

Later, when the higher-ups in the agency castigate me from floor to ceiling and back again, when the press hounds me for an interview, when my father, by holocall from the house in Maryland, gently chastises me, they will all first ask the same thing: *what the hell were you thinking?* And I will answer them all truthfully: *I wasn't thinking at all.*

I'd only had an instant to see Koa Manuwai, his rage, his defiance, the fish billy in his hands as he marched across the beach to where Aukai and her newborn pups lay, twins, a rarity and a blessing. *Fucking seals*, he'd been screaming, *fucking seals! I'll fuck you up so you can't tear up my fucking nets anymore, so you can't steal my fucking fish anymore!* And I'd put my body between him and the seals, taken a rain of blows from the club before beachgoers had wrestled him to the ground and held him until the police arrived. I didn't remember much more of what happened after that, just flashes of the hospital in Honolulu.

Back in DC two months later, still healing, still skittish, I sat in front of the desk of one of the deputy administrators of NOAA—high enough up that I knew I was in deep trouble but not so high up I would have delusions of grandeur—and waited to hear my fate.

Dr. Margaux Boniface propped her head on one hand. “Well, you stepped in it, for sure.”

“But I—”

“Caught on film. In public, in logo wear, on official time.”

“But—”

“Why would you ever do something so stupid?”

“There have to be some things worth fighting for.”

“Fighting or dying for? He could have killed you, you know.”

“It was for the seals. Fighting for, dying for: it doesn't matter. I will do whatever is necessary for the seals.”