

Chapter One

“Perhaps I didn’t make myself clear the first time, gentlemen. If either of you moves, I cut your balls off. Got it?”

The two men sprawled at Lani Kail’s feet—and the end of her Bowie diving knife—gave instant, silent nods. *Hell*. Why did she have to have trespassers stumble onto on her West Kaua`i beach tonight? And why did they have to be a pair of the most beautiful males she’d ever laid eyes on?

Trepidation gripped her again. Maybe they hadn’t “stumbled” at all. They were breathtaking, the kind of hunks a resort developer bully like Gunter Benson liked on his “support team.” The first of them, though clearly between three and thirteen sheets to the wind, was a mesmerizing mix of rugged and beautiful. His blazing amber eyes were framed by a messy head of hair in a slightly darker shade. The other filled out the yin to that yang, his silky gray gaze and spiky dark hair no less arresting. They were both built like the walls of Waimea Canyon, huge and hard and covered in taut bronze skin. Their open shirts, thrown over wrinkled khaki shorts, made it sinfully easy to confirm the conclusion.

Throwing them into a comparison with her island’s stunning tourist attraction brought a warning pulled straight from the canyon’s hiking brochures. *Distracted by the scenery? Prepare to fall to your death.*

She gulped, tightened her grip on the knife, and re-firmed her face. No sense in letting the hulks think their presence here was a shock, despite the fact that it was. Since the main highway ended a mile away, the sunset-seeking tourists kept mostly to the beaches south of the Barking Sands base, and thrill-seekers on their way to Na Pali usually only made breakfast stops here. So where had these two come from, and why had she found them in the middle of a fight that looked like a failed audition for a UFC slot?

There was only one answer that made sense. They had to be part of Gunter’s goon squad, sent out here in preparation for the “casual meeting” their boss had requested for tonight up at the ranch’s main house. And this move just screamed “casual,” didn’t it?

She glowered harder, though thanked the gods she’d discovered the intruders now, thanks to being paranoid enough to conduct a preliminary property sweep. The only thing she regretted about the decision was not thinking out her wardrobe better. With her mind consumed by anxiety about the appointment, she’d walked out of the house without thinking, still dressed in nothing but her bikini and thigh sheath—a factor clearly noticed by her detainees.

Damn it.

The gray-eyed stranger tried playing chief negotiator. He raised a placating hand, as if her knife was nothing but a quill pen. “We’ve got the message loud and clear, sweetheart. So why don’t you just lower—”

“I’m not your sweetheart.” She flicked the knife, making sure the blade reflected the light back into his face. But that meant she had to meet his gaze once more. *Why* did the man have to possess such mesmerizing eyes?

He lowered the hand. “Fair enough. Maybe you have a real name I can use?”

“Nice try.” Like he didn’t know her name already. The man’s persistent sociability, even with her Bowie at his nose, answered that well enough. What the hell was Benson’s game this time? Why had he sent in a pair of his “cabin boys” to act like drunk frat brothers on the beach like this? Did he think she wouldn’t see through this game? That she wouldn’t see him trying to “survey” the beach that wasn’t even his yet?

She winced at her mental default.

His *yet*?

No. *No*. This battle was far from over, no matter what Benson believed or connived to make *her* believe. There was nothing on this ranch—*her* ranch—that belonged to Benstock Development, including this sand. And she vowed, with renewed determination, that no grain of it would. She knew what the man and his company did to the lands they gobbled, to the people they took from their homes in the pretty and *not* so pretty ways.

Right now, Benson was making a run for the “pretty” angle. Shallow, devious coward.

“All right,” she snapped. “Stand up. Both of you. Slowly. Hands visible. No funny shit. I can gut a blue fin in two minutes with this thing, and your testicles won’t be half the challenge.” She rolled her eyes as Golden Eyes mangled his obedience, staggering more than straightening. “Okay, the act’s going to get old real fast, pretty boy.”

“Huh?” It was the first thing she’d heard out of the guy since she’d found the pair wrestling out here, pretending they were out for each other’s blood, even hurling booze bottles into her garden during the performance. But she knew better.

“The ‘soused and stupid’ act?” she countered. “It’s all right to cut it now. I know what’s really going on here, okay?”

“Oh?” He managed a sarcastic grin that looked lopsided due to a slightly crooked canine tooth. “Hmmm. Maybe you can fill me in, dreamgirl, ‘cause I’m a little lost.”

He leaned over, forcing her to deny better sense and steady his gait with a hand to his waist. He really was solid as a granite cliff. Thanks to the wind, she confirmed he really had hundred-proof vodka breath, too. *Aue*. She didn’t know whether to slap him or laugh at him. Normally, guys who did “drunk with a twist of cute” were more tempting than chocolate to her, but right now, she was much more ready for a Godiva than *any* of Benson’s brutes. Still, a new resolve took root. She’d have to keep her guard up with *both* these bozos.

“A ‘little lost,’ huh?” She shoved him away and pulled up on her stance again. “And I’m the goddess Hina, newly awakened for my nighttime adventures.”

“That explains a few things.” Mr. Intense Eyes and Dark Hair—and, she observed now, Endless Legs—surrendered that in a tone of a thousand nuances. She dared a glance at his face, to find his stare still fixed on her, looking like he deliberated the pieces of an intricate jigsaw puzzle.

She looked away before the man evoked the pull of a god in his own right. Just as fast, she added an angry huff. *God?* He barely should’ve gotten the courtesy of “man.” Both of these hulks were on Benstock’s payroll, which placed them somewhere between banana slugs and heroin dealers in the evolution chain.

“I’m taking you both back to the house,” she declared. “Sorry to cut your romp out here a little short, but since our friend arrives in less than fifteen minutes, you’ve given me no choice.”

“We’re goin’ to your place?” Golden Eyes cracked a woozy grin. “Suh-weet.”

To her surprise, McDark-And-Dreamy was just as ready with his hospitality. “Like *I* said before, we’re not here to cause trouble. And I’m sure any friend of yours will be a friend of—”

“Save it.” She hardened her posture, still baffled by the angle these guys were playing. Usually Benson selected his groupies for the clean-and-cute image so he could be the alpha dog with his fitted suits and expensive charm. These two apes didn’t fit an inch of that M.O.. But Gunter had never sent any of his men to play real estate recon on her beach before, either. The bastard was busting out an arsenal of new tactics, which only made her queasier about his agenda for the upcoming meeting itself. “Let’s go.” She pulled Gray Eyes forward by fitting the knife’s tip into one of his shirt’s button holes. “You’re taking lead, Yin Man.”

Confused crinkles appeared at the corners of his eyes. “Huh?”

“Yin and yang. It fits you two, in a demented way.”

He smiled. The look wasn’t a copy of his cheeky smirks so far. It grew from the middle of his mouth then moved outward in an ocean-like undulation...wrecking strange havoc on her stomach in the process. “Yeah. It probably does.”

His voice was different now, too. A little more serious. A lot more velvety.

Guard up, Hokulani!

“The path to the house starts there,” she ordered, “between the two papaya trees. Look for the bamboo planks. Got it?”

“Had it scoped about five minutes back, sweetheart.” He turned and trudged toward the trees, flexing calves the size of hams. For once, Lani was thankful for his strange cockiness. It made her consider the logistics of her order. *Damn*. The path was only wide enough for single-file travel, meaning there was no way to police both the men at once.

Or was there?

“Stop.” Her slam on the syllable was sufficient to freeze them both.

Yang swiveled his amber gaze back at her. “Dear Christ, I like the way she says that.”

“Down, T-Bomb,” cautioned Yin.

“Well, don’t *you*?”

Gray Eyes didn’t say anything—until he looked again to Lani. Though his lips remained motionless, his answer slammed through every inch of her body like a tidal wave of fire. *Gods*. The man wanted her. To be honest, that part would be easy to handle, if this was just a case of a jerk letting his dick control the guidebook. But the way he took her in, as if he’d never seen a woman before and marveled over everything about her, was something she’d never experienced from a man before. From another *person* before.

What the *hell* was he doing this for? He didn’t relent, freezing her in place, binding her—terrifying her.

And elevating her next command to the stratosphere of crazy.

“Give me your pants.”

Golden Eyes slid out another smirk. “I like the way you say *that* even better.”

Gray Eyes glowered. “What the fuck?”

“You heard me.” Lani jerked her chin, making sure to keep the Bowie directly in his view. “Benson sent you down here ahead of the meeting for a reason. I don’t know what that is yet, and I’m not going to risk finding out when one of you runs ahead to warn the man. Your shorts are my insurance against that. Hand them over.”

Golden Eyes, having already shucked his khakis, finished tearing off his shirt, as well. His new outfit, nothing but his black briefs, left no doubt in her mind that every part of him was mighty as a boulder. He extended both with another crooked grin. “Do I qualify for extra credit?”

Hell. How the man could make her want to scowl and smile in the same reaction, was a mystery she didn’t have time to untangle. She diverted her attention by turning to his friend, who still shifted uneasily on the sand.

“You sure about this?” Gray Eyes finally charged. “You already have his. Do you really need both—”

“Take them off or I’ll cut them off. Your choice.”

The tension continued in his face for another two seconds. When it suddenly disappeared, she wondered why a thread of uneasiness dragged through *her* nerves now—thickening to straight-up alarm as he drawled, “Your mandate, sweetheart.”

Hell. He justified her anxiety the next moment—in hard, huge, and damn near erect detail. And the man, with that sensual smirk again sliding across his lips, just let her stare as he dropped the shorts, blatantly revealing he was a commando kind of guy.