

SWEET SIXTEEN

JULIA WRIGHT WALKED a Waikiki boardwalk fringed with naupaka. It was 1916. The last of the Chinese ponds was still in operation and she saw ducks gathering on its muddy banks. An electric trolley zipped by on Kalakaua Avenue. Horse-drawn carriages rolled up and down the avenue with sedans and touring cars. The bells on horses jingled. Horns tooted. It amazed Julia that the carriages and automobiles didn't crash. She admired an indigo roadster with a white ragtop and promised herself she'd have one in her twenties. She wanted to marry into a wealthy kama'aina family and travel the world with her husband. Julia knew the future had big things in store for her but she felt frustrated being so young.

She was sixteen. Julia wore her black-and-white striped swimsuit with black knickers and white lace-up boots. She preferred strolling without her sisters. They intimidated her at times. Sue, her big sister, was tall and curvy. Kay, the youngest, had the figure of a boy but nonetheless attracted her share of gents. Both sisters were taller than Julia and this was a sore spot.

Julia liked the Outrigger Canoe Club types, those haole surfers with golden tans and strong bodies. Still, the malahini men who'd traveled great distances intrigued her too. Some of the men had wives but she saw them stealing glances. And why shouldn't they? She was a brunette with a model's figure and the face of a playful angel. Even though she knew she'd never have an affair with a married man, she still enjoyed the attention.

Julia was an inch over five feet tall. She'd perfected a sexy strut that made men think she was walking the red carpet at a premiere. Julia kept her Hawaiian blood a secret. Haole boys from established families shunned local girls because they figured those wahines were poor, uneducated, and might displease their parents. Except for her slanted eyes, Julia knew she could pass for haole. Her slender figure combined with provocative dressing summoned whistles and catcalls throughout Waikiki. The one thing she wished she could change was her height because men had trouble noticing her in a sea of taller girls. Julia had slipped into a pair of red strap pumps at the B. F. Ehlert department store—those magical heels made her an instant three inches taller. She'd begged Catarina, her mother, for them.

“Heels tell men you want something,” Catarina had said.

“I do want something, mother.”

“What would that be?”

“Admiration. Kisses. The love of an adoring man.”

“You're too young to be thinking like that, Julia.”

“I certainly am not.”

“Wear red heels in town,” her mother'd warned, “and you get that and something else.”

“But I want something else.”

“No, you do not, Julia. Believe you me.”

Julia spotted Chipper Gilman riding a wave on his redwood longboard. He was tall, lanky, and dark from the sun. His perfect posture

pushed out his chest and canvas trunks hugged his muscular thighs. He hopped off the board upon reaching shore. Chip had never given up the boy in him and his carefree nature made him attractive to Julia. Chip picked up his board and talked story onshore with Duke Kahanamoku. The surfers stuck their boards nose down in the sand, deep enough to stand on their own. Two blondes sauntered over. She guessed these girls were from California because their two-piece suits revealed legs, arms, and shoulders. The blondes were as red as boiled crabs. She heard them laughing and one did a cartwheel. Chip and Duke clapped. The foursome headed over to the Hau Terrace, an open-air restaurant build on the pier.

Chipper was one of the Makai Boys and a founding member of the OCC. He'd once called Julia a "freckle-faced pineapple" when she was a kid taking swim lessons from her brother Tommy at Sans Souci Beach. Julia knew Chipper had a bad reputation. He'd been the only competitor who stuffed his canoe with shark and balloonfish bladders for buoyancy and remained undefeated at the annual Waikiki Regatta. Julia thought it was cruel to use the innards of sea creatures like that, but she was still infatuated. Chip had a habit of surfing naked, which caught the eye of Alexander Hume Ford. She'd seen Chipper dog-paddling out to an anchored catamaran holding the neck of a whiskey bottle between his teeth. That wildness attracted and repulsed her. Part of her wanted to tame him. Another part wanted to run wild him, the part that resisted what her mother thought a good girl should be. Chip was seven years older but that didn't matter. She'd felt an animal magnetism whenever they crossed paths. Julia hoped someday they'd be together. But before that happened, she realized there was one big obstacle standing in her way.

Julia continued down the boardwalk. The blondes followed Duke into the Hau Terrace. Chipper remained on the pier. Julia liked how he stood with his arms crossed as if declaring ownership of the beach. She sensed a nobility about Chipper, as if heroism was waiting for him in the future. He motioned for her to join him. Julia hopped off the boardwalk. She wove her way through tourists sprawled on towels and shaded by umbrellas. Her boots sunk in the sand. She reached the pier and Chipper extended his hand. She took it and he lifted her up onto the wooden slats. Glasses clinked in the Hau Terrace bar. Notes from a ukulele drifted out. Julia recognized the song as “Pua Lilia,” a romantic ballad comparing a girl to a fragrant flower in the high country. Chipper winked at her. His blue eyes gazed into hers and she felt he was searching for something in her soul.

“Takin’ in the sights?” he asked.

“Yes,” Julia replied.

“Wanna know a secret?”

“Maybe.”

“Ever heard of Alexander Hume Ford?”

“Didn’t he start the OCC?”

“Yes. But guess what?”

“What?”

“Ford can’t surf.”

“You’re telling stories, Chipper.”

“No. I’m telling you the truth.”

“Ford was surfing in *The Mid-Pacific Magazine*. ”

“I was there with the photographer. The Makai Boys balanced his board on their shoulders while he stood on top. Ford wasn’t even in the surf.”

“Then he’s a crumb.”

“Crumby as they come.”

“Say, Chip,” Julia said, “Sue says you got hitched. Is that true?”

Chipper took his eyes off her and gazed up at Diamond Head. “I eloped with Adene Winter last Saturday,” he confessed.

“Oh. Then it’s true.”

“We signed the marriage license in Waialua, on the North Shore.”

“Why the bum rush to marry?”

“Adene wanted it fast, without a big Church wedding. We’re living at my old man’s house next to the Hau Tree Hotel. Wanna help us find a cottage?”

“No,” Julia answered.

“Thought you’d say that.”

“Do you love her?”

Chipper tilted his head and stared out to sea. “Not yet,” he admitted.

Now Julia knew why Adene wasn't at his side. She didn't love him. He didn't love her. The Winter girl was more in love with the idea of being married than being hitched. Julia felt that it would be a matter of time before Adene's infatuation wore off.

Tommy Wright, her big brother, had warned his three sisters that the Gilman brothers were the spoiled sons of rich parents with roots in Cambridge, Massachusetts. Atherton Gilman, the older, had been an All-American tackle on the Harvard football team before flunking out. Chipper had avoided high education so he could spend his days surfing with his pals.

Chipper's marriage with Adene didn't stop Julia from wanting him. It made her want him more. She was convinced that someday fate would smile upon her. She detested Adene, a Daddy's-girl redhead who sported the latest fashions from New York. Perhaps she was shopping downtown or getting her hair curled at the beauty shop. Julia saw the marriage collapsing like a house of cards.

Duke emerged from the Hau Terrace with the two blondes in tow. "Hui!" he waved.

Chipper saluted his pal. "We go?" he called.

"Ae," Duke replied.

Julia was confused. Was she invited to this special place they were going?

"Latah," Chipper told her, "my freckle-faced pineapple."

His words made Julia feel like a child. Surely she was as attractive as

those blondes. Maybe more. She hopped off the pier into the sand and marched away. After returning to the boardwalk, she gazed back at the Hau Terrace. Chipper had an arm around the waist of one of the girls—he was demonstrating the crawl stroke. Her friend giggled. She knew the giddy blondes would return to the mainland with their beach boy stories, romance-laced tales that would fade to distant memories. The surfers would eventually be forgotten.

Julia vowed to never forget Chipper Gilman. She shortened her steps and swayed her hips. She heard a whistle—it reassured her she wasn't chopped liver. Next came a wolfish howl. Men rocking on veranda chairs at the Moana followed her with their eyes.

“I will learn to be patient,” Julia promised herself. “Patience and I will become the best of friends.”