

THE MUD ELEPHANT

Nothing had changed in Lahaina. Hendrix was still filming "Rainbow Bridge," when the producer could drag him out, and he and Ralph were as whacked-out as the day I'd left. I couldn't follow this heroin trip...they probably hadn't moved since I saw them last, nodding in some fantasy world, holed-up in a tiny shack with the windows taped shut. I got their attention by spreading a sheet on the floor, pouring a knee-high mountain of golden powder for them to behold. "Wow, man!" was the total exchange. Ralph handed me an ounce of coke, and I settled down to do some toots and use the phone. I asked Tab to come in from Hana with Limpy and the mail.

When he became aware of my presence, Ralph told me briefly about Saint George. He was rather bitter about the sordid details, as he and Terry'd lost their catamaran. Saint's women, he muttered, avoiding any mention of Kela, still mourned vigilantly by the water's edge for his return in that dissolving wonderland. I briefed him on the terminal state of affairs in the Kingdom of Laos, but he wasn't yet with it enough to register on worldly events. I left them to recover, and went for a walk waiting for Tab and my faithful little dog.

I couldn't believe Limpy! He recognized me a block away, jumping out of the car and racing into my arms. He was definitely more loyal than any girl! Tab was in great spirits, glad to see me safe, and ecstatic about my success. I gave him a big bag of my spoils and listened to the latest news, looking over my mail, and interjecting plans for a victory bash I'd thought up for my return. He said lots of girls were staying at our Bachelors Unlimited camp, and that Keith and David Carradine had rented Pop Warren's cabin near us, bringing more with them. Wow, it seemed like Hana was happening! He went shopping for the party and I headed back to roust Jimi and Ralph.

Limpy and I strolled the docks checking out pretty girls on luxurious yachts, keeping an eye out for barracuda, and inviting friendlier sorts to the party. At Ralph's, unregenerate timelessness prevailed, so I put two ounces of coke against my ganja account and tossed one to Jimi to encourage him to wake up. Waiting for it to induce some fervor in these incongruous invalids, I read my mail. A letter from my mom about a piece of property adjacent to hers in Kona which had just come up for sale caught my attention. I made a mental note to call her, and snorted a long line of coke to keep the high from fading. Jeez, Ralph and Jimi were shooting the stuff rather than sniffing it! These guys were really too much!

Looking back, I could blame my personal chemical evolution, or simply the times we lived in, but it was deeper than that...I was terribly alone, angry at women, and life in general for yet unclear reasons. It wasn't just the drugs, but I couldn't stop then to evaluate. My mind raced forward, preoccupied with the party I knew would be the end of me and Hana, a forced exile, but the new beginning I thought might heal my wounds. Deep inside I wanted to go back in time when life was simpler and more sensitive, and I'd cared, but for now sensation and lust ruled the daze.

Tab left in the van creaking to its overload springs with party supplies on the slow drive to that remote and sleeping village soon to be invaded by creatures from a very contrary world. He planned to stop at the Zendo Temple and invite his musicians and guru buddies, and maybe get word out to Saint's deluded flock.

The mere thought of them all naked, waiting for Saint to walk across the water, wrecked me, and I drove down to the harbor and picked up two young lasses just in from Califrisco. While Jimi and Ralph mumbled all night in the next room, I sprinkled coke on the girls, encouraging them to lick it off each other, and got demented enough to forget the hurt inside me and play like I didn't care.

The sun called us out early, and the girls and I took Ralph's old banana wagon to Matsu's for a tune up, then sat in The Bakery watching driftwood of humanity float by on Front Steet in the morning tide. I knew it was gonna be tough getting Jimi and Ralph revived and ready to travel, so I talked my coked-out gals into jumping on them where they lay for some double-headed lust.

Figuring by the time I returned they'd be cured, I drove out to Harold's Honolua Bay mansion to see about some fish for the party and make sure the divers were coming. Raymond, Danson, and the Sonoda brothers were fighting chickens in the back yard. Harold was from an old plantation family, and ever since I could remember, he'd lived in rambling manager's homes with all manner of madness raging in different degrees through the rooms.

This morning was no exception. The wildest array of savages clinging to the edge of the lunatic fringe anywhere met me with bloodied scalps and dilated pupils. They'd shaved their heads at the height of some drug frenzy last night, and feeling no pain, had knicked the shit out of each other with straight razors. Now they stood, concentrating as one, caked in dried blood, reeling back and forth while two fighting cocks grappled to the death at their feet. On every arm was tattooed a black lizard.

Feeling a bit awkward, I reminded them of the party and mumbled about the fish. No one seemed to hear me so I put a hundred-dollar bill in Uncle Raymond's hand, and he concentrated on my presence just long enough to acknowledge. Boy, I couldn't figure what these guys had taken this time!

It reminded me of when they'd done two bottles of Romilar cough syrup each, and stood all day on the beach insisting there was a red Volkswagen anchored offshore. They seemed to group-nod they'd be along soon. Another cock fight began, so Limpy and I left.

The drive to Hana was a classic. Limpy sat at the back of the banana wagon watching Jimi and Ralph fiddle with their needles, while the girls and I smoked ganja and did toots as we swung that old wreck through the ninety-nine turns. When we passed through Hana town, we cleaned out the butcher and picked up five cases of wine and one of Scotch, bourbon, and vodka, heckling Hasegawa about his prices.

It really wasn't necessary, just back up, and the sole reason I pestered him was I knew his committee would vote unanimously soon. When we reached Koali Ranch and my mini-estate, the party was already in full swing, barbecue and stereo blazing, and more than a hundred stonies roaming about in preparation for what we felt was gonna shake this tiny place to its foundations.

By late afternoon, the divers arrived, and more than two-hundred crazies were milling around, loaded out of their gourds. A few of us started the motorcycles and invented a game, trying to jump the rock wall in the meadow by blazing up a flat stone and flying through the air. We were so fucked up that none of us got hurt...but we destroyed four-thousand dollars worth of machinery.

Girls were naked in the pools and couples were screwing in the hedges, as carloads of locals drove slowly by, eyes wide, mouths open, barely able to negotiate the turn. Groups pounded out rhythms on bongos and big drums, as belly-dancing girls slithered through the crowd. It was quickly turning into a mini-Woodstock, and cars were parked from our waterfall halfway to Seven Pools.

About sunset, Mr. Gray, my landlord, was roasted enough to come over and evict me, red nose pulsing, and his lips groping for words like guppies for water. I was pretty drunk, and told him I'd be glad to leave his little world, avoiding a major confrontation by sicking a bunch of naked girls on him and rolling on the grass in hysterics. I thought I saw Harry Hasegawa drive by with Leslie Medeiros, Hana's only cop, but they had coconut hats and dark glasses on and I wasn't sure. About then all hell broke loose...and there really wasn't anything to do but ride it down.

With a deafening crackle, amplifiers came to life and huge speakers blasted the initial screech and wails of Hendrix tuning up. Another guitar joined him, and incredible vibrations surged right out of the virgin earth beneath us, arcing into the night air in static charge with nature. The drums coursed into harmony, dancing began, and through it all dirt bikes did wheel stands through the grass.

The burglar alarm's siren wailed, and staccatoed burps of machine gun fire, flavored with muffled explosions of

grenades in the waterfall, punctuated the din, as hippies howled at the moon and naked girls sallied forth to meet the likes of the lizards in full bloom. It was all here...a tribute to the eccentricity of our era. I'd turned into the guy your parents had warned you about. Laughing at the swell expression of madness I'd sponsored, I spotted Limpy and Sheeba sitting by my trampled garden, blinking at each other in dismay. Really, what had happened to the "me" that set up this little paradise in the first place?

I watched the women...especially a local girl named Mona, her face sculpted in moonlight, and wondered if I should take this Hawaiian princess with me to my new life, but that deep-seated fear of my own strangeness overruled any hope for a normal existence yet. I had too much to work out, and knew this much for sure. I feared real love more than anything, and ended up bouncing on my fancy bed with a buxom blond, destroying it and most of my wedding gifts in a destructive frenzy before I passed out. The anger was growing in me...mere fledgling of what it was to become.

When I emerged in dawn's first light over piled bodies in the yard, I found Harold gurgling a mouthwash of Scotch while tending the barbecue, and Raymond tinkering with a bent motorcycle. Jimi and Ralph lounged in the back of the banana wagon as if nothing had happened, eyes glued wide and staring, but not at anything in particular. I ran a line of coke clear across the hood of a car, and woofing it all, set about making a rum and coke.

A feeling of some finality passed over me, but it was short and sweet for a change. I figured I'd be OK with the move to the Kona property, and hoped I'd rediscover me when it was all over. The party went on a few more days before Captain Medeiros finally called to threaten "outside help" if we didn't disperse. It didn't matter really. The statement had been made, for what it was worth...and we were all on our separate paths and destinies. Jimi went off to die on his drug, as did Danson and Robin, Mike and Turtle, and for all intents, Ralph, too.

We had passed the arc of the drug rainbow, all of us, and each would come to grips with its down side in his own time. The celebration was for us all...the only way to mark our ever being here. It was our last, great bash...a final, garbled shriek at the primal forces that geared the universe. In all its glory, it was as insignificant as a hippo farting underwater in the African veldt. Unheard and unanswered, we had done our thing...and like the mud elephant, wading through the sea, left no tracks.

Hana is quiet again, and grass grows over that scarred meadow in another spring. My friends have all returned into the earth, where the rainbow curves back down. A young Hawaiian family lives in my little house, and children are born in my bedroom to carry on...