have happened.

"Your pizza is up," one of the others pointed out. "We could take it outside to the beach and have a luau for our buddy."

Maybe Devon wasn't so different than the rest of them, after all. However Joni sensed that the difference was that most of these guys would give a friend the shirt off their back and, therefore, sharing was a two way street with them.

"I've got some wooden pallets in the back of my pick up." Lono said. "We can give Mark a proper 'Aloha' with a bonfire. Colin, why don't you see if you can find any of the other guys. We'll meet on the beach in 45 minutes. Rob, do you have your guitar with you?"

"Of course!"

"What a great idea! We can go up to Keahole point and see if Mark and Devon are still there." Joni offered.

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"Forget boiling vats of water. I think this whole mess is the hot water your brother was worried about you getting into." Gordon said as they drove out to Keahole beach. "Though I have to admit after talking to the other Trigger Fish, I don't feel quite as concerned."

"Why not? You heard them say that an exploding scuba tank was extremely unlikely. Devon may still be a killer." Joni countered.

"Oh thanks. I needed the pep talk."

"Just reminding you that we shouldn't let down our guard."

They pulled up along the side of the road across from the access to the beach. Several other cars were there as well, but neither of them knew what kind of a car Thomas would have been driving, so they couldn't tell if he was still there.

The beach was almost deserted. There was a young couple who were standing on the beach about hundred feet from them. But there was no sign of Devon or Thomas. Joni and Gordon walked over to the other couple.

"Aloha," Joni greeted. "We were looking for a couple friends who were fishing here earlier. Did you happen to see them?"

"Sorry, we just came down to watch the sun set." the woman replied. "We've only been here a few minutes."

"But we were just wondering about this." the man interjected, pointing at a rugged plastic pail at their feet. "Is your friend's name Thomas?"

"Why, yes! Is his name on the pail?" Joni said picking it up. Sure enough, Thomas had written his name on the bottom of the bucket with an indelible marker.

It was very likely that the only things Thomas would have had with him were a net and this pail. Possibly a small pack for a light coat or some sun block. Maybe a bit of lunch. If his pail was here, he shouldn't be too far. Unless Devon's trip here had been for something more sinister than fishing.

Most of the beaches on the Kona side of Hawaii didn't leave a lot of clues. They were made up of broken coral bits and weathered lava fragments. The mixture was so coarse that it made looking for footprints or other signs practically impossible.

Joni walked down to the water's edge and looked up and down the beach. When fishing it was common for the fisherman to range in the shallow waters along the coast. Their polarized sunglasses giving them a clearer view of what was taking place below the surface, they would await a fish and, at the proper moment, launch their net to ensnare their prey.

Joni looked at the orange sun hanging above the steel blue-gray ocean. She held up her hand in front of her and measured. It was less than two finger widths above the ocean. Sunset was only twenty minutes away at the most. Concern was mounting in her. Thomas was not fishing. It was too dark for that; or so she felt. But why was his pail here. And just where was Devon. She was reminded that Devon had been using the Trigger Fish's boat and how they had told the police about their suspicions. They hadn't known exactly where he was heading, but maybe the police had guessed and come out to question him.

They decided to leave the bucket and call the police. There was no reason to have the police getting mad at them for tampering with evidence.

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They stopped at their house and made the call. They weren't able to talk to the detective assigned to their case, but they left a message.

That reminded Joni she needed to call Mike Muscle and see if he could give them a hand. She put through the call and he picked up on the first ring.

"Whoa, Uncle Mike. Have you been waiting by the phone for my call?" Joni teased. "This is Joni."

"Hey TJ!" Mike boomed. Joni shook her head. The family story went that when she and Pete were born Mike had called them Twin Joan and Twin Pete, which he had quickly shortened to TJ and TP. When their younger brother, James, was born he had been dubbed JJ. She suddenly wondered if that was why they called him Jay. Mike obviously took his honorary unclehood seriously. No one else used the name, but when Mike was around everyone knew who he was talking about.

"Dave did say you might call, but would you be too disappointed in your old uncle to hear he has a cell phone now? I had it sitting on the table next to me."

"A couple years ago that would have floored me. These days I wouldn't be surprised to see a monk under an oath of silence with one."

"I'm not sure if it's okay to laugh at that!" Mike countered.

"Oh please! You of all people." Joni scolded. "Anyway. Did Uncle Dave tell you about our friend Mark and how he died? And how the police are holding our boat while they scrape it down for clues?"

"Yeah, Dave told me and I hear that for some reason you seem to think having an impounded boat makes life difficult."

"That sums it up nicely. You do still have your boat, don't you?"

"Sure do. I'm actually on it right now. A bit smaller than yours, but if you want to use it..."

"I know this is asking a lot but we were wondering if you could afford spending a week over here. Maybe less. That would give us a chance to find a new employee and run a scaled back business."

"The Pro-surfing championships are coming up in a month. But I can spare a week. Give me a place to stay and point me to a fitness center and you've got yourself a temporary employee. I'll leave in the morning and should be over by early afternoon."

"Oh Uncle Mike! Thanks! I take back all those things I've said about you"

Gordon looked at Joni. He smiled and shook his head. How many times had he heard that line? Why was it that the Lincoln family seemed incapable of saying a simple thank you?

Hanging up, Joni turned to Gordon. "Let's grab the drums and get over to the beach. I don't want to miss Mark's luau."

"Way ahead of you this time. The drums are sitting by the door."

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The party for Mark was just getting started as they got to the beach. With girlfriends, boyfriends and several kids, there were close to 30 people on the beach. There was too much going on for them to have much of a chance to talk about the mystery with anyone. But they did hear from Colin that he had seen the Trigger Fish's boat back at their dock, but he hadn't been able to get hold of either Devon or Thomas.

Both Gordon and Joni nervously eyed a large pot of soup or something that was simmering on the edge of the bonfire. The warning about boiling water was still on their minds.

The group sang into the evening, using up every song that Rob knew how to play. Joni and Gordon thumped out several drum rhythms that had people swaying, dancing and howling. As the embers started to die down, Lono raised his arms and everyone went quiet. Eyes closed he started a slow chant. Whether he planned it or not, on his last note a single spark rose up from the embers, not going out until it was high over their heads.

A moment like that was clearly not going to be topped. The group started packing up and heading back to their homes. Joni and Gordon brushed the bits of sand off their drums and put them back in their cases. Joni wanted to ask some questions, but knew that this was not the time or place.

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As they got out of their truck, they looked over at the darkened windows of the garage where Mark had lived. Joni felt she could almost see a point of light go out, like the spark she had seen on the beach, and the shadows deepen as if all of nature mourned his unfinished life.

"Did you see that light in Mark's room?" asked Gordon.

Joni came out of her reverie. "You saw that light too? It was so brief that I thought I was imagining Mark's spirit leaving."

"Somebody's in there. Maybe it's Devon!"

Gordon was getting out of the car. "Gordon!" Joni hissed. "Don't..." It was too late. He was heading straight for the side door of the garage. Joni yanked at her door handle, fumbling with it in her anxiety to stop Gordon from going straight into the garage. As she finally opened the door she saw something gliding past a window.

"Gordon! Get down! Now!" She yelled.

A small cement block crashed through the window of the side door. Gordon had started to re-act to Joni's call. He turned just as the shower of glass exploded around him. The cement block caught him behind the knee and he fell to the ground.

Joni could hear a commotion in the garage as the intruder went through a back window. With the culprit in flight she knew she had a chance of seeing him without getting hurt and she flew to the back of the garage. She could see the shadow of a man running, but it was far too dark to identify who it might be. She turned and ran back to Gordon.

"Are you all right? Let's get inside and see if you have any cuts."

Gordon groaned. He felt his leg and though it hurt, it wasn't broken. He stood up. His calf muscle definitely was protesting, but he could walk.

"I think everything is working," he said with an embarrassed laugh.

He limped into the house. He had a few nicks from the glass and a nasty scrape on his leg from the cement block. While he dressed his wounds, Joni talked to the police for the third time that day.

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Joni woke up around 4 o'clock the next morning. She couldn't get back to sleep, so she went out to the kitchen. She sat down on a bench seat under a window that looked out over the ocean. It was too dark to see anything besides stars. The Big Dipper was visible and pointing, as it always does, to the North star which hung close to the horizon. She hugged her legs to her chest and quietly hummed one of the Hawaiian songs they had sung the evening before. She leaned her head against the cool glass and wondered about all the people who might be missing Mark tonight.

His Mom and Dad knew. When the detective had come out to investigate the break in, she had asked him if he had talked to them. He said that he hadn't, but someone from the community relations group had gone out to break the news and ask a few questions. They had also come down to the station to identify the body.

She knew he also had a sister and brother-in-law who ran a gallery over in Hilo, but she had never met them. They must know.

He'd had a girlfriend, she forgot her name, but they'd broken up last spring. In fact that was one of the reasons he had moved into their garage. She lived somewhere up on the Kohala peninsula. Gordon had heard Mark say that she told him she'd fallen for someone closer to her own age. That sure seemed lame to Joni, but it had left him heart-broken.

That led her to thinking about the person who broke into Mark's apartment. It was pretty obvious that the intruder was after some of Mark's camera equipment. Fortunately most of Mark's gear was on the boat, under police protection at the moment. But the person had rifled through his darkroom, spoiling several rolls of film in the process and broke a 35mm camera when he or she had dropped it during the escape.

Photography was one of Mark's great talents. It was hard to know Mark without knowing that he was a talented photographer. So someone like Devon, knowing that Mark was dead, might be tempted to score some of his valuable equipment to pawn for a few extra dollars.

Another thought hit her. Could Mark have been blackmailing someone? Did he have a picture that someone wanted destroyed? She started running through various scenarios: Maybe he'd taken nude photos of his old girlfriend and was going to sell them to Playfull magazine. Taking the photos was not a stretch of the imagination. But no magazine would take photos without the rights of all parties being worked out. Maybe he had a shot of her with Devon. A shot of Devon shoplifting. None of these were striking her as reasons for the events that had happened. But the photograph angle bore investigation.

Dawn was starting to show her pinkish skirts on the horizon. Joni pulled on a dark blue tank-top and a pair of khaki shorts. She ate a quick breakfast: an English muffin and a papaya. Scuffing into a pair of sandals, she walked through their office/reception area and down into the underground viewing area of the Pool of Refuge. A soft light shimmered through the large viewing panels looking out onto a protected bit of the ocean floor. A bit of coral reef and rock which, with a bit of food as encouragement, brought a wonderful range of fish for the viewing public to see. For those who could no longer dive or snorkel, it provided a window on the fascinating life below the surface.

In the reflection of the glass Joni saw Gordon coming down the stairs. He was running his hands through his hair and yawning. Obviously he had just rolled out of bed. She could tell he was still favoring his left leg. He came up behind her and slid his arms around her waist and gave her a kiss on the neck.

"Couldn't sleep?" he asked.

"Uh-huh. Just thinking about things." she shrugged her shoulders.

"I thought I was the one who did the thinking and you were the one who dove into things. What happened last night? The roles got reversed. I must have lost my head!"

"Shh. Look!" Joni nodded her head towards a solitary fish wending his way towards them.

It was one of their favorites: Bright yellow, with a swooping black mask and a white underside. A stocky fish with a blunt snout and a wonderful name: Humu humu nuku nuku apua'a. Also known as the Trigger Fish.

"Gordon. I want to find out what happened to Thomas. If he still hasn't shown up, then I think Devon may have killed him. If that is the case we really need to find Devon before he comes after us. He must know we suspect something. If nothing else we have to be on guard to protect ourselves."

"I agree, but we have a snorkeling gig this afternoon with that group from the Kona Village resort up the coast. We didn't cancel it, so we have to get ready."

"You're right. In fact I was thinking we might take them snorkeling off Keahole point."

"Keahole point? But ..."

"There are wonderful fish there. And it will give us ten people to help search the area."

* * *

One of them had to welcome any visitors and wait for the repair person to come out and repair the window in the garage. So while Gordon stayed at the Pool of Refuge, Joni drove over to the Police station, She hoped they might let her take some of the snorkeling equipment that was stored on the boat. Secretly, she hoped they would tell her what they knew about the accident. But giving out that kind of information was not to be. The chief detective seemed very reluctant but grudgingly said he supposed she had to keep her business running and authorized her to visit the boat and pick up any snorkeling gear as long as the forensic team was through with it.

At the boat she was happy to see that they hadn't dismantled it, as she had feared they would. There was fingerprinting dust everywhere and there was plastic taped over the doorways. She imagined that a small vacuum-like device that she saw was doing some sort of analysis of the chemicals in the cabin.

They wouldn't let her into the cabin, but she could take the flippers that were stored in a cargo bay at the rear of the boat. They also promised that if she came back at noon they could also let her pick up some other equipment that was in the cabin.

As she was tossing the flippers into the back of the pick up, she saw a couple of the Trigger Fish over at their boat. She had no problem recognizing Lono, and the other was Colin. She walked over to them.

"Any news about Devon or Thomas?" she asked, shifting her dark glasses from her eyes to the top of her head.

Lono looked at her. Appraising her. She looked back. Her steel blue eyes daring him to say something rude or dismissive. But his face shifted easily into a smile and she relaxed.

"Neither one has been home or talked to anyone that we know of since yesterday afternoon." Lono said, shrugging his shoulders. "The boat's back so they should be around somewhere."

"Thomas has family south of here. Down near Captain Cook. We were just heading down to see if he might have gone down there." Colin added.

"Any place else he might go?" Joni asked.

"For him, the volcano Kilauea was a ..." Colin started, but Lono interrupted.

"Maybe we'll find out from his family," he said simply.

"Okay. What about Devon? Any ideas about him?" Joni guessed they were being careful so that if their friends were in trouble, they wouldn't let any important information get into the wrong hands. She realized that she was guarding her own secret suspicions about Devon.

Colin looked at Lono who shrugged his shoulders. "That guy? Who knows? He's been known to work as a janitor at one of the resorts. Not steadily. It's up north a bit. Called the Kona Village."

"There's an intriguing coincidence," thought Joni.

"We've done some salvage diving for a guy up there and he's given a couple of the guys odd jobs. Other than that, unless he has a girlfriend he's been hiding from us, I have no other idea where he would go."

Joni figured she owed them something. "Did you know that it was Devon's tank that exploded yesterday? The one that killed Mark. He had left it on our boat."

"Now that's pretty strange. We were just noticing that he had left his tank on our boat."

* * *

As the others backed away from the boat, Joni stepped forward and peered over the side. Nestled between the back seat and the gas tanks was a set of tanks with the letters DEVON painted in red along one side. Lono grabbed her arm and pulled her back.

"Didn't you notice?" Lono barked. "The regulator heads are pointed straight at the gas tanks. If that thing goes off, it's not going to be pretty."

"Oh man!" exclaimed Colin. "What are we going to do? We don't want the police confiscating our boat! We've gotta get that fool thing out of there!"

"We don't know what set the other set of tanks off. It might have been motion activated, a radio signal, on a timer, who knows?" Joni said. "I think your best bet is to get the police bomb squad over here. They probably know how the other one was detonated. You certainly can't chance getting on the boat!"

"If it wasn't so close to the gas tanks I'd be willing to get some light mattresses and wrap the tanks up and try moving them. But this is bad."

Even saying that, Joni could tell Lono was working out all his possibilities. He was used to taking care of himself -- most all of the group was the same way. They stood silent for a few seconds.

"I could give you the fire extinguisher in my truck." Joni offered hesitantly.

Lono's head pivoted. "CO2?" he asked.

Joni nodded.

"That gives me an idea. We have one in the boat as well. How about this: We take the CO2 fire extinguishers and a mattress. We stay behind the mattress and spray the hell out of the gas and scuba tanks. Next we get something between the two sets of tanks. One of those foam seat cushions should do the trick. Then we wrap the whole mess up and give it to the police."

"I'm in," said Colin. "We just have to get the mattress."

Lono ran up to a cabin cruiser with a young couple sitting in the stern. Somehow he sweet-talked them out of the mattresses on two of their deck chairs. Meanwhile Colin was easing the bright red CO2 extinguisher from its holder. He'd grabbed the seat cushion and was using it as sort of shield between him and the tanks. It slid free and he stepped back with a sigh of relief.

Lono handed Colin one of the mattresses. They all swept their eyes over the boat and its surroundings, instinctively looking for ways of making the task safer.

"It's not how I wanted to spend my morning, but here goes. Let's spray down the gas tank first. The colder it is, the safer it is. I'll hold up the mattresses, you stay behind me and spray."

Joni steadied the boat as the other two stepped in cautiously and maneuvered their way to a better vantage point.

"Don't try this at home kids." Colin said with a nervous laugh as he pulled the safety clip out of the extinguisher.

A cloud of white CO₂ poured from the nozzle and soon the gas tank had a white frost on it. He nudged Lono to shift slightly so he could spray the scuba tanks and they continued with their delicate surgery for a few more seconds.

"Okay, Okay," said Lono. "Let's get that other seat cushion in place."

Colin reached down and pulled out the cushion that he'd been holding between his legs. He brought it around to put in place but there wasn't enough room to get the cushion in between the two sets of tanks.

"I think we're just going to have to take a chance and move the tank," He said after two hesitant tries.

"Hang on," called Joni. "I have some flippers in the truck. It's not much but they would probably fit."

At the truck she heard a thump and turned just in time to see Lono tumbling backward into the bottom of the boat, Colin was thrown overboard and a fountain of gas was shooting from the end of the tank. Following its trajectory, Joni could see the regulator head sail across the harbor and bounce off the side of a boat.

"Whoo-Hoo!" shouted the young couple from their cabin cruiser. They must have thought it was a joke.

Joni sprinted down to the boat, jumped nimbly from one gunnel to the other and dove into the water. She saw Lono starting to sit up in the bottom of the boat and Colin was coming to the surface as she hit the water. She'd nearly knocked both of them back down. She came back to the surface laughing.

"Are you okay? What happened?" she asked.

"I could ask the same thing," said Colin. "One minute I was standing behind Lono. Boom. The next I'm in the water."

"I was putting one of the mattresses around the tank," Lono explained. "I must have nudged it, I don't know. But I heard a click. I just thought 'Get this thing away from those

tanks' and started lifting it. That's when it went off. It knocked me down and I must have pushed you into the water."

Colin and Joni were pulling themselves out to the water just as the police arrived. Lono was setting the tank down on the dock. He was still planning on keeping their boat out of this investigation. The young couple was also coming over to see what was going on.

Joni let Lono tell the story. He somehow forgot to mention that the tank was in the boat. He just said that, based on something Joni had said, it looked suspicious. When he got to the part about the regulator head flying off, they all followed the direction of this hand. Joni bit her lip to stop from laughing.

It was one of the Ghostly Giant tour boats. It hadn't been damaged, but she did feel vindicated somehow.

The police were very interested in the story. Especially in light of what had happened the day before and a second tank with the name Devon on it.

"So you wrapped it in these cushions to try and make it safer?" one of them asked.

"Yes," said Lono. "These two people kindly lent them to me."

"We'll have to send a diver out to retrieve that valve head. Meanwhile we'd like to take the tank and these cushions to analyze and compare against yesterday's incident."

"Of course," said Lono.

The couple looked at each other in surprise.

"Uh, I guess so," they said.

* * *

Joni had been gone less than an hour. Walking into the office, still damp from the plunge into the water and seeing Gordon helping a woman in a wheelchair get up the steps from the viewing area, she hoped he wouldn't feel jealous of her latest adventure. Getting to the top of the stairs, Gordon turned and saw her. He gasped.

"Don't worry. It wasn't hot water."

The woman's husband took control of the wheelchair and the two turned to nod a farewell to Joni and Gordon.

"Why, I recognize you!" Joni said to the couple. "You visited us last year just about this same time of year. I remember it was your 45th wedding anniversary."

The couple's eyes shown. "That's right!" the woman said. "How sweet of you to remember. 46 years ago we came to the Big Island for our Honeymoon. It was pretty different back then; a lot of people still came on cruise ships, but we flew. It was such an adventure. We snorkeled, we lay on the beach, there was a luau. It was so wonderful."

"I was telling this fella..." the man started.

"It's her husband, dear!" his wife corrected.

"Anyway, I was telling him, how your little aquarium here is the only way we can see those beautiful fish anymore. We were so glad to see that you were still here."

"And we're pleased that you came back!" Joni replied. "My name's Joni and this is my husband Gordon."

"Pleased to meet you. We're the LaPointes. I'm Meral and this is Johnny."

The couple thanked them again and left.

"Okay, So what happened?" Gordon asked. There was a touch of exasperation in his voice.

"I've got to get out of these clothes and take a shower. Put up the closed sign and join me. I'll tell you all about it."

"Works for me!" he laughed.

* * *

A while later they were sitting at the kitchen table having an early lunch and discussing the situation. The appearance of a second booby-trapped scuba tank brought up a number of questions.

Up to this point they had been suspecting Devon of all the problems. But could someone be trying to frame Devon? Using tanks with his name on it was either a very devious way of trying to cast doubt on his involvement, or else he never expected that the tanks would be recovered after the explosions.

"Where was Devon's tank on our boat? Is it possible that he was trying to sink the whole boat?" Joni asked.

"Now that you mention it, it was down in the galley. I'm not sure where, but that's where Mark was when he said he found it. Remember, he was bringing up some glasses from down below when he told us about it."

"But just what is Devon up to? Is he trying to get rid of all the Trigger Fish? That seems bizarre. I am really worried about Thomas. I hope Lono and Colin can find him. They were going to talk with his family."

"And what was the big mystery about Kilauea?" asked Gordon. "You thought they were keeping something from you?"

"My guess is that it is one of the places they hope to find him. Remember how we saw those guys doing some sort of chanting on the rim of the volcano?"

"That's right. And yeah, Mark did talk about a weekly trip a group of them took over there. I forget the day, but Sunday rings a bell."

They started to clean up their plates. It was time to head back over to their boat and see what else they could pick up.

The phone rang. It was Dave Muscle.

"Joni. I just heard a report about another exploding scuba tank. It happened not far from where your boat is docked. Did you hear about it?"

"Matter of fact, I was there."

"I should have known." laughed Dave. "Well it gave me a good excuse to make a phone call over to the Kona police to see what was up. I really can't tell you too much, but it seems that drug smuggling is suspected as being involved."

"Are they trying to say that Mark or we are mixed up in some sort of drug thing? Is that why they are going over the boat with a fine tooth comb?"

"No. I think it had to do with the kid who left the tank on your boat. But if they thought you were involved, I helped diffuse that. I told them I knew you and your Dad. Unfortunately because of the death, the forensic boys say they need a day or more to get all their data. So maybe tomorrow afternoon."

"Thanks Uncle Dave. We were worried it could last a week or worse."

"No problem. If I learn anything more I'll let you know."

* * *

While picking up the snorkeling equipment at their boat. Joni noticed Mark's camera had been taken out of its case and was sitting on the table. After the break in, she felt a little sensitive about Mark's equipment.

"Are you done with the camera?" she asked. "I really don't feel comfortable leaving such a valuable piece of our equipment lying out like that. If you don't mind, I think we should take this home."

She didn't wait for a yes or no, she just started packing it back into its case and zipping the case closed.

"I guess that will be fine." the crime scene supervisor said. "Just add it to the bottom of the list of items you're taking and we can both initial it."

"That was easier than I thought," said Joni as they walked away.

"Do you think we'll find some clue. That maybe who ever was rummaging around in Mark's apartment was after his cameras."

"Or what is on the film inside those cameras. I noticed that there was still film in the camera, and a finished roll in the case."

"Let's not screw around then. Let's run it over to the Pro Photo shop before someone finds out we have it and tries to steal it from us."

"Good plan. Though I'm sure Mark would turn over in his grave knowing that a stranger is developing his film."

"You sure can pick a phrase," Gordon said shaking his head.

* * *

Mike Muscle arrived around 1:30. That gave them about an hour to get packed and on their way. Mike had brought his dog, an Australian shepherd mix, called Iceburg. He decided to take Iceburg and go for a run. After the long cruise over they both needed to stretch their legs. They exchanged keys and important information and Mike was off again.

As Gordon and Joni walked down the dock by their house, Joni pointed out Mike's boat. It was a large cabin cruiser. It would hold 12 or 15 people easily, but it was definitely more equipped for living than touring. The deck was smaller than theirs and the cabin area larger.

Gordon noticed the name painted on the stern of the boat.

"Science Project!" he laughed. "Do we dare look in the refrigerator?"

Getting on board, it was obvious that either Mike or his wife, Gretta, took very good care of the boat. That, or he'd just bought it.

They arrived at the resort about 10 minutes ahead of schedule and Joni took advantage of the extra time to ask the Resort's activities director if he knew of Devon or the person for whom he worked. He didn't know of Devon personally, but he knew that several divers worked for the groundskeeper, a man named Ben Stone. He would probably be around when they came back from the cruise since he had several acres of golf course to groom before morning. Joni thanked him and said she'd check with him at that time.

When she got on the boat everyone was on board and getting settled in. She shook hands with several and greeted others as she made her way to the most central area. She called for everyone's attention and gave them a quick run-down of their safety rules and an overview of the tour. It was a pretty simple itinerary: They would go down to the point, snorkel for two hours and then have a light meal of fruit, cheeses, roasted peppers and a selection of beverages. They'd be getting back about 6:30.

They soon arrived at the point. The group began donning mask and fins and little by little they all got in and began paddling around. There was one couple who explained it was their first time and they were nervous about sharks and other real or imagined dangers. Joni figured this gave her a great excuse to get in. She could show them how to snorkel and then accompany them for a while, giving her a chance to do a little scouting.

Joni and the first timers got into the water and while they treaded water, Joni explained some very basic information about snorkeling. She knew that once they saw their first school of butterfly fish or a Moorish Idol, they would forget everything else.

"The good thing about these modern snorkeling tubes is that even if water gets into the tube, this valve at the bottom is designed to let that water out without the hassle of trying to blow it out the top of the pipe. Once you've got your mask on and are floating, looking down, you'll see that your body just naturally floats. It's when you pick up your head that it tends to force the rest of your body down."

One man kept trying to look sideways and his tube would fill with water. He kept trying to adjust the mask and it would fill with water. Joni was trying to figure out just what the guy's trouble was.

"Here," Gordon called down. "Take one of these clear sided masks. I think the lack of peripheral vision is making him too nervous and that's why he's thrashing around."

The guy looked up at Gordon. He hadn't wanted to admit it, but that was exactly the problem. The black sides of his mask made it feel like something was going to sneak up on him. With the new mask he seemed to settle down. Soon she heard a muffled "whoa" emanate from the tube. No doubt he'd seen his first fish.

Without saying why, she encouraged some of the stronger swimmers to explore further afield. Secretly she was hoping that if there were any big clues, someone might stumble upon them. She kept calling it clues to herself, but she was afraid it might be Thomas'

body. It was a long shot since Devon did have a boat with him, why would he leave evidence?

She was pointing out several fish around a coral head to some of the snorkelers when she heard some commotion. Looking up she saw most of the snorkelers heading back to the boat. As some of the first arrived back she asked what was going on.

"Mr. Wooten saw some bloody meat in the water and warned us that it could bring sharks," the man replied.

"Can you point out Mr. Wooten or where he saw this?" Joni asked. To herself she thought, "Sure. That would make sense. Devon left him for the sharks. They show up mostly at dawn or dusk. That gave him last night's dusk and this morning's dawn to let the sharks do his dirty work."

Gordon heard the comment and knew exactly what Joni was thinking.

"Just set a marker by the spot and come right back. We don't want you to get into any 'hot water,' do we?"

When she caught up with Wooten she asked him to guide her back to the location. It took a few minutes and several false starts. Wooten kept taking sightings off the boat's position and a point of land, which was only moderately successful. But finally they found the spot.

There was something unrecognizable on the ocean floor, but very close by caught between two rocks, Joni could see a corner of a net. A dark object seemed to be caught in it and wedged between the rocks. She kept saying the words 'dark object' and 'something unrecognizable' to herself so that she wouldn't have to think of the alternative words that might force her to think of the human it might be.

She decided to clip the marker to the net. She kept repeating her mantra 'dark object, dark object' as she reached down and fastened the clip to the netting. Her eyes saw an undeniable body but her brain just kept overriding the images with its self-protecting phrase.

A morbid curiosity sent her on a circuit of the rocks. She wasn't sure if she'd ever met Thomas. Was it possible that this... 'Dark object,' her brain cut in.

On the far side of the rocks she suddenly got a glimpse of something that brought a sudden halt to the mantra.

She couldn't be 100 percent certain, but this wasn't Thomas she was looking at. It was Devon.

* * *

Joni and Wooten swam back to the boat, both a bit shaken, each for their own reasons. Once on the boat both Joni and Gordon remained low key about what had been found. They apologized that their snorkeling had been cut short. Most people had had enough anyway and were glad to move to the eating portion of the entertainment.

Joni said she would serve and that Gordon should make the call to the police. She was tired of talking to them. "Just tell them that one of our guests discovered what appears to be a body mauled by a shark, and that we have marked the spot."

She hadn't even told Gordon her suspicions about the identity. She didn't want to talk openly about it in front of the tour group. They were all fascinated to hear about what happened, but fortunately only the one man had seen anything and he didn't seem to want to shock anyone. He kept his comments pretty much to his observations. Like Joni he seemed to instinctively go for words like 'object.' Many of them were eating after all.

They headed back up the coast to the resort. Joni finally found her chance to tell Gordon her suspicions. With the noise of the motor to cover her, she took Gordon something to drink.

"There's an extra bit of information I haven't been able to tell you," she said getting close to his ear.

Gordon looked around puzzled. "About the person you found?"

"Uh-huh. Now get ready for a shock. I'm pretty sure it is Devon."

"Holy mackerel!" he whistled. He checked their course then turned back to look at Joni. "Devon? You don't mean Thomas?"

She shook her head. "This sure changes things."

* * *

They met the resort's groundskeeper, Ben Stone at the golf course. The activities director had pointed him out and then introduced them. Gordon wasn't quite sure why Joni still wanted to see the man, now that they were pretty sure of Devon's whereabouts. But he was drawn along.

Shaking his hand, Joni was struck by the thought that she had met him before. Something about him was very familiar.

"Haven't we met?" she asked. She cast around for possibilities. "Did you work at the University of Washington?"

Ben Stone smiled, "Isn't that typically a man's line when he meets a pretty woman, such as yourself?"

"I'm sorry. But it's just..."

"That's really quite all right. I did live in Seattle back in the eighties, but I rather doubt you were going to the University then. I'm sure I would remember you if we had met before." He turned and formally nodded his head to Gordon; "You have a lovely wife. I hope you don't think I am being too forward with my remarks."

"Not at all." Gordon replied smiling. While inside all his male instincts were shouting 'What's this smarmy guy trying to do.'

"Anyway!" Joni said. "We heard that you've employed a number of guys from the Trigger Fish to help out here. So we were wondering if either Devon or Thomas had been working here in the last couple days."

"They were going to help us out on our boat, but now we haven't seen them since yesterday morning." Gordon added.

Joni looked at him thinking, "Way to go Gordo."

"Sorry. I haven't heard of Thomas. But Devon does work here. Kind of an unreliable kid. But, you know, I kind of envy his life style. He should be around tomorrow or the next day. I asked him to come in and do some pruning work along the front drive."

"Do any of the other Trigger Fish work here?" Joni asked.

"Sure, there is one guy, Lewis, who is very dependable. He helps out almost every day. That's him out there on the lawn mower." He gestured across the course towards the sound of a motor sweeping across the greens."

"What about Lono? Does he ever work out here."

"Lono? No, not as a groundskeeper. But I've met him and several of the others."

"Do you have an idea of how I might contact Devon?" Joni asked. "I mean, how do you contact him when you have work for him?"

"I don't think he has a phone, if that's what you mean. I have a schedule of extra odd jobs for the coming month. He and I usually work out a couple of jobs for the coming weeks. Each time he's here I have to remind him about the jobs he's signed up for. It rarely matters what day the job is done, so things have gone pretty smoothly."

A craggy faced man came up to Stone and told him he had a problem with the lawn sprinklers on one of the greens. Stone looked at the man; he seemed annoyed or angry. Maybe he just didn't like being interrupted.

"I'll be over in a minute." he said and turned his attention back to Joni and Gordon.

"Well, thank you for your time," Joni said. "I can see you're busy and we'd better be getting back home, ourselves."

"When I see Devon, I'll let him know you are looking for him."

"Hopefully he'll turn up soon."

* * *

Arriving home, they saw Mike talking to a strikingly pretty woman out in front of the house. Iceburg ran to greet them as they stepped out of the truck.

"How's my little oodie boodie?" Joni cooed, rubbing him behind the ears. "Who's a pretty doggie dog."

"It's a doggie dog world," thought Gordon. "Three, two, one..."

"Ohh! It's a doggie dog world! Isn't it Iceburg." Joni finished giving him a final pat on the head. She looked up at Gordon who was smiling. "What?"

"Nothing!" he said holding up his hands.

They walked over to Mike and the unknown woman.

"Hey TJ, Gordon. This is Ginger Kaliah ... uh,"

"Kalaneaneole," she finished for him.

"Kah-la-nee-ah-nee-oh-lay," Joni repeated carefully. They shook hands. "What a beautiful name!"

"She was a friend of Mark's. She just heard about his, um, death and came to... to..." Mike hesitated. "I guess we didn't get to that part."

Ginger looked a little embarrassed. "I guess I can't say for sure myself. But when I heard he had died, well, I couldn't believe my ears." Her eyes shown. "We were ..."

It didn't take a mind reader to understand that she had been Mark's girlfriend. The one who had left him for another. Left him broken hearted and in search of a new life for himself.

Mike had not heard any of the history. He just saw a girl suffering under the weight of heavy emotion. Though it was obvious they'd been a couple.

"Ginger," he said. "It's perfectly natural to reach out at moments like this. Come on in for some tea or coffee."

"No. No. I really can't stay," she protested. "But there is one thing I'd like to ask. A favor I guess."

"What's that?" asked Gordon.

"He had a picture that he had taken of us. We were up at the Waipio valley. If the family doesn't mind, I would love to have that picture."

"Of course. We'll see what we can do. We haven't talked to the family yet. So I'm not sure how they feel about any of this."

"Pardon me if this sounds a bit crude." Joni said. "But didn't you break up with Mark for another man?"

"The simple answer is yes. But life is way more complicated than that. There are times when you have to make a decision. If it's a bad one, sometimes it can be corrected, sometimes you find it is too late." Ginger turned and started running towards the road. Iceburg chased after her. She stopped and turned back. "I'm sorry I bothered you."

Joni felt a pang of guilt cut through her. "Ginger. Wait! I'm sorry, How can we contact you once we find out about the photo?"

Ginger turned a shy smile on Joni. "Thank you," she said. She sniffed back a tear and pulled a piece of paper and a pen from her shoulder bag.

* * *

"I'm worn to the bone!" Joni groaned flopping onto the couch. "What a day!"

"I can imagine!" said Gordon. "You've been up since God knows when, witnessed an attempt to sabotage a boat, found that guy's body, and meanwhile have been trying to run a business and question everyone within a dozen miles. Go ahead and take it easy. I'll go feed the fish and take care of the aquarium."

"And I'll whip up omelets for everyone," Mike added. "You know, TJ. Your Dad is going to be mighty proud of you. Sounds like you are doing a marvelous job."

Joni followed him out to the kitchen and sat watching him as he rifled through the refrigerator and cabinets looking for ingredients and utensils.

"Any Tabasco?" he asked.

She pointed to one of the cabinets. "Probably behind the cooking oil."

"Got it," he said putting it down on the counter next to the stove. "What's going through your mind? Wanna talk about it?"

"Pretty much the same thing that Gordon and I have been discussing since we left the resort," she replied. "We thought that Devon was the person who killed Mark and broke into his apartment, and possibly that he had killed Thomas. Not to mention setting up the booby trapped scuba tank on the Trigger Fish boat. But now it looks like he may have been dead before the break-in happened, and maybe it was Thomas who killed Devon. "

"So could it have been Thomas who did the break in and tried to blow up the boat to hide some evidence?" asked Mike.

"Thomas sure looks guilty. But I haven't heard of anything that really ties this all together. Maybe both Devon and Thomas were after Mark for some reason. After Mark was killed Thomas couldn't trust Devon to keep quiet. I sure wouldn't trust him!"

"Maybe Devon tried to kill Thomas and in defending himself, Thomas killed Devon. Now he's hiding from the Police."

"Still doesn't account for the break in. But a good idea to work on." Joni replied. "Then there's one other detail that is driving me crazy."

"What's that?"

"At the resort, the guy we talked to was very nice, but he said something that struck me later as a strange thing. I asked if Lono worked at the resort and he said something along the lines of 'not as a groundskeeper.' In context of the larger answer I missed the possibility that Lono had worked there doing something else." She walked over to the refrigerator and pour herself some juice. "Why that should matter, I'm not certain. But now I'd like to find out if Lono has ever worked out there."

Mike slid an omelet onto a plate and set it in front of her. He opened a drawer and pulled out a couple of forks. "Here you go. Don't wait for Gordon. I'll make him one when he gets here."

She took a bite. "Ummm. Thanks Uncle Mike. This is just what I needed."

* * *

Joni woke to the sound of the phone. Gordon was already on his feet heading for the door. But Mike apparently had gotten up before either of them and she heard him answer. It was quickly apparent that it was Dave Muscle who was calling, and Joni rolled onto her elbows to hear what she could.

"Hey little brother! What's going on? Yeah, sure. Should I get TJ? I hear them stirring around up there."

"I'll be right there." she called.

She threw on a robe and padded down the steps from their room to the living room. She took the phone from Mike and sat down on the couch, curling up her legs.

"Uncle Dave?" she asked

"Morning, Joni. You seem to be in the eye of a hurricane over there! I've just gotten news of the body that was found and I hear it was Gordon who called in to report where it was."

"That's right. Is there a positive ID?"

"Sounds like you have a good guess at the identity already. It was Devon Nelson. He's the same guy you suspected of leaving the tanks on your boat isn't it?"

"That's the guy. Have they turned up any evidence as to what happened? How he died."

"Preliminary reports show he died from a sharp blow to the base of the skull. He was bound in that net and probably loosely lashed to a coral head. The lab techs think he was dead for several hours before any sharks got him. It's very possible that he got wedged into those rocks when the shark tried to drag him away. Otherwise you might never have found him."

"Are the police linking the two crimes together? Mark's death and Devon's?"

"It's certainly thrown a wrench into current investigations. But yes, we know there must be a connection. Another thing that starts mixing matters up further is that Devon Nelson was apparently an alias. His buddies identified him as Devon; his fingerprints show that his real name is Nelson Stone. A known drug user and suspected dealer. He up and walked away from a halfway house in Los Angeles about 6 months ago. The Police thought he had headed for Mexico."

"He wouldn't happen to have family here in Hawaii, would he?"

"Not sure if anyone has checked into that. Why do you ask that?"

"I met a man yesterday whose name is Ben Stone. He employed Devon at a local resort hotel. Seems very suspicious that they both have the same last name."

"Interesting. I'll get that clue to the interested parties." Dave said. "Now I have a bit of information about the attack on your boat. That mist in your boat cabin was some form of aviation fuel. It was found in the tanks left by the Trigger Fish boat as well."

"My God! If we had a pilot light lit in our cabin, the whole thing could have blown sky high." Joni gasped.

"Exactly. If any spark had been made, such as by the regulator head striking a metal surface, it would have been a tragedy. Quite by accident, Mark saved you and your boat."

* * *

Mark Haleahkala's family lived up the coast in the small town of Puako. After learning the full story of Mark's death, Joni felt they had to meet them. It was Saturday and they decided they would take the chance that they would be there and just go up.

Mike stayed behind to watch over everything.

As they drove up the highway, they were silent for the first half of the trip. They read the messages people had written along the side of the road. The white coral they used to form letters stood in bold contrast to the black lava rock that formed the road banks. Most were similar to the one that they had put up several months ago: "GW Loves JL," but some were more elaborate.

Gordon turned to Joni. "So do you think that we were all the target? What could we have done to cause someone to go to such lengths!"

"I don't know, but like my Uncle Dave said: If there are drug smugglers involved, we could be in extreme danger."

"Maybe we should go back to the mainland and let this cool down." Gordon said. "We really have nothing to protect ourselves except luck and a friend who is a cop."

"I won my brown belt in Karate," Joni added. "And my Dad taught me to shoot a gun,"

"Why am I not comforted?" Gordon asked. "People who blow up boats don't always get close enough to be whacked in the chops by a Kung Fu master. As to shooting: you have to have a gun to shoot one."

"Gordon. I was just adding to our arsenal. I agree, we don't have much. But by my reckoning we may not have any choice but to fight back. Depending on what these

people think we have or what we know, they might be ready to follow us where ever we go."

"I'd rather not dwell on that! Here's the turn-off to Puako. What was their address again?"

They pulled into the driveway of a one-story white house. A man came to the screen door and watched as they got out of the truck. Joni took a deep breath. "Nothing to do but open your mouth and see what comes out," she thought to herself.

"Mr. Haleahkala?" she asked when she had reached the bottom of the two steps leading up to the door. He nodded and she continued, "I'm Joni and this is my husband Gordon Wallace. We were Mark's friends, but also his employers and.... Mr. Haleahkala, can we come in?"

"Mark told us about you," the man said opening the door. "My wife is off ordering some flowers, but she'll be back soon. Come in."

They sat in a small living room looking out through large glass doors. Beyond a two-foot wall they could see glimpses of a beach and the ocean stretching off to the dull silhouette of Maui.

"I know we should have called, but at a time like this the phone just seemed so cold and impersonal," Joni explained.

"That's fine, miss. We've felt we should call you but it's been a hard to do anything the past two days." Mark's father was older than her Dad. Probably in his fifties. His hair was still pretty dark, but was receding slightly. He was in pretty good shape. Most likely he worked in some form of physical labor or else he worked out.

They heard the door open and Mark's mother came in. They all stood up to make introductions. There was a few seconds of awkward silence. Then Mrs. Haleahkela asked if they could come to Mark's service the next afternoon. That broke the ice and they were soon all sharing stories of Mark.

Just before they left, Gordon brought up the subject of Mark's things left in their garage and specifically about the photograph which his girlfriend had asked for. They readily agreed that she could have it.

"I suppose we should get down to your place and clean up Mark's things. Maybe his sister would do that. I don't think he has anything besides his photography and scuba equipment. Anything else can probably go back to the second hand store it came from."

"Oh, don't worry about that right now!" Joni told them. "They aren't in anyone's way. Besides he's paid up through the end of the month."

* * *

On their way home they decided to take a chance and see if they could find Lono at the tavern. Being Saturday they were pretty sure to find one of the Trigger Fish there. If Lono wasn't there, they'd probably know where to find him.

Luckily for them Lono was there. He was sitting on a backwards-facing chair, his arms folded across the top, his chin resting on his arms, watching Colin and Rob play pool. Standing behind him, with her hands on his shoulders was Ginger. Seeing Joni and Gordon, she dropped her hands nervously.

Joni tried to calculate the ages of the parties involved. Was Lono the older man for whom she had left Mark. Mark had just turned 20 in August. From the way Mark had talked about Lono, she guessed he was at least 25. Ginger was harder to guess, but based on the fact that she had been looking for someone closer to her age, that would imply at least a 4 or 5 year age difference.

It did make a certain amount of sense. She'd wondered before why Lono didn't have a girlfriend; or girlfriends for that matter. They must have been trying to keep from hurting Mark's feelings. Now that he was dead, they didn't have to hide.

When Ginger dropped her hands, Lono looked up to see what was going on. Seeing Joni and Gordon he smiled.

"If it isn't the bomb squad!" he welcomed them. "Aloha."

"Morning Lono. Hey Ginger." They gave a wave to Colin and Rob at the pool table.

"Word has it that it was you who found Devon's body yesterday."

"Word travels fast." Joni countered. "But it's true. Though when we first found it, I was afraid it would be Thomas. So how about you? Any luck finding Thomas? His family have any suggestions?"

"His family hasn't seen him." replied Lono. "Not a trace. But considering his possible guilt in Devon's death, they could also be hiding him. The concept of the Heiau is still strong in a lot of families."

"Personally, I don't think Thomas did it," Joni said. "Whoever killed Devon had the calculating coolness to wrap him in the net, drop him in the water and take the boat back to the dock and booby trap it. But if that person was Thomas, why would he forget his bucket on the beach."

Even Gordon was surprised by Joni's conclusions.

"So do you think Thomas was killed by the same person and the sharks did a better job of disposing of him?" Lono asked. There was a slight crack in his voice when he said the word 'disposing.'

"Maybe. But another alternative is that Thomas witnessed the murder. Not wanting the murderer to find him, he's gone into hiding."

"And why does someone want all these people dead?" asked Gordon.

"That I don't know," answered Joni. "But if we could find Thomas, he could tell us who. If we could catch that person, he or she could tell us why. But until we catch that person, there are a number of us who are in extreme danger."

"Strong words." said Lono with a totally stone face. "If we find Thomas we can ask him what he knows."

"Fair enough." Joni decided to change subjects. "I seem to recall you once said something about doing some work out at the Kona Village resort. Did you work for Ben Stone?"

"Yes. He hired several of us to do some salvage work. More like litter patrol if you ask me. Someone had reported seeing plastic and glass bottles strewn along the ocean floor just beyond the reef. He hired us to come out and get them."

"Did all of you take part in the salvaging?"

"No. Let's see; Devon was there, Thomas, myself, Mark. I think Rob was there the first time. Actually he hired us twice. There must be a cruise ship that is dropping garbage. We set up a plan for anyone working out there to keep watch on who goes past. We don't mind getting the work. But it really burns my hide to think of someone being so careless with our islands."

Gordon heartily agreed. Joni was forming another question.

"Now would I be pushing things if I asked at what time tomorrow everyone will be going over to Kilauea in hopes of finding Thomas?"

Lono let out a laugh. "Joni, that is some brain you've got going there." He looked around him to see who was in earshot. "This is not to be repeated to anyone. Clear?"

Joni and Gordon nodded.

"Sunrise. South rim," was his simple answer.

* * *

As Joni and Gordon were about to get into their truck, Ginger came out and ran over to them.

"Please!" she started. "I hope you can understand. Mark's death has me all mixed up. But I do love Lono and he loves me. It's just that... Oh, I don't know!"

"I think I do understand. At least a little," said Joni. "And the fact that you came out here tells me you want to be friends. I think that's sweet. I could use a friend myself."

"Mahalo!" she said using the Hawaiian word for 'thank you' and gave Joni and Gordon a quick hug.

As she ran back to the building, Gordon called. "Oh hey. We did get the okay to give you that picture."

She turned back again. "You did? That's so nice." She opened the door and waved. "Mahalo. Aloha! I'll call you."

"Joni. I don't think I can keep up with you these days," Gordon sighed as they pulled out of the parking lot. "I was in there thinking about all these senseless murders and trying to remember to tell Ginger about her photo..."

"So all you could think about was Ginger!" Joni teased.

"Stop. I'm serious, You raced from Devon's body to Thomas' part to the salvage operation and on to Kilauea. You got answers that normally take police with rubber hoses. I was practically out of breath!"

"Well, take a quick breath. Next stop is the Pro Photo shop to pick up the photos we turned in yesterday."

At the shop they took their photos to a table by the window and looked through them. The first roll was from their last dive together. The mother whale and her calf from several angles. Then they came to the one of Joni doing a back flip, the mother whale's fluke, somewhat in the distance, seeming to form a perfect frame for her curving body. He had caught her just as her face had come into view, her legs curved above her and her fins tucked together made her look almost like a mermaid.

The beauty of the picture and the realization it was Mark's last photo hit both of them at the same time. Gordon took Joni's hand and gave it a squeeze. "Woof! The guy had a knack," he said, trying to diffuse his emotions.

After a few moments, they went back to looking through the second batch. There were several photos from other whale hunting trips they'd taken in recent weeks. But then they came to pay-dirt. Several photos of the bottles that Lono was talking about. From

one shot it looked like a hundred or so strewn across the ocean. There were wine bottles, plastic milk jugs, as well as what looked like sport-drink bottles.

"Here are some close ups of several," Gordon pointed out. "Looks like he was taking some of these shots as evidence of polluting, but these are more artistic."

"Yeah. This one is real familiar. I think he has this bottle on the shelf in his living room. That deep wine-red glass. I'm sure of it."

They looked at each other. Could this be what the intruder was really after when he broke into Mark's place?

"Let's get an enlargement of the picture of you, and one of the bottle." said Gordon. "That way these negatives will be safe and we'll have a duplicate in case the police want it."

"Good idea. Let's also get one of the litter field. Then, let's get home and see if the bottle is still there!"

In the truck Joni flipped through the photos several times.

"Considering what has been going on and Uncle Dave's comment about smuggling, I'd say we're looking at a cover for a drug drop." Joni mused. "But I can see how the Trigger Fish might fall for the story. If Mark did fall for it, then it's not hard to imagine that he figured since he was picking up trash, there was no reason he couldn't keep a cool looking bottle."

"And if Devon or someone who was in the know found out, that could have been the trigger for this whole set of events!"

"So we have Devon a.k.a. Nelson Stone working with Ben Stone. Father? Uncle? Family of some sort, no doubt, and part of the smuggling ring. I'd sure like to have Thomas tell me what he saw the night Devon was killed. If the Stones are related, it pretty hard to believe that Ben Stone killed him.

* * *

There was a noisy commotion out in front of the Pool of Refuge. Fearing the worst, Gordon and Joni dashed from the car to the entry-way.

Joni had never seen more than a dozen people at their aquarium in a single day, and that was when a kindergarten teacher had brought her class. The viewing area could only handle ten people comfortably. There were easily 30 people lined up waiting to get in.

"What's going on?" asked Joni..

"We're waiting to see the exhibit," a Japanese tourist told her.

Mike saw them and came out. A couple and their daughter followed him out. Mike thanked them for coming and turned to the couple at the head of the line.

"Room for the next two," He said cheerily.

"Okay. What gives." asked Joni. "Is this one of your elaborate jokes? Did you pay all these people to stand in line?"

"Nothing of the sort," he said, leading them a short way from the line. "Your buddy, Mr. Diamond, stopped by earlier. He tried to steal a couple of our customers who were reading the billboard outside about tours. He tried to imply that your boat had been impounded by the police for improper conduct. I set them straight. But then I got to thinking, two can play that game."

"So what did you do?" asked Gordon.

"I made a sandwich board out of a couple of pieces of cardboard and put it on Iceburg and sent him over to lure away the crowd at Ghostly Giants."

"But I don't get it. Why would they give up on a tour that they had probably already paid for and come over here?"

"Oh that. I heard from someone that the Coast Guard came by to inspect his boat. I think they may have found some reason to do a prolonged inspection." Mike shrugged as if he had no clue as to what happened. "Though you should have seen Diamond's face when the guys showed up. It was priceless!"

"The Coast Guard." Joni gave him a wry smile. "You still have connections, I see."

"Anyway, there was this crowd milling around and I figured a little advertising wouldn't hurt. And you know how people love a dog doing something cute."

"There are still a few pirates sailing the seas, Uncle Mike."

* * *

Joni gave Mike a quick run down on what they had discovered in the photographs. She was torn about telling him about Kilauea, but they'd given their word so she kept quiet.

"But now I'm dying to go check the apartment and see if that bottle is still there." Joni finished up.

"Go for it. We've got things pretty well under control here." Mike replied.

Joni got the extra key from inside and she and Gordon unlocked Mark's apartment door and went in. Gordon had done a little straightening up the day before, while the repairman installed the new glass in the door. Iceburg ran in behind them and started making the rounds of the small apartment.

"Looks like they did get the bottle." Joni said pointing to the space on the shelf where she had seen it.

"Let's not give up yet. Maybe he moved it. Perhaps it's in the darkroom. He might have thought it would be a good container for his photo chemicals. I know that most photographers keep their chemicals in dark glass bottles."

Under the table where his developing trays were set up they found three dark brown, gallon-sized bottles marked Fixer, Developer and Rinse. There were some smaller bottles and boxes of the concentrated mixes. The cabinet over the trays just had some miscellaneous equipment, a small film developing tank, a thermometer, a few thin reference books.

"Next stop, the kitchen?" Gordon asked.

After 10 minutes they had assured themselves that the bottle was no where in the apartment. Iceburg had followed them from room to room fascinated by their search. He very well might have been thinking that here were two humans doing something he could totally identify with. Sniffing around from room to room. Checking out all those cool places, under and behind things.

As they left the garage-apartment, Iceburg seemed to pick up something and sniffed along the side of the building and wound around the back.

"Do you think he's just looking for a tree? Or is he on to something?" Joni mused. "Let's go find out!"

Behind the garage was a small alley that ran from the street down to the water. It wasn't big enough for a car, but a couple of people could easily walk down it. Iceburg was trotting back and forth beneath the window. He ran up to Joni and Gordon and then turned and started back towards the street. About 10 feet shy of the road he stopped and look back at them.

Joni ran up to him and looked to see what he was interested in. The alley had scraps of paper and sometimes broken glass, so seeing a few shards of glass wasn't that surprising. But this was a shard of a deep wine-red glass. Next to it was a faint dusting of some white powdery substance.

"Dang, Iceburg!" exclaimed Joni. "How the heck did you know what we were looking for?"

"Looks like the burglar dropped the bottle as he ran away. He must have come back later to clean up the mess, but missed this piece." Gordon said, surveying the situation.

"We have got to get this information to the police." said Joni. "I'm starting to feel like you, I don't want to go tangling with drug smugglers."

* * *

That afternoon they heard through Dave Muscle that, based on the information they had gotten from Joni, the police were going to be picking up Ben Stone. It looked like Joni had helped crack a drug smuggling ring that the police had been trying to track down for almost a year. They hoped that they might even get the name of his supplier.

Joni hoped that if she could talk to Thomas, they might have all the evidence they would need to name the culprit. She figured once he heard that Ben Stone was behind bars that Thomas might feel comfortable coming out of hiding.

They woke at three-thirty the next morning. By four o'clock they were on the road, heading for Kilauea. They left a simple note on the table for Mike saying that they would be on the Hilo-side of the island. Joni had started to write Kilauea, but caught herself. What if the police should find out and send a squad car over to pick him up and scare him off.

The trip down around the southern tip of the island and back up to the volcano was about 65 miles. But at night and with the road being only two lanes in several areas, the trip took almost two hours.

As they approached the volcano, parts of the landscape were absolutely desolate. Ancient black flows of lava covered either side of the road. The pahoehoe style of lava had the look of dried, black pancake batter. In some areas so smooth that it resembled asphalt.

They parked their car a short distance from where the crater rim trail crossed the road. There were several cars along the road and they hoped that the Trigger Fish would be there. It was still dark, but they had small flashlights that helped them stay on the trail. A smell of sulfur supplied them with the general direction. They came to the rim and turned to follow the path towards a cluster of lights they saw ahead.

They came upon Lono, Colin and Rob squatting around a small bundle of fruit and some flowers. A fourth person, who Joni had seen before but didn't know the name of, sat with them as they waited for the first rays of sun. The four men nodded to Joni and Gordon, but she knew that they should respect the group's silence and sat down a short distance away. Joni pulled on a windbreaker she had brought with her and they prepared for a glimpse of an Hawaiian tradition.

Their ritual seemed like more of a bonding experience for the friends than a religious one. At the same time, it was definitely a recognition of the awesome force of Pele the goddess of the volcano. They started about 10 minutes before the sun sprang up from the ocean and continued for another 10 or 20 minutes. Joni guessed they were waiting for a good puff of steam to rise from the crater to announce the end. Her guess appeared to be right. The chanting stopped, their eyes closed and they lifted their arms as a vent of steam floated up past them.

The group walked over to Joni and Gordon as they were standing up.

"I believe you've been wanting to talk to me?" the fourth member of the group said.

"So you are Thomas?"

At his nod Joni introduced herself and Gordon.

"Where do we start?" asked Joni. "Did you hear how Mark was killed?"

"Yes during the last few days I have heard some news reports."

"I suppose the thing that I am most curious about is, what happened at the beach on Thursday afternoon? Do you know how Devon died?"

"After Lono left, Devon and I were talking, you know, just shooting the breeze. I needed to go water a bush, as the saying goes, so I went into a grove of trees. When I got back to the beach I saw a man come up behind Devon and just nail him with a piece of wood. I stopped in my tracks. I watched Devon crumple to the ground. I couldn't believe it. Well, the guy looks up and sees me. He had this craggy face that said he would kill you as soon as look at you. I was standing near my net and I threw it over him and I ran. I drove to a cousin's house and left my car there. I had him take me to some other relatives. That guy's face still haunts me. I'm not safe until he is locked up."

"Had you ever seen him before?" asked Gordon.

"Last night it struck me that I had seen him before." He turned to Lono and Colin.

"Remember that guy who piloted the boat that we did our salvaging from the first time? Over at the resort, when we picked up that garbage?"

"Sure," replied Lono. "He was there for the second salvage job, but Stone had him doing something on shore that day. He is a tough number. I'm pretty sure Stone called him Jim."

"Oh, I think we saw him too. We talked with Stone on Friday and the guy was doing work on the sprinklers. Not super smart looking, and craggy sure would describe him." Joni suddenly worried that even though the police had Stone, they might not know about

the real killer. "We found out that Devon was an assumed name. His real name is Nelson Stone."

"Stone?" Colin asked. "So he's a relative to Ben Stone?"

"Very likely. He was mixed up in drugs back on the mainland. The police are pretty sure that the bottles you were picking up was part of an elaborate smuggling plot."

"Something is wrong with this picture," said Lono. "Stone and Devon are related, mixed up in drugs. It appears they were after all of us who were on that last dive. But why would Stone's man kill Devon?"

"I think it might have been a mistake." Thomas replied.

"A mistake!" the others said, almost in unison.

"It's just a guess. But when he looked up from Devon and saw me, there was something in his look that showed confusion," Thomas explained. "I think that might have slowed him down enough so I could escape. He probably saw Lono leave and didn't know that Devon was there. I must have been out of sight when this other guy showed up. He mistook Devon for me."

There was a stunned silence as that sunk in.

"I wonder if Stone knew about Devon's death before it was announced on the news?" mused Joni. "We saw him the next day, right after finding the body. I think Craggy Jim may not have told him about the mistake. Maybe tried blowing up everyone on your boat as a cover up."

"He did seem fairly assured that Devon would be around. But he might be a good actor," Gordon added. "Maybe, family or not, he had a reason for wanting Devon dead."

The sky was brightening but it was still hazy from some thin clouds. The gray, barren landscape and sulphurous steam that rose from cracks in the crater below could make one believe that the world was cold and unforgiving

"So what started this whole mess?" asked Joni. "We know that Mark kept one of the bottles that he was picking up. But if he was able to get it away from the salvage site, how did anyone know he had it."

"Two things that I can think of: First, I helped Mark get the bottle into his equipment bag by blocking the others view of him. They were making all this fuss about how the bottles might contain toxic waste and how they wanted to get everyone of them into special containers, so we had to be secretive about taking it. Second: The group has been talking

about watching out for whoever was doing the littering. Earlier this week I asked Mark if we could take his bottle to the police as evidence."

"That's right. And Devon did react kind of strangely," added Colin.

"Most of us were surprised when we found that Mark had kept a bottle." Lono put in. "But in retrospect his concern that Mark might have toxic waste in his house and that the police might arrest all of us for not reporting it, does sound like he was seeking a way to keep us quiet. Watching for boats probably seemed harmless. Learning we had evidence must have stunned him."

They started heading back down the trail.

"I have someone picking me up in a few minutes," said Thomas. "I'm going to wait a day or two before showing my face on Kona-side."

"We might all be safer on this side of the island until we know that the Police have the killers in custody." said Gordon.

"We'll call the police on our way back and give them the run-down on what we've learned." Joni replied. "They'll wrap this mess up pretty quick."

Reaching their car, Joni turned to Gordon and said, "While we're over here we could run down and see if it's possible to view the lava flowing into the ocean. It's such a beautiful sight and it is fairly early."

"Like I said, staying on this side of the island appeals to me!"

* * *

Coming around a corner, the amazing spectacle created by huge clouds of steam billowing up from the coastline became visible. They'd been here twice before and found it inspiring each time. Even when you got up close you couldn't easily see flowing lava. Most of it had a dark black skin. But cracks would open up, especially when it made its final drop into the sea, and the orange color of the molten lava would be visible. Along the coast next to the lava flow a black sand beach was forming from the bits that were created in the explosive impact when the lava met water.

They continued along the coastline until the road was stopped by the flow. A few other cars were already out this morning. If the car was relatively new and either red, white or blue, they knew that it was probably a tourist in a rental car. An older car or pick up was an islander. There seemed to be mostly all tourists in the parking area.

There was about a quarter mile walk from the parking lot to the best views of the flows. You had to wear good walking shoes since it was rough walking and the black surface held in the heat. Either from the sun or the lava that flowed below it.

Joni felt a pebble in her shoe and started to pull it off. She told Gordon to go on and that she'd catch up in a minute. She sat in the truck and over-turned her shoe and felt inside to make sure nothing was stuck. She looked out the window at the billowing cloud of steam and had a sudden flash: Peter's dream about steaming water. She felt a cold chill and the hair on her arms stood on end.

"I'd better get Gordon and tell him that today isn't the best day for us to go out to the viewing area." As she finished tying her shoe she noticed a red car parked across from their car in the lot. Two people were sitting in the car.

"Tourists," she thought as she locked the door to her car. "What are they doing just sitting in their car like that?"

Then she realized it was the retired couple, the LaPointes, who she'd met at the Pool of Refuge. The ones who were celebrating their 46th anniversary. They recognized her as well and waved.

"Oh man, that is so sweet that they are getting to visit all the wonderful spots of Hawaii."

She was about to raise her arm to wave to them, but someone clamped down on her arm from behind. She turned and caught a glimpse of 'Craggy Jim.' She swung her foot up and caught him in the groin. His eyes bulged and he stumbled back, but before she could do more a net was thrown over her and her arms were clamped at her sides. There were two assailants.

"Quick!" the second man hissed as he wrapped duct tape around her head, clamping the net into her mouth. "Before any cars show up. Get her in the trunk."

Joni struggled, but there was no escape. Had the LaPointes been involved? They just sat there and waved while she was being attacked! Were they the masterminds behind this whole drug operation?

Her hands dug at the net looking for a way to get free. She tried to kick her feet, but they simply picked the net up and she was helpless. She tried to twist and see if maybe Gordon was looking, but all she could see was the maw of an open trunk. The trunk of a white rental car.

"Gordon, please!" she thought. "If you're going to show up, now's the time. ...Lono ...anybody!"

She was starting to panic and she knew she needed to overcome that. The trunk lid came down and she heard them yell, "Let's go!"

Joni fumbled in the dark looking for something sharp. She heard another car start up. "The LaPointes," she thought angrily. She started kicking on the sides of the car trying to make noise that someone might hear. She heard a horn honk and hoped momentarily that someone had seen them. But as the car she was in started up and lurched out of its space, she began to lose hope.

Where would they take her. If she got free of the net, maybe she could fight her way out of this. Another thought came to her: What if they didn't let her out. They could drive the car over a cliff or fill the car with carbon monoxide from the tail pipe.

Suddenly there was an incredible squealing of tires and something crashed violently into the side of the car. The car seemed to lift up and jump sideways. Joni was thrown against the opposite side of the trunk and blacked out.

* * *

When she came to, Gordon was holding her.

"Gordon!" her voice squeaked, "Peter told me to stay away from hot water. I saw the steam. I didn't realize until too late. "

Gordon nodded his head. "It's okay Joni. You're safe now."

"But that retired couple. The LaPointes. They're involved in this!" Joni protested.

"I'll say they are involved in this!" Gordon replied. "They risked their lives to save you. They ran their car straight into the drivers door of the car you were in. And it was them that honked their horn to alert me and some others to the problem."

"They did? Where are they?" asked Joni worriedly, words spilling out rapidly. "Are they okay? That was such a terrible crash!"

They were sitting right next to Joni. Meral was in her wheelchair. Johnny leaned against a car and was rubbing his hand.

"New cars and their air bags saved them." Gordon replied. "I think Mr. LaPointe broke a finger. But he didn't find that out until after he whacked one of these guys with his cane."

"We're sorry that we took so long to react," said Johnny. "I started to get out when I saw them throw that net over you, but then I was afraid I'd get us all killed. Once you were in the trunk I figured you were safer there and I was going to move my car so they couldn't

get out, but I was too late to do that. Meral here was the one who said 'Ram 'em.' So I did!"

"I can see how you doubted us, dear." Meral added. "But at our age the only thing we had to work with was the car. Fortunately those guys hadn't noticed us sitting there,"

Tears streaming down her face, Joni got up and hugged Johnny. She turned and gave Meral a kiss. "I owe you two so much!"

"One of the other people had a cell phone and we're waiting for the police to arrive. It should be soon. They said they'd dispatch a copter and send a medical team along with them."

She looked around to find her assailants. They were lying on the ground wrapped in the net, with duct tape around their ankles. She really wanted to know who the second man had been. As she neared them, she thought she recognized him and turned to Gordon.

"Didn't they pick up Ben Stone?"

"Look closer. Remember how you thought he looked familiar when we first met him? I don't think I would have noticed the similarity," Gordon said nodding. "But I have to admit that now I can see some resemblance between them."

She took another step and gasped. "Roland Diamond?"

* * *

Joni and Gordon barely made it to Mark's funeral. Taking a cue from the offerings they had seen Lono and Colin leave at the volcano, Joni had brought a few flowers and a papaya. She wasn't sure if doing this would be correct, but doubts like that didn't stop her. The service was held at his graveside in a small family plot. The family and most of the Trigger Fish were there. Mark's parents saw them walking into the plot and came over to welcome them. They led them over to the gravesite where several other sets of flowers and fruit had been placed.

Joni knelt down next to the small container of Mark's ashes and placed their small tribute to him. Wishing him Godspeed, she stood up. Gordon put his arm around her and they stepped back into the circle that had formed around the grave.

After the services, they talked with Lono, Ginger, Colin and Rob. None of them had heard yet about the capture of the drug smugglers or of Joni's terrifying adventure.

"Oh Joni!" cried Ginger. "That's awful. How could you go through that and still be here? I'd be a basket-case."

"But it's over and I'm alive. Do you know how wonderful that feels!"

"Whoa! That is an amazing way of looking at things." Rob said nodding his head.

Lono said he'd have to get word to Thomas through his family. With her two attackers in jail, Thomas should be safe to return to Kona.

"Well, we just have to get our boat back and find someone to help out at the Pool and things may start to take on a shape of being normal," Gordon said as they walked back to their car.

"I think normal is going to be a whole lot different from now on."

* * *

Over the next week, Joni and Gordon were able to get Dave Muscle to leak them bits of the unfolding case against the drug smuggling gang.

Roland Diamond was the older brother of Ben Stone. He'd changed his name back in the early 80's, when he'd tried to scrape out a living as a singer on a cruise ship. A cook on the ship had been dealing some drugs and it had given Roland his first taste of the money that could be made.

Devon (Nelson) Stone was Ben's son. He'd gotten caught by the police in one of the families attempts at running the drugs to the mainland. He was careful to make his involvement in the drug smuggling appear to be only on a local level. Being a dealer didn't make him many points with the judge, but it was better than being a smuggler and dragging the family down with him. His age saved him from a long prison sentence.

In something of a comedy of errors, Ben Stone went to the police when he heard the news that his son had died. He tried to play the part of concerned employer, but the police had already been processing his arrest warrant, so they held him on charges of smuggling.

Meanwhile Diamond had fled from his business when the Coast Guard showed up. Mike Muscle had inadvertently blown his cover. Diamond had bluffed his way through the preliminary safety check. But when they mentioned having to do a more thorough check he panicked, and while pretending to discuss the situation with his clients, he had taken off and gone to find Ben at the resort.

From evidence the Coast Guard had found on the boat, they suspected that Diamond was using the Whale watching business as a cover for his smuggling operations. The theory was that occasionally the whale watchers would find a "boat in distress." Since they rarely had the same passengers twice, there was no one to notice how often this

happened. The boat was actually a drug running boat that came in from a steamer sitting in international waters. After transferring the drugs to the whale watching ship and putting them into bottles, they would drop them off shore from the resort.

When a couple of their men had gone to the mainland for several weeks, it had left them short handed. They decided to take a chance on hiring the Trigger Fish to do the pick up job.

Diamond and the man Joni called Craggy Jim seemed to be mostly after revenge or else to learn Thomas' whereabouts when they came after Joni. They had simply asked Lewis, the Trigger Fish member who mowed lawns at the resort where they might find the group and, having no reason to suspect them of anything, he'd told them about Kilauea. Apparently they had missed seeing the whole group but had seen Joni and Gordon.

* * *

With all the excitement they didn't pick up their boat until the day after their adventure at Kilauea. As they moored the boat back at their own dock Colin met them. They threw him the bow line and he grabbed it and fastened it to a cleat on the dock. Joni jumped to the dock and fastened the stern.

"I hear you could use some help at your business." he said.

"You're interested in working for a dangerous outfit like this?" Gordon teased.

"I figure you guys are safe to be around. I mean, lightning doesn't strike twice, and all that." he replied.

"With Joni on the scene, don't count on that!"

"Don't go scaring off good help." Joni scolded. "If you want to join the Pool of Refuge, I think you'd make a fine addition."

"That's great! When can I start?"

"You just did when you grabbed that bow line," replied Joni. "We've got a private cruise planned that's leaving in half an hour. If you're ready, you can help us get the boat cleaned up."

"Aye-aye, skipper."

Joni walked up to the office, flipped the sign to closed and walked down into the viewing area. Mike was talking to Johnny and Meral. Iceburg was keeping his head in the perfect position so that Meral could scratch behind his ears. Meanwhile, Johnny was going over the sensation of getting thumped by the air-bags.

"Ya know, I wasn't expecting that. I was counting on the seat belts. So one second I'm looking at this guy with eyes the size of saucers, the next 'poof,' I'm kissing this big plastic pillow."

Mike turned to Joni and said, "You've got one great set of Fairy God Parents."

"You can say that over and over again." she replied. She sat down between them and the conversation carried on for several more minutes.

Colin and Gordon came in and joined them.

"The boat is ready for occupancy." Gordon announced.

"I guess I'll be heading home to Oahu." Mike announced. "The Hawaiian Pro-surfing championships aren't won by flabby office boys."

"If we can't get over, we'll at least be watching you on TV." Gordon said shaking Mike's hand. "You've been great!"

"If you see me thumbing my nose, it's for you guys!" he laughed.

"Uncle Mike! I'm touched." Joni teased, "And if the Bonzai Pipeline knocks you on your backside, that's us paying you back."

Colin cleared his throat to get everyone's attention and pointed to the viewing glass. Floating before them was the beautiful Humu humu.

Joni turned from the glass to Colin. "It's great to have a Trigger Fish back at the Pool of Refuge."

* * *

The End

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