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# MIKE BOND

"MASTER OF THE EXISTENTIAL THRILLER" — BBC

A tropical landscape featuring a calm body of water in the foreground, reflecting the sky and surrounding greenery. The middle ground is filled with lush vegetation, including several palm trees. In the background, a range of steep, green mountains rises under a sky with scattered clouds. The overall scene is serene and idyllic, typical of a tropical paradise.

# SAVING PARADISE

"A COMPLEX, ENTERTAINING...LUSCIOUSLY CONVOLUTED STORY"  
— KIRKUS REVIEWS



# SAVING PARADISE

Mike Bond

ALSO BY MIKE BOND

*Snow*

*Assassins*

*Killing Maine*

*The Last Savanna*

*House of Jaguar*

*Holy War*

*Tibetan Cross*

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To the memory of George Helm, warrior, musician, leader and  
poet, who gave his life to defend his beloved Hawaii,

and to the memory of my ancestor, Elias Bond, who tried  
always to give to Hawaii and never took.

Ua mau ke ea o ka `aina i ka pono.

*The life of the land is preserved in righteous action.*

# *Lovely, Cold and Dead*

IT WAS ANOTHER MAGNIFICENT DAWN on Oahu, the sea soft and rumpled and the sun blazing up from the horizon, an offshore breeze scattering plumeria fragrance across the frothy waves. Flying fish darting over the crests, dolphins chasing them, a mother whale and calf spouting as they rolled northwards. A morning when you already know the waves will be good and it will be a day to remember.

I waded out with my surfboard looking for the best entry and she bumped my knee. A woman long and slim in near-transparent red underwear, face down in the surf. Her features sharp and beautiful, her short chestnut hair plastered to her cold skull.

I dropped my board and held her in my arms, stunned by her beauty and death. If I could keep holding her maybe she wouldn't really be dead. I was already caught by her high cheekbones and thin purposeful lips, the subtle arch of her brow, her long slender neck in my hands. And so overwhelmed I would have died to protect her.

When I carried her ashore her long legs dragged in the surf as if the ocean didn't want to let her go, this sylphlike mermaid beauty. Sorrow overwhelmed me – how could I get her back, this lovely person?

Already cars were racing up and down Ala Moana Boulevard. When you're holding a corpse in your arms how bizarre seems the human race – where were all these people hurrying to in this horrible moment with this beautiful young woman dead?

I did the usual. Being known to the Honolulu cops I had to call them. I'd done time and didn't want to do more. Don't believe for a second what anyone tells you – being Inside is a *huge* disincentive. Jail tattoos not just your skin; it nails your soul. No matter what you do, no matter what you want, you don't want to go back there. Not ever.

So Benny Olivera shows up with his flashers flashing. If you want a sorry cop Benny will fill your bill. Damn cruiser the size of a humpback whale with lights going on and off all over the place, could've been a nuclear reaction – by the way, why would anyone want a family that's *nuclear*? Life's dangerous enough.

I explain Benny what happened. He's hapa pilipino – half Filipino – and doesn't completely trust us hapa haoles, part white and part Hawaiian. To a kanaka maoli, a native Hawaiian, or to someone whose ancestors were indentured here like the Japanese or in Benny's case Filipinos, there's still mistrust. Didn't the haoles steal the whole archipelago for a handful of beads? Didn't they bring diseases that cut the Hawaiian population by ninety percent? And then shipped hundreds of the survivors to leprosy colonies on



Molokai? While descendants of the original missionaries took over most of the land and became huge corporations that turned the Hawaiians, Filipinos, Japanese and others into serfs? These corporations that now own most of Hawaii, its mainline media, banks and politicians?

I'm holding this lissome young woman cold as a fish in my arms and Benny says lie her down on the hard sidewalk and the ambulance comes – more flashing lights – and she's gone under a yellow tarp and I never saw her again.

Couldn't surf. Went home and brewed a triple espresso and my heart was down in my feet. Sat on the lanai and tried to figure out life and death and what had happened to this beautiful woman. Mojo the dachshund huffed up on the chair beside me, annoyed I hadn't taken him surfing. Puma the cat curled on my lap but I didn't scratch her so she went and sat in the sun.

I'd seen plenty of death but this one got to me. She'd been young, pretty and athletic. Somehow the strong classic lines of her face denoted brains, determination and hard work. How did she end up drowned in Kewalo Basin?

Benny's bosses at the cop shop would no doubt soon provide the answer.

# *House of Sharks*

AS MENTIONED, I've seen lots of dead people. A tour or two in Afghanistan will do that for you. I sat there with my feet up on the bamboo table and tried to forget all this. Mojo kept whining at the door wanting to hit the beach but I didn't. Once the sun moved past her spot Puma jumped back in my lap and began kneading her claws into my stomach.

By afternoon the surf was looking good, and when you're under that thunderous curl you don't even think about Afghanistan. Or about Sylvia Gordon, age 27, KPOI reported, a journalist for *The Honolulu Post*, dead in the surf this morning near Ala Moana Beach.

But I had a raunchy feeling in my stomach like when you eat bad sushi so I quit surfing and went down to the cop shop on South Beretania to see Benny and his friends. Benny was out cruising in his nuclear Chrysler but Leon Oversdorf (I *swear* that's his name), Second Lieutenant Homicide, wanted to see me.

“Look, Lieutenant,” I said, “I been cool. I don’t drink or smoke weed or indulge in premarital sex or habituate shady premises –”

“So how the fuck you find her?” Leon says by way of opening.

I explained him. How it happened. All the time he’s looking at me under these gargantuan eyebrows and I can tell no matter what I say he won’t believe me. Just because I been Inside. I could tell him Calvin Coolidge is President and even then he wouldn’t believe me.

“So she drowned,” I said after a while, looking to leave.

Leon watched me with his tiny sad eyes. Him that helped put me Inside. “No,” he said.

And what he said next changed my life. “She *was* drowned.”

“I didn’t do it,” I said right away.

Leon leaned forward, meaty palms on his desk. “Pono,” he chuckled, “you think we don’t *know* that?”

“Know what?” I said, covering my bases.

“She was dead six hours before of when you found her.”

The thought pained me horribly. This lovely person floating in the cold uncaring sea. When I could’ve held her, kept her warm.

“She was dead,” Leon said matter-of-factly, “from being held underwater till her lungs filled up with good old H<sub>2</sub>O.”

“How do you know she was held?” I risked. “Even if she just normally drowned there’d be water in her lungs –”

Leon scanned me the way the guy with the broadaxe smiles down at you when you lay your head on the block. “This water in her lungs ain’t ocean, it’s fresh.”

“Fresh?”

“Like from a swimming pool or something. You get it?”

WHAT’S BAD ABOUT TIGER SHARKS is they don’t kill you right away. They’re not fast like a great white, where you get maybe two seconds and then half of you is down his gullet and the rest spread across the ocean. But these damn tigers, they like to play with you.

There’s a reef on the south side of the island of Molokai called Hale o Lono, which means *House of Lono*, who was one of the four gods brought to Hawaii by the ancient Tahitians. Tiger sharks breed there by the millions, hammerheads too, with their widespread heads and eyes on the end. I don’t mind hammerheads – they bug you when you’re down forty, fifty feet you just sock them in the eye. In that wide-faced appendage of theirs.

Tigers however a different deal. How they play with you. Rake you across the ribs with a quick twist of their jaws and then backpedal to watch the blood uncurling from your body like a holy flag – I swear they *like* this – and wait to see what other brothers and sisters show up for the *luau*. The human *luau*. Tiger sharks, they’re never in a hurry. Always have time to watch you bleed.

So when you’re sitting far out on your board waiting for the next wave, your legs dangling into the deep, in the back of your mind there’s tiger

sharks. Occasionally they take somebody, leave a shred of bathing suit or a chewed board. But you can always hope it'll be someone else.

But what I didn't understand when I found Sylvia Gordon is why the tigers didn't get her. She'd been dead six hours, Leon said. Trouble with Leon is he hardly ever lies except professionally.

Not only did she get held under till she choked out the last air and sucked in fresh water that filled her lungs like embalming fluid, after that she got dumped in the ocean and the tigers didn't get her.

Why was that?

Leon didn't seem to care. "We're lookin at this," he said. "From *The Honolulu Post* stuff she was doin. She was some nosy broad, yeah?"

Thing about Hawaiians – and you can tell a true Hawaiian by if she or he does this – they often end a sentence *yeah?* It's reflexive, like scratching your balls when they itch. I've caught myself more than a few times doing that in polite company.

So I asks Leon what's he mean. He says she was doin articles – in the *paper* even, on crystal meth. So the meth dealers wanted to clean her. And they did.

Now crystal meth is a horrible disease and like leprosy and most other diseases in Hawaii it came from the haoles – the white folks. A partial list of the plagues the haoles brought to Hawaii includes malaria (mosquitoes), influenza, tuberculosis, cholera, mumps, diphtheria, smallpox, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, obesity, diabetes, syphilis, gonorrhea, rats and then

the mongoose to kill the rats, fleas, head lice, pubic lice, poverty and servitude.

Men who had been free to fish and hunt all day, rejoice in their large families and the pleasures of love and life were now forced to work twelve hours a day six days a week bent over in the pineapple plantations, or swinging the machete in the sugar fields, while the plantation owners relaxed in the shade, sipped mint juleps and discussed how to get richer.

The word haole comes from ha and ole, meaning without breath. The whites were so pale they were assumed to be dead, also they did not exchange breath or hug each other as Hawaiians do.

Tourists who stay on Waikiki (a horrible place – the antithesis of Hawaii) or some sham Maui condo furnished with top-of-the-line formica, Wal-Mart dishes and phony Hawaiian prints, or even in the fake Kona resorts where (*I swear* this is true) they have ersatz Hawaiian celebrations with gas-fired torches and fat ladies dancing hula (more on this later, but as a clue, hula came from the same place as rock’n roll) – almost never get to see the sleazy side of paradise.

To tourists Hawaii is an air-conditioned tanning booth with shopping, booze, bikinis, and lots of smiling low-paid help. The real Hawaii is something else – the greatest mariners the world has ever known, brave warriors and wise healers, a deep-hearted family connection reaching hundreds of people and across whole islands, love of the ancestors, a magical way of life.



Leon bless his narrow little soul tells me how a bunch of guys on the North Shore were brewing meth big time and Sylvia went out to investigate and they're the ones who drowned her. "We arrested seven these guys already," Leon says under his big black brushy brows. "Get the rest the motherfuckers tomorrow."

What strikes me right then, if these methheads did in this beautiful person how come they're hanging out in their hammocks by the seaside high on meth and getting blow jobs from their cranked-out sweethearts when the cops arrive? If it was me that killed her, by now I'd be deep in the mountains of Molokai.

Leon didn't assist with this theory. Because he hates methheads. With good reason. You can walk in a house full of methheads and the kids haven't been fed in three days nor had their shitty diapers changed. And some skinny little dog is lying dead on the carpet. So I'm not fond of methheads either.

But that doesn't mean they killed Sylvia Gordon. Because methheads ain't proactive.

In Afghanistan we had what we called instant response. The ragheads nail one of us, we nail them right away three times harder. But our mission in Afghanistan was entirely humanitarian. And anyways methheads ain't so bad as ragheads.

I figured Leon was practicing instant response. Going for the usual suspects.

I left feeling Leon was less than half full of honesty. Which is a precious commodity these days. I wandered over to Kahala and talked to some surfing buddies. Including Grunge.

He's one of the best surfers on Oahu and I trust him because he's an ex-Marine. From GW's fabricated Iraq War. "She was here," Grunge said. "God what a pretty lady. One a them that walks softly, you know, not even knowin how pretty she is and we just want to bow down and say can I lay my cloak under your feet?"

Trouble with Grunge is he's prone to overstatement, as he got his head mixed up in Iraq from too many IEDs, and every time a 747 of pudgy pale tourists roars over he just hears incoming and reaches for his guns. So he's always a little furtive, glancing about.

"They kill her?" I says. "The methheads?"

"*Kill* her?" Grunge sounds offended. "Hell no."

"Then who did?" I says, but really to myself.

THAT NIGHT I did the strangest thing. I'd been out on the rocks with my rod trying to get dinner. I get a nice hit and it's an oholehole, lovely delicious fish. About eight inches. He stared into my eyes and I unhooked him and set him free.

Went home and tossed a pound of frozen hamburger on the fire and cut open a papaya. You could argue that the steer wanted to live too, but cattle aren't free, can't survive in the real world, and are stupid as shit,

whereas most wild fish are fast, wise and beautiful. Sadly however we are what we eat.

So maybe it was stupid to turn on the TV. I hate the damn thing but tonight felt lonely in the reminder of death and wanted some distraction. And caught KHON just as a photo of Sylvia's smiling bright-eyed face filled the screen, the announcer saying, "The drowning of *Honolulu Post* reporter Sylvia Gordon," his charming TV voice all sad and wistful, "police now say was an accident."

# *True Aloha*

“SO WE MADE A MISTAKE,” Leon says next morning when I drove down to see him, his eyes like candles far back in a cave.

“Nobody makes that mistake,” I answered. “You said she had fresh water in her lungs –”

Leon massaged his lugubrious jowls. “Coroner changed his mind. Musta re-analyzed it.”

“What’s his name?”

“Joe Krill. Says she musta floated in from Black Point, the way the currents flow. Anyway,” he looks at me, “what’s it to you?”

“I want to talk to him.”

“Look, Pono, when you have your last piss test?”

“Last week,” I lied.

“You keep this up we do one a day.”

“Keep what up?”

“Fussin about this girl.”

“You said the methheads –”

“They was clean, good alibis. Didn’t even know she was writin articles...”

“Leon,” I says like we was old friends. “You said her lungs were full of fresh water. How’s *that* accidental?”

Leon picked up the phone. “Sergeant, send this man down for a piss test.”

I got up quick. “I was just leaving.”

“Now you ain’t.”

“I got an appointment.”

“Yeah you do. Downstairs.”

I walked out real fast and Leon didn’t call me back, but now the cop shop was off limits. And whatever I did for Sylvia I had to do on my own.

ALOHA is an often-misunderstood word. It can mean hello or goodbye, but also affection or sympathy or the warmth that holds people together. Among Hawaiians there’s a lot of this subliminal connection – like *sympathy*, whose Greek roots mean *to experience emotion together*. And for Hawaiians that emotion includes being ruled by westerners for the last two hundred years,

who stole your land, killed lots of your people, banned your language and wiped out your entire way of life.

But unlike the missionary thieves who pillaged Hawaii in God's name and kept the spoils, my missionary ancestor Elias Hawkins returned the land King Kamehameha had granted him back to the Hawaiian people. While the descendants of all the other missionary hit men morphed their holdings into the super-corporations that run Hawaii today.

But even if you're half haole you can cross over. If the Hawaiians trust you. So I went to see Bruiser, security chief at the *Post*. A boxer, six feet two with a Hawaiian barrel chest, a clan tattoo down his arm and a smile so big a boat could sink in it.

Speaking of security, that's what everyone wants these days. Go anyplace and there's a dude with a sidearm watching you. Couple decades ago no one carried handguns and nobody walked into places killing people. Now thanks to the NRA, the politicians and the Muslim fundamentalists we need security everywhere. Might as well live in Afghanistan.

Bruiser doesn't care from that. It's a job. "Sylvia was nice to everyone," he says. "You know how office people they look down on the rest of us? Sometimes they're friendly just to pretend they ain't ho'o kano. But Sylvia she wasn't like that. When my Auntie Gracie passed last month, Sylvia she come the service... One time she went to Maui she bring me back mangoes right off her friend's tree --"

"She had a friend in Maui?"



25 MINUTES will get you to Maui from Oahu on Island Air. A lovely view of the sapphire ocean, past the translucent aqua of Molokai Reef, the longest and most pristine coral reef north of Australia, then over the magnificent National Humpback Whale Sanctuary, then Penguin Banks, the richest feeding ground in the Pacific, and you land in Los Angeles only they call it Kahului. So Maui isn't the green garden it used to be unless green to you means money.

Because lots and lots of money was made building these huge concrete hotels and condominiums casting their dark shadows across the spindly beach. Shopping centers, fancy boutiques, chain restaurants and multi-lane highways going off in all directions and at night there's all the three hundred dollar hookers you could want and any kind of drug you can imagine. Like Reagan used to say when he shilled for General Electric before he became president and shilled for big money, *Progress is our most important product.*

One thing Reagan did say certainly applies to Hawaii: *Politics is supposed to be the second-oldest profession. I have come to realize that it bears a very close resemblance to the first.*

But there's nothing wrong with being a hooker. The wrong politicians commit is pretending that they're not. And while a whore actually gives you something for your money, a politician just takes your money and screws you in a different way.

Sylvia's friend Angie lived in a ramshackle plank house up a dirt road in an area where due to the present recession everything hadn't been torn

down yet to make condos. She was slight and pretty and blinked a lot to hide her tears, wiping them onto the short cotton skirt she wore with a skimpy halter top, but clearly at the moment she wasn't any more interested in sex than I was.

"Sylvia grew up on Kauai," Angie said. "She and I were roommates at Bates, but after that I came home to Maui and she stayed on the mainland, was working in Boston, came out here to visit me last May..." Angie paused. "If *only* I hadn't invited her... but she decided to stay here and got a job right away – can you imagine it in *these* times, as Maui correspondent for the *Post* – that's the kind of person Sylvia was – could do anything she set her mind to--"

"Except stay safe," I said, feeling mean for saying it.

She sniffed. "After three months they moved her to Honolulu as an investigative reporter. You know," she looked at me pleadingly, "she almost didn't go?"

"Why?"

"She didn't like Honolulu, said she might as well live in New Jersey..." Angie turned away. "Oh what a horrible accident."

I learned long ago never tell anyone anything till you're sure where they're coming from. "An investigative reporter, that could have made her lots of enemies, yeah?"

"Oh no. Everybody loved Sylvia."

Now I never heard of anyone *everybody* loved, but I kept quiet on that. “When you saw her last it was when, two weeks ago, did she talk what she was doing?”

“Oh yes,” a brief flash of happy agreement. “She was doing research on a big series the *Post* had scheduled... She was really excited. ‘I’m finally really getting my teeth into something —’ that’s what she said.”

“A series on what?”

“This huge project that’s being planned, billions of dollars... monster wind turbines all over Maui, Lanai and Molokai, blasting a billion-dollar cable through the Whale Sanctuary. It’s supposed to bring power from all the other islands to Oahu.”

I’d heard a little about this gargantuan taxpayer-subsidized scam but hadn’t paid attention, thinking no one could be so stupid as to actually do it. “So she was *for* it?”

“Oh no. ‘The more I learn about it,’ Sylvia told me, ‘the worse it smells. And when I learn enough I’m going to break it wide open.’ It was a perfect example, she said, of why *Money* magazine rated Hawaii the most politically corrupt state in the country, and even worse than Russia. Those were about the last words she ever said to me.”

“When was that?”

“On the phone, two nights before she died.”

“What else she say?”

“That a lot of the other media had been ‘bought’ – that was the word she used – by the developers of this project, or they were part of the fat money system that’s run Hawaii since the conquest ...”

“Who’s behind this thing?”

“Behind it? Oh everybody who has lots of money and wants more: the Governor, IEEC, Lanai Land Corporation, an outfit called Ecology Profits, which is a bunch of investment bankers, Sylvia said, masquerading as environmentalists. Plus WindPower and all the other mainland industrial wind companies living on billions of taxpayer ripoffs. That’s what she said.”

Lanai Land Corporation was one of the colossal corporations founded on the holdings of Protestant missionary families I mentioned earlier, that had stolen most of the Hawaiians’ land decades ago and made billions on it since, mostly on sugar, bananas, pineapples and subdivisions. IEEC was Island Electric Energy Company, universally hated for its bullying monopolistic ways, bad management, and the nation’s highest electricity bills.

“But the government,” I pointed out, “doesn’t have any money anymore.”

Angie half-smiled. “That doesn’t stop the Washington pork, though, does it?”

I scratched my head. I do that when I’m thinking. And as a result get lots of dandruff in my eyes. “What’s it called, this thing?”

“You don’t know?” She widened her eyes as if I was being unnecessarily stupid. “Big Wind and the Interisland Cable.”

# *How I Got Mojo*

SO BACK I GO, talk to Bruiser. Seeing as he's my only contact in the media world.

Know how you can have a hunch and often it's right? Not a few times in Afghanistan they saved my life. And about Sylvia I had three:

*One:* She didn't drown from accident.

*Two:* If we'd met we might have fallen in love.

*Three:* If I'd known her I might have saved her.

"What you coming round here for?" Bruiser said. "Surf's good today."

I looked at the sour staccato street, pale tourists, flashy facades and manic traffic, the inane busyness of Honolulu, and wondered why everybody didn't go surfing instead. Which is why Honolulu's traffic congestion is rated the worst in America. "Whacked my head, my board, yesterday. Givin it a rest."

"You get whacked, your board, every day. What's new from that?"

“So, Sylvia Gordon? I hear she maybe didn’t drown from accident.”

Bruiser looked at me darkly. “What you say?”

I explained him. He looked even darker. Like I said, when they adopt you in Hawaii, it goes deep. And he and his *ohana*, his extended family, had adopted Sylvia. “Last morning before she died,” he said, “some guy, he dropped her off.”

“You know who?”

“Nah.”

I nodded up at the huge building. “Who should I talk to, in here?”

“Managing editor, Godfrey Slink. She was doin the special piece for him. But last day she say he don’t like it, he don’t want it no more.”

“That was all? That she was doin for him?”

“That was all, Bro. She was choosy. Savin herself.”

“For what?”

“For what she was waitin for. You dumb or what?”

“You know a lot for a hired cop.”

He grinned a knocked-out tooth. “Big Brother watchin. All the time.”

**GODFREY SLINK** was tall and lank and had a monkish pate with a silver fringe. I wanted to mention that *Godfrey* means *God’s Peace* but the moment wasn’t auspicious.

“What’s this to you?” he says by way of opening.

I explained him how I found her. “One of those tragic accidents,” he says wistfully. “Here at the paper we’re crushed...”



The AC in his office made it colder than January in Fairbanks. “But what if it wasn’t an accident?”

“You know better than the Coroner who examined her?”

“How come he first said she was drowned?”

He looked for his coffee cup on a desk strewn with papers. “Coroners are human. They make mistakes.”

“So how come you tell Sylvia to drop the big story?”

He looked at me exasperatedly. “*What* big story?”

“Big Wind and the Cable.”

He slid attenuated fingers across pale lips. “That got killed.”

“How come?”

“There wasn’t any story to it.”

“You’re ducking me.”

He glanced at me sharply. “I believe we’re done here.”

SHOULDN’T HAVE left so accommodatingly. Because good old Godfrey, *God’s Peace* himself, knew more than he said. About Big Wind and the Cable. But I didn’t learn that till later. When it was almost too late.

A few years ago we had a Republican governor named Penny Blight who of course had lots of friends with money: General Electric, the U.S. Department of Energy (Enron light), defense contractors, Lanai Land Corporation (like I said, one of the companies that stole all the land from the Hawaiians then made them work it like slaves)... Just normal corporate business, if you see what’s happening today when we have the Senator from

Exxon and the Congressman from General Electric, and anyone who thinks we still live in a democracy is suffering from terminal naiveté... but as usual I'm getting off the subject.

So Penny Blight the good-looking Republican governor (if they'd picked her rather than whatshername from Alaska we might have ended up with an old fart for president instead of this young guy who's still looking for an ass he hasn't yet kissed in Washington), she figured she'd build a high-speed superferry to make sure all the outer islands would get overdeveloped like Oahu. It would also serve as population control on the whales, dolphins and our other sea animals, because it went so fast it would kill them before they could get out of the way.

Well, the folks on the outer islands said no, but that didn't matter; she tried to push it down their throats without doing an environmental impact statement. Even when the courts told her she needed an EIS she still pushed it, so finally the folks on Kauai went out on their surfboards and canoes and blocked the superferry when it came into port, and it finally went away.

Then Penny figured out with the help of her corporate friends that there were billions of dollars to be made with this taxpayer ripoff called Big Wind (it should be called Break Wind except that ain't polite).

But she ran into term limits so now we have this ex-reefer madness guy named Alvin Fitch, a Democrat – no surprise in this fraudulently single-party state. He campaigned on the promise to kill Big Wind, but if you've ever invested any faith or funds in a Democrat you know how far they can fall. Turns out Alvin has set the record of transgressing on his promises and

proliferating all the evils he campaigned against.

He ran as an outsider, but soon as he got in office he started pushing all Penny's nasty agendas that the corporations want like superferries and Big Wind and the Undersea Cable that would cost taxpayers billions and kill the whales the taxpayers are trying to protect, because God bless the American taxpayer, they love whales and the environment and what they *don't* want is more wars and trashing what's left of this lovely earth we live on.

But these days it's the politicians' job, after they get elected, to kill the whales and trash the earth – because thanks to that recent Supreme Court vote (5 Republicans yes, 4 Democrats no), corporations can give all the money they want to politicians. So if you send the Governor fifty bucks and General Electric sends him fifty thousand, guess who he runs with?

He said as much, quote: “If you want me to listen to you then you better contribute to my campaign.” Now isn't that rare, a politician who *ever* speaks the truth?

And speaking of General Electric, turns out they made ten billion dollars profit last year but paid no taxes. Actually GE got a two billion dollar *tax credit* for building windmills that don't produce electricity and for all the terrible losses they'd had as a result. BP – who gave us the Gulf of Mexico Oil Spill – owns huge wind projects and uses them to offset billions in taxes. But that doesn't matter – our country sure don't need the money.

As usual I'm getting off my story. Makes me want to tell you about Afghanistan. Kind of like politics in Hawaii. Like Penny Blight running for Congress, still pushing the Big Wind Cable, and collecting campaign

donations from all the billion-dollar companies who want the taxpayer corporate welfare payments from it.

Unlike all these evil people, Sylvia Gordon, God bless her, was eating my heart. She was murdered but that wasn't the official story. As if Jack Kennedy was killed by Oswald's bullets – anybody from Special Forces can tell you no way *that* was true.

But I wasn't getting anywhere near to finding who killed Sylvia.

That night with Puma stretched across my stomach and Mojo snoring at my side I tried not to think about how she'd died, this lovely smart caring person held underwater by thick strong hands. Her last scrabbling for life. The moment she knew she wasn't going to make it.

And why all night in the ocean the tiger sharks didn't get her.

To Hawaiians *ohana* means family in the wide sense. My *ohana* is hundreds of people on the Big Island, Molokai and Maui. I've got two hundred cousins if I have one. We're linked all the way back to those magician seafarers who, long before the Europeans, sailed their rickety rafts far into the unknown and linked the Pacific.

So when Bruiser's *ohana* took Sylvia in, that means she was a very special person. One who like a Hawaiian reveres the land and sea because the land and sea are life, who loves and protects others because that is the *pono* way, the only righteous life.

If she floated out there six hours, how come the sharks didn't get her?

I GOT MOJO from an Israeli surfer named Alexa who lived a while on the North Shore. She'd rescued Mojo from death row at the puppy penitentiary and used to bring him to the beach when she went surfing.

She'd just come in from a long ride and we sat on the sand talking about the cross-currents and how to take the big ones. She had on a halter top that revealed some of her lovely small pear-shaped breasts, making me feel as I usually do around pretty women, that if I could only get between her thighs just once I'd be happy to die young.

We talked about the waves while Mojo excavated sand and chased crabs and barked at the other surfers. After a while we swam out beyond the surf and made love. It was getting dark, the ocean deep about a hundred feet, and this fifteen-foot hammerhead comes rising up to watch us. Then he turned away and for a moment I could read his mind. *Wow, he was saying, so humans do it too.*

When she flew home to Jerusalem I ended up with Mojo. He must've known I'd taken him in exchange for my time with Alexa but for some reason it seemed to annoy him when he should've felt proud.

Next day surfing I parked Mojo's little puppy ass on the beach. The waves were good, I had a new board I'd just run through the sander, there were some nice pipelines and other guys were getting fine rides. But Mojo kept running up and down the water's edge barking his tiny tail off. I figured little bastard's gonna drown and I won't have to buy any of that disgusting pet food they show on TV with some golden retriever barking for more.

Everybody knows golden retrievers rival sea slugs in IQ, but do they have to stoop to that?

To shut Mojo up I put him on my new board and walked it out a few feet. Being a dachshund he was low-slung with a wide stance that fit the board perfectly. He rode the first wavelets easily, wagging his tail and barking excitedly and watching the waves for more. He wiped out a few times but just paddled back to the board sputtering and trying to climb back on with his little bowed legs. I helped him up a few times then let him learn how to do it himself.

Within hours Mojo was surfing like a pro. Other guys had come up to see this, not believing. I'd walk Mojo out about twenty or thirty feet in the kiddie waves, turn the board around and let him catch the foam into shore. In he'd go, barking and wagging his tail and looking around to make sure everyone was watching. And I realized all the time he'd been on shore he'd been learning how we did it.

It got to be a problem because when I'd go out every dawn he'd want to go too. And he wasn't satisfied with just a few rides – for him it was an all-day thing. I had a short board I'd adapted from a windsurfer that became Mojo's board. So there we'd be, the two of us in my old white Karmann Ghia, him standing up in the passenger seat with his head out the window and his ears flapping, our two boards tied to the roof rack, on our way to the surf at six-thirty every morning.

And true to his name Mojo was a real chick magnet. Girls who never would've stopped to say hello were all over Mojo, and needless to say I got

plenty of second-hand action. It was like being a roadie in a band – Mojo was Mick Jagger, but hell, I was carrying his board.

In German *dachs* means badger, and of course *hund* is hound. These little guys were bred with short legs so they could go down badger holes and drag them out. A badger is pound for pound the toughest meanest animal on earth. There's a badger in Africa even lions are terrified of. So anybody goes down a hole after a badger is pretty damn tough.

Perhaps due to some early puppy trauma Mojo hated pit bulls. Whenever he saw one he was after it instantly, me running after him fearing for his life. But it was the pit bulls I should've feared for. He'd get under them and bite them in the belly and no matter which way they turned Mojo was faster. It was an unfair fight.

There was a particular pit bull in the neighborhood who killed cats. I'd talked to the owner – a big nasty Texan with one of those silly pickups on huge wheels – about keeping him tied up, but this guy got his rocks off on how tough his dog was. One afternoon I hear this racket outside and it's the damn pit bull has chased Puma up a mango tree. She's on a branch, all seven pounds of her hissing away at him.

The pit bull heard Mojo coming but it was too late. Mojo got under his belly and went to work, the big dog spinning and snapping his jaws but he couldn't catch Mojo. Then Mojo grabbed him by the privates and really ripped. That pit bull squealed and started running, Mojo hanging between his legs, chewing and biting and trying to slow him down by dragging his rear

feet. By the time he finally let go the pit bull was howling three octaves higher, and I never saw him again.

As Mojo's renown grew we started getting requests. Tourists wanting to shoot videos. Then a wedding where Mojo was the star act. By this time he was getting good – I'd paddle him out about a hundred feet, spin him around, wait for a soft curl and give him a shove. By now he was doing tricks and running up and down the board. All the time wagging his little curly tail and barking, a big grin on his long dachshund snout. Fame is a real high, and Mojo was getting his full.

Then Waikiki Hilton Village signed him up. Every Thursday afternoon three to five, come watch the amazing surfing dog! Nobody believed it till they saw him. KITV shot him and he was all over the television, then YouTube and all the rest.

Perhaps due to the stress of fame Mojo started hitting the sauce. Afternoons when I sat on the lanai drinking my Tanqueray martini with Puma in my lap, Mojo would sidle over and whine. "Go get your bowl," I'd say. He'd go grab his empty dinner bowl and I'd pour in a taste of martini for him. *Lap lap lap*. Then whine for more.

"This dog needs to go on the wagon," Julie Brownmiller, who was living with me at the time, would say.

Even worse he was doing drugs. Sad to say but true. Julie was fond of Maui Wowie and every time she lit up he'd be there beside her, sitting dachshund-style on his little ass and rear legs, vertical as a tree stump,



waiting for her to blow some smoke at him. He'd sniff in quickly and wait for more.

“This dog needs to go into rehab,” Julie would say.

Those were the good old days. Before Big Wind and the Governor's hideous Cable.

# *Max AC*

## HERE'S WHAT I KNEW:

*One:* Sylvia was doing a newspaper series about Big Wind and the Undersea Cable.

*Two:* She was going to blow it wide open. That meant there was some scam to it.

*Three:* *The Post* was going to run the series on this scam, but then killed it.

*Four:* She was drowned in fresh water then floated six hours in the ocean.

*Five:* But the tiger sharks didn't get her.

*Six:* Police first said she was drowned by somebody.

*Seven:* They changed their minds and said it was an accident.

*Eight:* Since it was an accident the case is closed.

ONE DAY TWO YEARS AGO my phone rings. "Mr. Hawkins?" a cultured

Japanese-American accent.

I glance around to check I was still me. “Yeah?”

“I’ve seen your articles in *Surfer News*... Do you still give lessons?”

The guy on the other end was named Frank Hamata. He’d spent the last thirty years as an electrical engineer, had just retired as vice president of Island Electric, and all he’d really wanted to do all his life was surf.

“I’d sit in my office,” he said one day, “and I could see them out my glass wall, down there riding the waves, and I’d think, them or me, who’s doing the right thing?”

“That easy,” I said. “*They* were.”

He smiled. Slim and small-statured with thin silvered hair, he had that deep mix of intelligence, humility, wisdom and kindness typical of Japanese-American business people in Hawaii. So I felt like the piano teacher with an older student: this one’s not going to Carnegie Hall but think of the joy you can bring into his life.

Frank would never ride the big ones, but he was going to have a lot of fun out there on the rolling curling ocean. And as any teacher knows, giving someone the gifts of bliss, awareness, fun and knowledge is about the greatest high you can get.

If I wanted to learn more about Big Wind, who better to ask?

“WHAT you been doing with yourself?” Frank asks as we sit in the shade of his royal palms, the ocean fussing and grinding on the rocks below.

I explain him that I was growing tired of racing around the world

doing surfing articles. And that I'm doing better at forgiving myself.

He gives me that kind, sad look. "You've got nothing to forgive, Pono."

I downed the fresh orange juice Frank always feeds me. "I was wondering –"

"How unusual..." Frank chuckled.

"Somebody was talking story, this new windmill project –"

He laughed. Which for Frank is an excessive show of emotion.

"Pono," he says, "you didn't come way out here to ask me a utility question."

I nodded. "True."

His eyebrows knotted. He had such a tough wise face that any emotion could be hidden in it. "You want to know about Big Wind and the Cable?"

"Yeah."

"Why?"

I had no choice but to tell him. About Sylvia and all.

He sat there hands clasped in front of his mouth, cogitating.

"I can't believe Big Wind and the Cable are linked to her death," he said finally. "But they're a total scam. Wind projects don't lower greenhouse emissions or fossil fuel use, they have terrible environmental, human health and social impacts, they destroy property values, they don't produce much power, most of them are owned by Big Oil, and most of the jobs go to the Chinese and other foreign companies..."

"That's not how people see them –"

He smiled, perhaps at human naiveté. “Of course wind projects make billions for the wind developers who pay millions in contributions to politicians including the President *and* Congress, who create outrageous subsidies to make the developers even richer... If I were still at IEEC I’d have killed Big Wind and the Cable long ago.”

Big Wind’s idea, he said, was to construct – I *swear* this is true – four hundred turbine towers, each forty-seven stories high, making them the tallest structures in Hawaii and nearly half the height of the World Trade Center – across fifty square miles of Molokai and Lanai, the two most beautiful islands in the Pacific.

Each of the four hundred turbine towers, he said, has three blades, each bigger than a Boeing 747 wing and weighing 22 tons. For each tower they dig a huge cavity in the ground, dump all that earth somewhere, and pour a two-million pound concrete and steel base that will be there forever.

Then – I swear this is true too – they want to dynamite a billion-dollar High Voltage cable between five islands, through the National Whale Sanctuary and Molokai Reef, the longest most pristine coral reef north of Australia, to send a piddle of electricity to Honolulu, so Honolulu can keep running Max AC to provide the cold weather the tourists all come here to avoid.

“To do this,” he added, “they will also blast deep water ports out of the coral reef, dig hundreds of miles of erosive dirt roads, build miles and miles of transmission lines, and more miles of cables that will be left in the ground in twenty years like all the concrete bases when this monstrosity

grinds to a halt.” He chuckled. “They deny it, of course, but in the end, all these turbine towers will be left in place like rusting remnants of some War of the Worlds, though the developers always make glib promises to set some money aside – *our* taxpayer money, no less – to take them down. The thousand-ton concrete bases? They aren’t going anywhere. Where would they dump them – in the Whale Sanctuary, perhaps?”

Big Wind will cost five to ten billion dollars, Frank said, but the developers don’t risk a cent – it’s all funded by overcharges on electricity customers who don’t need it and us taxpayers who can’t afford it.

“And here’s the best part,” Frank says ironically. “It makes hardly any electricity at all.”

“But I thought renewable energy...” I started to say.

“Wind is very erratic,” he explained. “That’s why we have to keep fossil fuel plants running full-time as backup. And usually when the wind blows is when we don’t need the power, so we have to curtail it... Many studies from around the world have shown that wind power doesn’t reduce greenhouse gas emissions or fossil fuel use. It’s just Big Oil masquerading as pro-environmental and making billions off the taxpayers in the process.”

Frank leaned forward. “The easy way,” he said, “to make Hawaii energy independent? Put rooftop solar on every house. But IEEC doesn’t want it, because if everyone’s generating their own electricity then IEEC loses its cash cow, the captive consumer, and the company goes broke . . . That’s why they’re blocking rooftop solar every way they can, putting a false fifteen percent limit on it . . . In five years IEEC won’t exist anymore, solar

will win out, but in the meantime, they're going to build Big Wind and the Cable if they possibly can."

Big Wind was like, he added, the old Soviet Union, where the Commissars in Moscow decided on some huge wasteful project, and would flood whole regions chasing thousands of people from their homes to build monstrous dams, but by the time the electricity got to Moscow you couldn't even fry an egg with it.

KNOW YOUR ENEMY is one of the first rules of war. It's the basis of *Six Strategies*, an ancient Chinese text, and of Sun Wu's *Art of War*, and of the writings of Sun Bin, who taught me more about protecting my country than any other person alive or dead.

With these thoughts in mind I reconnoitered the Honolulu offices of WindPower LLC, located near the top of a glossy high rise off King Street.

Feeling awkward and overdressed in a blazer and slacks I took the elevator to the thirty-ninth floor and stepped into a spacious entrée with floor to ceiling windows overlooking the tiny streets and flea-sized cars. The dizzying height made it seem impossible that Big Wind's turbine towers would be even taller.

WindPower's walls were tastefully hung with posters of pretty landscapes, sparkling streams and happy animals. It was calming and gave one unwarranted hope for humankind. A wall of clocks showing the time in cities around the world added a cosmopolitan touch.

The brightly dressed young receptionist smiled in my direction. "Hi,"

I said earnestly. “I’m a journalist doing a story on renewable energy –”

“Great!” she bubbled. “You’ll want to talk to Gavin Hughes, he’s our media guy. But,” she added sadly, “he’s not here right now –”

“Actually, I’m looking for someone more scientific.”

“Oh Gavin he’s scientific all right. He tells me stuff,” she added in her breezy semi-Brit accent, “that I don’t *at all* understand.”

A bleary tall bald guy with a mustache erupted through a side door. “I’m off to see Napoleon,” he announced. “Tell Damon I want a team meeting at four –” He goggled at me through large spectacles. “And you are?”

“A journalist, I...”

“Speak to Gavin.” His mouth snapped shut like a turtle’s and he scuttled out the door.

“Who’s that?” I said, in my role as investigative journalist.

“Oh that’s Simon Lafarge. Our CEO.”

“I thought Napoleon was dead – you guys brought him back to life?”

With a conspiratorial hand aside her mouth she whispered, “The Governor – Simon calls him that because he’s so small, you know? In the Legislature they call him the Gnome...”

Since she was sharing secrets I popped the next question: “You must get a lot of journalists coming around?”

She made a quick moue. “Not many.”

“What you’re doing is so great – getting rid of fossil fuels, changing us over to renewable energy. It must feel good to be in such a line of work.”



“Good to be on the good side, right?” she added, but it seemed rather sarcastic.

“Another journalist I knew said she’d interviewed Simon about this, that he made a good impression.”

“Really?”

“She really liked him, maybe you remember her? Sylvia Gordon?”

“You knew Sylvia? You think she *liked* him?”

“That surprises you?”

Again the conspiratorial hand aside her mouth. “Simon didn’t like *her*. He said no one was allowed to talk to her. He stood right there,” she nodded at the door, “and told her get lost.” She studied me. “How did you know Sylvia?”

I ducked that. “Why didn’t Simon like her?”

She shrugged. “He gets a little tetchy sometimes.”

“Tetchy?”

“You know.” She said the words bravely, as if no one had ever dared say them before: “Pissed off?”

“We all do I suppose. I get like that when the waves aren’t good.”

“You’re a surfer?”

I nodded, a little humbly.

“Gee I’ve always wanted to do that.”

“Actually, I teach surfing. I’d be happy to show you the basics some time.”

She studied me, considered this. “That’d be nice.”

I glanced at the clocks. Nine p.m. in New York, three a.m. in Paris, daybreak in Moscow. “When you finish here?”

“Five. Unless Simon makes me stay late.”

We settled on tomorrow. She’d bring her bathing suit to work and I’d pick her up. She was from New Zealand and her name was Charity. I didn’t like fooling her, but as Sun Bin says, it’s essential strategy to have an agent in the enemy camp. Now, despite myself, I had one.

Though I thought she didn’t know.

# *Scorpions and Centipedes*

WHEN I CAN'T FIGURE what to do I get down on myself. For being lazy, not solving things. Mojo senses what's amiss and plumps his butt on my lap and licks my mouth before I can turn away wondering where his tongue has been recently – and somehow in his furry, ocean-salty rufous presence I remember I'm *not* guilty and that it's okay to listen to lessons from the heart.

I spend so much time up on big waves where your decision time is a hundredth of a second, and the wrong decision can be painful or even fatal, that I'm not very good at regular cogitation. And I'm not the investigative type, don't know how to find information or scan the internet. I'm not talkative, and bad at asking questions. And since I'm on parole I have to be very careful who I annoy. If they put me back Inside I'll never find out who killed this beautiful woman.

Plus I'll go crazy.

TEACHING FOSTER KIDS how to surf took my mind off Sylvia. Twice a

week I bring seven of them down to the beach to work on getting out on the water, staying on their board, reading the waves, all the usual.

These kids are a reason to hate crystal meth. Their parents were so zoned out that Social Services placed the kids in foster homes. You can't just root a kid up from his family any more than you can tear a tree from the earth and plant it elsewhere. But in this case you needed to. The parents barely knew the kids were there, didn't feed or clothe them, didn't do anything. That's the wonders of modern chemistry: a little Sudafed or Contac and anhydrous ammonia is all you need.

One kid, Anthony, still has burn scars on his arm from when his Mom poured hot water on him instead of in her instant coffee. Nine years old and skinny, he got knocked around so much his smile's a little bent, but he's got guts and he wants to learn how to live. And there's no better way to learn how to live than surfing.

First I teach them how to swim. Nobody goes out on a board till they can swim well. Crystal meth kids tend to be afraid of everything, particularly the water. Week after week we work on it, and now it's great to watch them cut through the waves doing the crawl just like an Aussie.

"What's with you, Pono?" Anthony punches me in the gut. "Didn't get no lovin today?"

I hand-punched him back. "Just getting old, man."

"How old *are* you anyway," Cynthia asks, a brown urchin with a big-toothed grin, tugging at my finger.

"Seven hundred and seventy-nine."

She scowls. “You said you wouldn’t lie to us anymore.”

“But I didn’t say I’d do it any less –”

But they don’t want to talk, they want to surf. It does your heart good to see them out there leaning into the waves, scooting their boards back and forth over the crests as if they were born to it.

Which we all were. It’s just that we’ve forgot.

ANGIE HAS A FEY SEXY look she doesn’t know about. As natural to her as laughing at complicated thoughts or scratching between her toes.

The more I got to know her the more I realized she was absolutely no one but herself, and didn’t care to be anyone else. A complete package, a compact well-balanced whole with nonetheless half the mysteries of the universe locked up inside her.

Not that I was back on Maui because of Angie. I needed to understand Sylvia, learn her last activities and what the moment was that doomed her. The moment when someone decided she knew too much. Because if I had *that moment* I’d have her killers. With no chance that any of them was going to jail. That’s one of the things you learn in Special Forces – how *not* to send people to jail.

I suppose with all this talk about SF I should explain you. When the Islamic madmen destroyed our beautiful towers I was seventeen. A senior at Punahou headed for UCSD in marine biology. I’d surfed all my life, taken ocean-related courses at U of H, dived with the best and swum with the whales – if there’s anything purely religious it’s swimming with a mother

whale and calf – so ocean life was what I loved.

When the crazy Muslims hit us I felt bereaved. Sat in the UN dining room crying. Finished the year then decided *Screw marine biology I'm joining the Marines.*

“Nah, don’t do that,” Pa said. As a former Seal he hates the Marines. “Mindless cannon fodder. Bullet sponges.”

“I want to get Al Qaida.”

“So go in Special Forces. Those guys have all the fun. And they don’t have to spend their lives like Seals, in the damn ocean.”

THE HAWAIIAN TOURISM Office will tell you how multicultural we are – all the types and colors of different humans in these little islands. That’s because when the U.S. military invaded Hawaii and overthrew the Hawaiian Monarchy, and President McKinley appointed Sanford Dole to become Hawaii’s first territorial governor, Dole tried to turn the Hawaiians into serfs on the plantations he’d stolen from them, but the Hawaiians didn’t buy it. So Dole and the ex-missionary thugs banned the Hawaiian language and imported impoverished folks from other places – the Philippines, Japan, Korea, even Mexico, and a mixing of the races ensued.

In fact the Tourism Office, and all the other multi-million-dollar tourism campaigns make a big show of our smiling friendly people but don’t mention the low wages, health issues and all the other problems they face. Nor does the Tourism Office tell you about our exciting multicultural arthropod community, one that can give you the bite of your life.

Arthropod, from the ancient Greek, of course means *jointed feet*. Arthropods are eighty percent of all living things – all insects and crustaceans, including two that are quite poisonous and widespread in Hawaii: scorpions and centipedes. If you have to get bit by one, take the scorpion. Like our Governor, the centipede is far worse.

It's interesting how these evil creatures showed up in Hawaii: our islands rose from the sea when the Pacific plate slid slowly northwest over a hot spot in the earth's mantle, at a speed of 30 miles every million years. That led to spurts of volcanic activity which created the islands, Kauai 5 million years ago, Oahu 2.5 million years ago, and the Big Island only 400,000 years ago.

Everything that now lives on these islands either floated or flew to them – including us. So how did centipedes and scorpions get here? Probably on flotsam from Malaysia – or did the ancient Polynesians unknowingly bring them in their sailing ships so long ago?

Either creature will give you a bite to remember – the centipede can put you in the hospital. An Afghani trick is to put scorpions in your bed, which can make you never want to sleep again.

Like the people who killed Sylvia, centipedes hide under the detritus of everyday life, seemingly innocuous yet deadly. If you want to find a centipede or scorpion you look where you normally wouldn't go – in dead leaves, under rocks or old lumber.

I'd been to WindPower LLC, a place I'd normally never go. Where else was I not looking for whoever killed Sylvia?

LIKE MOJO, PUMA arrived without invitation. It was a rainy night, windy and cold for Hawaii. I lay in bed listening to the patter and spatter of rain, reflecting on Afghanistan, prison life and the vagaries of humankind. I was happy to be alive in the loveliness of the rain, which to the ancient Hawaiians was a gift of the gods.

A slight mewling tugged at my awareness. Bamboo leaves rubbing against the house, a trickle in a gutter. The rain came back in gusts, thundering on the tin roof, and I forgot the sound, but soon it was back again.

Mojo was sleeping in his usual position beside me and grumbled when I moved him. Flicking on a headlamp to check the floor for scorpions and centipedes I went to the kitchen window but could hear mostly the *drip, drip*, *drip* off the eaves. Distant tires howled on the highway; water gurgled in the gutters, the surf rumbled, and the rain swept over the roof and hissed through the mango leaves.

I opened the back door and glanced out. It was a beautiful night; everything shone with the glossiness of rain. Something cold and wet brushed against my foot – a little ball of soaked fur.

What could I do? I wrapped her in a towel and held her against my chest till she stopped shivering. She snuggled closer and started purring. Is there a person on this earth who would have put her back outside?

She was all black but for a patch of white on her chest. I rubbed her down with the towel and gave her some of Mojo's hamburger and rice which she ate instantly and looked for more. At the sound of his food being eaten



Mojo trotted into the kitchen and growled. The kitten clawed his nose and Mojo backed away. He who would take on a pit bull any day was not going to mess with this little cat.

She slept that night on one side of me with Mojo on the other. When she wanted to change sides she went to his side and made him move. It was clear from the beginning that this two-pound kitten was going to rule the house.

Over the next few months she grew to full size, all seven pounds. My vet Paula calls her a Burmese, due to her relatively flat face. “What’s her name?” Paula said.

“Cat.”

“C’mon Pono, you have to do better than that.”

“Okay, what do you suggest?” I always defer to Paula as she is a star skydiver and I’m afraid of heights.

She cradled the cat between her lovely breasts. “When I worked at the San Diego Zoo we had a black puma with a white spot on her chest. You should call her Puma –”

So “Puma” it was. An absolutely fearless, affectionate and wise friend. A dog is a loyal, loving companion and protector, but a house without a cat is like a body without a heart.

She knows when I’m feeling down and leaps into my lap and does everything she can to boost me up – rubs herself against me, purring, licks my fingers with her scratchy little tongue, kneads her claws in my stomach – trying to make me feel loved and wanted. Usually it works.

Supposedly there are cat people and dog people, but us lucky folks have both. Our window into the minds and lives of creatures halfway between us dumb domestic humans and the wild world we lost so long ago.

Only thing I held against Puma is she wouldn't learn to surf.

# *Thieves and Liars*

AFGHANISTAN WAS HOW I ended up Inside the first time. Second time was right here in Honolulu. But that's another story.

You'd think there's little connection between Afghanistan and Hawaii, but in reality they're very close. Honolulu politics is like Kabul: a few good honest politicians but enough thieves and liars to ruin everything. Perhaps this is why Hawaii gets continually rated the most politically corrupt of the fifty states – not an easy accomplishment these days.

Like Pa said, the trick was get into Special Forces, don't be a bullet sponge in the Marines. First requirement was Ranger training at Fort Benning – day after day of the most exhilarating exhaustion you could ever wish for, running, rucksack marching, climbing wicked hills and jumping off tall walls into muddy rivers and nasty bush and all the time the drill sergeant abusing you in every legal and illegal way while your companions sweat and moan and collapse around you as if it were a real war.

Like most kids growing up half-wild in Hawaii I was running around

barefoot before I was two, surfing by five and windsurfing monster waves at ten, swimming long distances and running up the fourteen-thousand foot slopes of Mauna Loa and Mauna Kea as if they were stairs – to me they *were*, to a level of physical excitement beyond any drug. I was *crazy* about running – about *any* form of physical exertion that made my blood hot and the sweat pour off me like a Molokai waterfall.

So in the Rangers all that physical exertion was a turn-on. Young American guys today are nowhere near as tough as they used to be – too many carbs, TV and video idiocy, and the misconception that watching football games makes them men. While my companions were dropping like flies I was having the time of my life.

And after all that fun and games came the Special Forces Selection course at Fort Bragg – another twenty-four days of exhausting physical rigors, after which I was admitted as a Weapons Sergeant candidate to Special Forces Qualification Course, which made everything before it seem like kid's play.

Next thing I knew I was in Afghanistan.

And if you aren't crazy by the time you leave Afghanistan then you were crazy to begin with. Because you'd have to be crazy not to go crazy there.

SYLVIA HAD GONE TO MOLOKAI to see where they planned to put all these huge wind turbine towers. So Angie and I flew out of Kahului across the National Whale Sanctuary and around the north side of Molokai.

Molokai may be the world's loveliest island. It's just been rated one of the world's ten best by Yahoo Travel and MSNBC, and *National Geographic* rates it the sixth most beautiful island in the world, but it's better than that. With the world's second-longest coral reef on one side and the world's tallest sea cliffs on the other – incandescent green peaks with two-thousand foot waterfalls tumbling down their black volcanic faces to the frothing sea. Peak after peak topped by impenetrable rain jungles, valley after vertical valley of sparkling rainbowed cascades, and far below great muscular waves pummeling the black sand.

They unroll forever, these gorgeous cliffs, then you pass over the emerald peninsula of Kalaupapa where the haoles banished the lepers, shoving them off their boats into the huge waves crashing through the volcanic rubble. And where Father Damien was one of a few who dared to care.

Then more cliffs and magical waterfalls till you swing over green grazing lands then the rich farms of the Hawaiian homesteads, where anyone with Hawaiian ancestry gets forty acres of fertile volcanic soil, enough for a huge garden and chickens, pigs, and a cow or two, as well as papayas (my favorite), bananas, mangoes, coconuts, oranges, lemons, limes, passion fruit and all the other delicious stuff that just leaps out of the soil.

*Oh my god if you've ever eaten passion fruit right off the vine...*

Then you're into cattle country, steep ridges red and raw with erosion, everything sliding toward the sea. Then Hoolehua Airport, a wide spot in the road where all there was to rent was a huge blue Chrysler like Benny

Olivera's nuclear cruiser, and with Angie reading the map upside down I drove our Armageddon vehicle west toward the setting sun that gilded the jutting hills and set the sea afire.

They say you have no idea of beauty till you've come to Molokai. Some people call it the friendly island, but for most Hawaiians it is *the Sacred Island*, the only one that's kept its Hawaiian character despite the tidal wave of haoles. Even in the past, they say, enemies attacking Molokai died in their canoes before they ever reached the shore.

We stood on a lovely ridge with green forested valleys and grassy savannas on all sides sweeping down to the agate white-capped Pacific where whales spouted and slapped their huge tails. It was ecstasy – the perfumed warm air, the salty tang, the brilliant green bushes and grass, the explosions of yellow, purple, white and red flowers, the distant thunder and crash of the sea. The sun sank warmly into my shoulders, the air tasted fresh and cool. The endless sky covered us like a beneficent cloak. If the industrial wind developers had searched the world for the most beautiful place to destroy, they'd found it.

"Everywhere here," Angie said, "is our precious '*aina* – and ancient graves and sacred sites that will be destroyed, and the kupuna, the ancestors, will be lost forever."

"Fucking paradise," I added in my usual cogent way.

And not a breath of wind.

THAT NIGHT ANGIE and I stayed with her friends Mitch and Noelani high

up on the edge of the Molokai rain forest where the mists unfurled like Afghani veils and spattered off the towering trees and luminesced the long grass, and when you ate mangoes off the branch they were slippery with it.

“You can kill some kinds of trees up here,” Mitch said, “just by walking under them. Before people came to Hawaii there were no mammals, no four-footed predators or herbivores, so these trees evolved with a network of surface roots you can easily crush.”

Mitch has an earnest fast way of talking, using his long-fingered hands. For twenty years he’d been a studio guitarist in LA, one of those impeccable musicians who back all kinds of famous singers but are never named on the album notes. That was fine with Mitch; he loved music, not fame. And he made plenty of money, enough to buy this place and live with Noelani and work on saving the rain forest and the world-famous Molokai Reef and all Molokai’s other unique mysteries.

Angie said Noelani, whose name means *beautiful one from heaven*, had been dancing the hula since she was two and is now one of Hawaii’s best at this infinitely complex art. The hula is a way of telling a story without words, expressing an emotion too complex to relate, a time in history, usually done to a chant or instrumental music.

“It started right here on Molokai,” Noelani said. “Did you know that?”

I shook my head. The haole side of my family came to Hawaii in 1837 and I’ve lived here most of my life, but every day I learn something new about this marvelous place.

“When the missionaries came in – like your ancestor,” she smiled at me sweetly, “they tried to stamp out the hula, called it evil, the work of the devil.”

I thought about my ancestor Elias Hawkins. He hadn’t believed any of that. And he had nine kids and spent his life earnestly trying to help people, gave far more than he took.

“And now,” she added, “High Stakes Ranch, the Governor and IEEC want to put these wind turbine towers on the sacred spot where the hula was born –”

I still wanted to defend old Elias but kept silent on that.

“Before the Europeans came,” Noelani went on, “all Polynesians had very relaxed attitudes about sex. Kids started having sex when they hit puberty, most adult relationships were polyamorous and couples raised kids that were often not from both partners –”

“Polyamorous?” I said, not wanting to miss any interesting tidbit.

“*Poly* in Greek means *many*. Like Polynesia means *many islands*? I think you know what amorous means.”

“What’s that got to do with hula?”

“The missionaries of course were horrified at all this fun and happiness. They made people stop dancing, wear clothes, and go to church, and told them that having fun was a sin, and if they didn’t stop having sex they’d burn in Hell forever. Just to practice Hawaiian religion got you a year in prison . . .

“So all this sex got buried,” Noelani added earnestly, “and came out in



the hula. It can also be a poetic rendition of the sex act, and of a woman's ability to entice a man to sex."

"Most guys don't need any enticing," I said, thinking of myself.

"In Polynesian times the women often initiated sex. Any time, and as often as they wanted."

Paradise, I thought. And now we have Paradise Lost.

Mitch and Noelani's house looks out over cloud-wispy valleys and across Molokai Reef to Lanai, another magical island now owned by Lanai Land Corporation and run by an ancient harridan named Miranda Steale, and where Mitch said the developers want to build another forty square miles of turbine towers.

Watching the moonlight turn Lanai's western slopes ivory and silver it didn't seem possible anyone would want to do a thing like that, but you know how some people are – the only thing beautiful to them is money. Like that Spanish conquistador so in love with gold the Incas tied him to a stake and poured it molten down his throat.

Dinner was venison – I hate to keep talking superlatives but Molokai and Lanai have the world's best venison – deer originally given to King Kamehameha by an Indian rajah. The grass here is so sweet the deer have no gamey taste, just rich deep mouth-watering protein. And with it came Molokai purple sweet potatoes and string beans out of Mitch's garden, a salad of wild tomatoes and lettuce so delicious you want to keep chewing and chewing it.

"Building wind turbines on Molokai or Lanai," Mitch said, "is like a

hunting season on rare and endangered birds. Some turbine towers kill two hundred birds a day or more, and Hawaii is already the bird extinction capital of the world...”

“What they do to bats,” Noelani said, “is the wind implodes their lungs. Our bats are already dying out. This will finish them off.”

“And the towers with their thousands of blinking lights will kill the few *pueos* we have left,” Mitch added. Pueos are short-eared owls, already endangered, attracted to lights.

“We keep killing off these species,” Angie said, “that have been here for millions of years... As if it didn’t matter –”

“Our few remaining monk seals are on the edge,” Mitch added. “Any cables across their breeding grounds and they’ll go extinct. When was it, two years ago, Caribbean monk seals went extinct?”

Noelani turned to me. “Our problem is that we’re fighting huge and powerful enemies. This project makes no sense – it will cost billions, destroy a large part of Hawaii, is totally opposed by everyone who understands it. But none of that matters.”

“None of it *matters*?” I said.

She shook her head. “The governor and the legislature don’t care that in terms of science, engineering and economics this will be a disaster. President Obama doesn’t care – he doesn’t understand that industrial wind projects don’t lower greenhouse gases or fossil fuel use.”

“No matter what we say or do,” Mitch added, “they run right over us. They use our tax money to hire consultants to prove what they want, hire PR

firms to sell the project to us – they lie and we don’t have the millions of dollars to fight back.” He said nothing, then added sadly, “People don’t realize we don’t live in a democracy anymore.”

As they talked, I began to see Big Wind and the Cable for what they were – a monstrous War of the Worlds metallic evil stalking these beautiful islands – one more corporate thing to crush the beauty of the world.

Like the Iraq War – a vast costly disaster built on lies.

But some folks made billions on that too.

ANGIE SLEPT in the spare bedroom, and me on the lanai listening to the symphony of a million insects, the sad screech of *pueos* and the *plunk plunk plunk* of dew off the eaves. It was so beautiful I couldn’t sleep, went out on the deck to follow the stars’ slow slide across the ebony sky. There’s so few lights on Molokai you can see the stars and planets just as God made them, thick as a sparkling mist – you can reach right up and pull them down by handfuls – an endless universe that puts everything in perspective.

But the question I asked the stars that night was an old one: *In this world of thieves and liars how do we find truth?*

*Sylvia, wherever you are – can you tell me?*

TRUTH WASN’T HIGH on anybody’s list next morning when Angie and I visited the folks who run High Stakes Ranch, which owns most of western Molokai – a place so beautiful your eyes can’t stop feasting on it – and where these miles and miles of wind turbine towers would go. Though High Stakes

Ranch sounds American as cherry pie, Mitch said it's really owned by a Hong Kong gambling company that bought it in hopes of bringing casinos to Hawaii.

Three years ago they tried to install a mega-development of vacation mansions on sacred Hawaiian lands along the southwest Molokai coast, miles of untouched gold-sand beaches and forested volcanic cliffs and headlands. When the people of Molokai rose up like a tsunami and killed the project, the Ranch punitively shut down most of its other Molokai operations, fired two hundred employees, poisoned all the palm trees in their resorts, emptied the swimming pools, abandoned the golf courses and stopped fixing the roads, tried to cut off the water and other services they are required to provide.

I guess that's called big business, but Mitch said it didn't have the desired result. The folks on Molokai are tough and don't like being stepped on. Though the job cuts hurt, what it did was harden the hatred most Molokai people feel for High Stakes Ranch.

"WIND TOWERS are not in our interest at this time," said Ian Christian, the jovial slick-palmed CEO of High Stakes Ranch. Tall, avuncular and fat, Ian was sweating although the AC in his office would've killed a polar bear. Everything about him said *emoluments*, though I had to wait till I got home to look up what that meant.

"What do you mean," Angie said, "not at this time?"

He smiled down at her, palms open on the table. "Corporations aren't like people. We have to constantly reevaluate what's best for our

stockholders.”

“Corporations are considered persons under American law,” Angie snapped. “Unfortunately.”

“When Sylvia came out here,” I interjected, “did she talk to anyone at the Ranch?”

Fingers steepled, Ian thought. “No,” he shook his head slowly. “No, not that I know.”

“Not that you know? *Who* might know?” I was beginning to feel that cheery Ian was being less than open.

He smiled like I’d just answered a difficult question. “Now that she’s dead no one would know.”

THAT NIGHT SYLVIA came into my dreams as if I’d sent her an email, her lovely soft voice with a rough catch in the back of her throat, the lovely Hawaiian accent, the feminine immanence of her. “You’re going about this the wrong way,” she said.

“Of course. I can’t figure it out.”

“*Think!* You know I was killed. *Who* would want to kill me? And *why?* Who has the most to lose?”

“Jesus, Sylvia. You tell me.”

“I know,” her voice slipped away. “I know, but I still don’t know.”

What did that mean? And how can you find someone’s killer when even *they* don’t know who killed them?

PEOPLE SEEM to think me happy though I'm not. Probably Afghanistan is too much with me – ambushes, firefights, bomb blasts, the endless dying. The filth and despair, the horrible men and benumbed women, the insanity of religion.

But even before Afghanistan I wasn't happy. In a way our beautiful earth is going through the same thing as Afghanistan – slow dismemberment by human hands – and this preoccupied me in a way I couldn't alleviate. All around me my beloved Hawaii was dying – ruined by crooked politicians and ruthless companies building concrete towers and concrete freeways, pouring sewage into the sea and pollution into the once-fragrant air.

Often as a kid I hitched from Hilo to the Kona coast of the Big Island. There were times I waited for two hours or more on the little country road at Waimea and not a car passed. Today it's a car-clogged four-lane highway hemmed by shopping centers, condos and chain restaurants, the air thick with greasy emanations and windblown trash. People who live there have no idea what it once was. This is what sorrows my soul: we have lost the earth and don't even know it.

And Big Wind and the Cable, I was learning, would destroy it even more. Giving Hawaii the *coup de grace*, the bullet in the back of the head.

Anyone might think, I imagine, that I have an easy life. Get up early to surf, a job that pays enough to keep me surfing and canoe racing and chasing women, a car that often runs, pets I love and a roof that rarely leaks. What more is there in life?

But since Afghanistan, I was realizing, I'd lost purpose, given up

marine biology, commitment to a cause, a caring. And when Sylvia bumped into me, lovely, cold and dead, I began to remember there'd been a spirit life back in my past, and deep joy in many moments.

Like the people who live in Waimea and don't know what they've lost, what it once was, I had imagined I was happy because I didn't remember what happiness was.

# *Love and Death*

MOJO WAS FURIOUS when Angie and I got back from Molokai. She had decided to stay with me on Oahu as there was no late flight to Maui. My neighbor Zeke had fed and walked Mojo but that didn't count. For two days he hadn't been surfing and wasn't going to let me forget it.

Puma took out her annoyance by devoting herself to Angie and ignoring me. "Mojo has to pull himself together," I said, annoyed. "He's got a gig this afternoon."

"The one at the Hilton?"

"Seagram's is doing a marketing shoot, using him to promote some new energy drink – I get twelve hundred bucks for letting him do it."

"How much of that does *he* get?"

"Enough to keep us both in Tanqueray."

I should've known things were going to turn bad when he wouldn't get in the car, then didn't want to sit in the back because Angie was in the front. When we got to the beach I noticed there was a bit of cross swell out



there. Kind of like a rip tide, it can make riding tricky. The camera crew was ready, lights and expensive gear all over the place, a Zodiac inflatable pulled up on the sand. Ted, the Seagram's project director, was walking up and down watching the sun, looking nervous and harassed.

"You're going to have to watch the cross current," I tell Mojo, who's eyeing the cameras. The sun comes out from behind a cloud and I call him over, he hops on his board and we push out.

All's looking good, he catches the first wave just right, the camera crew tracking alongside in the Zodiac. Mojo turns to watch them not paying attention to the curl and it surges over the board and knocks him off, the board spins around and whacks him on the head.

I'm there in no time, put him back on the board but he's having none of it. We go into shore and he sits on the sand shaking water out of his flappy ears but won't get back on his board. For a good half hour I plead and coax, even promise filet mignon, but nothing works. Ted's very ticked off, and I would be too.

"He's never done this before," I explain.

"He got banged on the head," Angie adds.

"I've just blown four grand on this camera crew," Ted seethes.

"You're going back to the pound," I tell Mojo when we get home, but he just smirks and jumps in Angie's lap.

I'M STANDING THERE after dinner on my lanai looking up at the stars – we dumb humans have been doing that since we climbed out of the muck and

we *still* don't know what's really up there – and the door slides open behind me and Angie comes up beside me with her arm against mine making my heart thunder and I said very diplomatically *what a fuckin beautiful night*.

“Yeah,” she slid her fingers up my arm. “Let's do something about it.”

It was ardent and lovely, each inside the other's skin, and afterwards we lay there bonded, having finally said with our bodies what we had long felt. We made love all night and again in the morning on the breakfast table knocking aside dishes and papaya and banana skins, a coffee cup clattering, Mojo barking, Angie giggling and the sting of perfect pleasure neverending.

That afternoon we tried surfing but the waves weren't good so we went back and made love in the shower and sat on the lanai drinking Tanqueray martinis and talking about Sylvia like she was a dear friend who might show up any moment. And like a jealous lover I wanted to know about the men in Sylvia's life. “Was she seeing anyone lately,” I asked Angie.

“Not really. There was one guy, Manny, the last few weeks he was really after her but she didn't like him much. A leech, she called him... Manny St. Clair – that was his name... When we last talked, a week before she died she'd met a guy she really liked, somebody named Lou...”

“Any guys before that?”

“Not many, a few college boyfriends, then she got engaged to a guy in grad school but he died in the second Bush invasion of Iraq... I used to ask Sylvia,” Angie said, “Don't you miss sex?” And she'd say every once in a while she'd meet some guy, even did a couple of one-nighters but it didn't

click... I remember how she said it, kind of looking down at her long hands draped over her knees, and I knew she was thinking of Brian, the guy who died in Iraq.”

I looked out the window saying nothing, seeing the faces of dead friends.

“Who died?” Angie said, that way she had of seeing inside my head.

Startled, I pulled back from my friends, the IEDs, RPGs, bullets, grenades, falling buildings, bombs and screams of human beings. “What?”

“In Afghanistan?” She ran her palm up my thigh. “You don’t *have* to tell me...”

“It’d only make us both feel bad.”

She tickled her fingers over my ribs. “You feel pretty good, actually.” She leaned back pulling me with her. “I like the feel of *all* of you.”

It made me laugh, she was so funny and so good. Her kindness just overflowed into me, made me feel safe and protected. I had this sudden feeling of letting go. “We were on patrol. Up north, the mountains. This starving puppy had followed us, begging, and I turned to pull some MRE from my pocket and one of my guys stepped on a mine and two guys died because I glanced at that dog and didn’t see the wire.”

“Oh Pono –”

How do you put in words, I wondered, what you’ve lost? “Next day the squad – we’re down to seven guys now – we’re doing a weapons check in this Godforsaken village of about thirty stone huts on a rocky mountainside. It’s sleeting, the thermometer on my wristwatch says eighteen degrees – and

I'm watching every detail for the danger I'd missed yesterday. Ahead of us I could smell a fire, rancid smoke. They were searing a sheep skin, I thought, to get the last wool off the pelt. Horrible stench and then screams, almost-human, then this awful moan, a woman, '*Allah please kill me –*'"

"Oh my God," Angie whispered.

"I ran for the sound, into a courtyard, a bunch of guys with AKs standing around a writhing woman, her body charred, half her face coals, an empty gasoline tin. I screamed *What happened?* They turned at me, all angry, the woman gasping and shrieking –"

"Pono this is horrible."

"This old guy with a long beard grabs my shoulder, says *She looked at a man not her husband.*

"*She what?* I yelled at him.

"*In the market. Raised her eyes to him. A woman's eyes trap men in Hell, the Koran says –*

"Her eyes were gone but maybe she heard my voice, this foreign soldier's voice. *Please kill me*, she's screaming, *Oh God please kill me!* and one of my guys grabs my shoulder, 'C'mon, man, let's go, this shit happens all the time here –'

"*It is a just punishment*, a young Afghani in a dirty headscarf says. *God's will –*

"*Who did it?* I'm screaming at the old man, shaking him. *That is her husband*, he nods at the young man. *It was his duty.*

"She was dying. In the most horrible pain. There was no way to save

her. I shot her in the head.”

Angie said nothing, clenching my hand, her jaw trembling.

“*Criminal!* the young guy’s yelling at me. *She was to suffer!* I swung my rifle up and shot him.”

“Oh Pono.”

“I shouldn’t have maybe. But what he’d done to the woman was so awful, I just reacted... She wasn’t even a woman... just a girl, fifteen... These honor killings, they call them, so common in Muslim countries, a girl can be beaten to death by her father and brothers just for showing her face in public .

“Anyway, three days later I’m on a plane back to the States, and after two months and seven days of lockup at Fort Carson in Colorado I get a two-hour trial and twenty years in Leavenworth army prison. A civilian massacre, they said. Bad for our image.”

“When?” Angie said.

“December 2005. Four years after Bush let Bin Laden walk from Tora Bora, when we’d won the war and then lost it again.”

“But you didn’t do twenty years —”

“Another lawyer took my case, a West Pointer just out of law school. She got it reviewed, was going to make a big public fuss, so the Army commuted my sentence.”

Angie leaned back in her chair stroking my arm and looking out to sea. I sensed she was seeing the long unrolling of human history, all the wrongs and rights, the horrors imposed on each other, the sacraments of love.

“Oh, Pono,” she said again, each time meaning something different. And I

sensed I'd opened a secret chamber in my heart, a poisoned locket, had emptied it and now it might heal.

She squeezed my hand. "But you were in twice, you said."

"Yeah." Out to sea the waves were breaking better, steep and tall and steady. "I'll tell you some time."

Military prison's horrible but it's better than civilian prison. In military prison you get three squares and the guards are tough but they're Army too and aren't trying to sell you drugs or shorting your rations or wanting blow jobs, and they don't get you in a corner and work you over like civilian guards do, not unless you provoke them. And the other prisoners are Army too, trying to live out their time, and they don't try to cornhole you in the shower or break your ribs in the exercise yard.

"I learned a lot in Leavenworth," I said.

She had pulled her chair closer, her head against my shoulder, stroking my arm.

"You're treated like who you are," I went on. "You can withdraw, focus on yourself. Or you can give yourself to others, listen to their stories, love them for the good in them, try to *help* the good in them. If you do, I learned, your time goes faster. And at night when you lie down on that concrete slab you sleep easier."

She nuzzled against me. "I love sleeping with you. We've only spent one night together but I want more."

Another of the things I was learning about her was she lets you know right now what she feels. None of this coy stuff. I kissed the fragrant top of

her head where the hair parted. “We didn’t do much sleeping.”

She snuggled closer. “I’m not planning on sleeping tonight, either.”