

THE MASTER OF BORANGA

FOREWORD

“I am insane...”

That’s how the letter began. The hand-written letter in itself surprised me. Who does that these days? My first impression was that some poor, deluded soul had gotten his doctors mixed up, since I was only a general practitioner of over three decades, not a shrink. The letter, postmarked Honolulu, Hawaii, bore the letterhead of the Pacific Hills Medical Center. Hawaii? My late wife and I had vacationed in the islands a couple of times, but otherwise I didn’t know anyone there. I read on:

Dear Dr. Morrison:

I am insane. At least, that’s what the doctors here believe, and would have me believe. But I’m not insane. I assure you, I am not insane! I’m as rational now as I was when I last saw you—what, five years ago? You took care of me through all my various ailments and broken bones when I was a kid. Do you remember me as a guy given to wild wanderings of the imagination? Even after the tragedy, you commented on how well I handled things. No, Doc, I was not crazy then, and I’m not now. I always admired and respected you, Dr. Morrison, which is why I’m writing to you. I need your help, Doc, I need it real bad. I must get out. I must get back! Please help me!

During the past year, I have been through experiences that more than likely could drive a sane man crazy. I have returned from these encounters with my body messed up, but not my mind. I have actually lived through the horrors that I am going to relate to you. I did not imagine them!

My injuries are almost healed now. I tried to leave twice, so now they keep me confined—a virtual prisoner. The doctors think I’ll do more harm to myself than to anyone else. I tell them what happened to me and what I have to do, but they won’t believe me, they just won’t listen. They think I’ve lost my mind.

While recovering from my injuries, I wrote down as best I could all that happened to me. I sent these pages separately, and I hope they’ve already gotten there. Read them, Dr. Morrison, and believe them. Every word is true, I swear. Remember the kind of person that I was. You have to help me get out of here! I must return to Boranga. I must help them! I must save them! I need to find her again, my Larra! Help me, Doc, please!

*Respectfully yours,
Roland Summers*

Roland Summers. Until I saw the signature, I believed that I was reading the words of a nutcase. But Roland Summers? Not likely. I was the Summers’ family doctor for years, until his parents were brutally murdered in a home invasion robbery gone terribly wrong over five years ago. Roland, a fine, intelligent young man, was an athlete. He even talked about winning a spot on the U.S. swim team and competing in a future Olympiad, but the tragedy ended that dream. Nearly twenty-one at the time, he left school and enlisted in the navy. That was the last time I had seen or heard from Roland Summers. But my memories of him certainly did not fit the image of someone who could have written the words I had just read.

Roland was an above-average student. I remember how proud his mother used to be of what he achieved in school. He played all sports during high school and was even offered a basketball scholarship by a local college. But swimming was his greatest love. He didn’t have many friends, as most of his time was spent in practice.

After his parents were murdered I observed Roland for a time, and I believe it was his strong will that helped him through this most tragic period in his life. We discussed at length his decision to leave school and

join the Navy, and I felt that the choice he made was a rational one. He had planned on enlisting at some future date anyway, and he felt that to get away from home would serve him well, even knowing that these were dangerous times.

Now Roland Summers was in a psych ward in Hawaii. I couldn't believe it! Had his mind been affected that greatly over the years? What had brought him to this? I felt that the answer might lie in the pages he had mentioned in his letter. I looked through the rest of the mail but found no such manuscript. Was there really one, or was he imagining that, too? With a full slate of patients I could not dwell on it for long, but that evening the image of a young man, a fine, tormented young man, began to haunt me.

The next morning, the manuscript arrived. With another busy day scheduled, I could not read the pages until that evening. I asked one of my partners to cover my calls so that I could read it undisturbed.

My colleague would cover many calls for me that week, as I became caught up in one of the strangest tales one could possibly imagine. You'll soon understand why. I present to you, in his own words, Roland Summers' story of his unbelievable experiences on Boranga.

CHAPTER ONE: THE FOG

I have always loved the sea, with all its beauty and mystery, its gentleness and raging fury. I can see the waves from here in my room, but somehow it doesn't look quite the same through the bars. I guess it's because of the sea that I am here today. Still, right now my only wish is to ride those waves once more, to find what I know is out there.

It's hard to say why I have decided to write down the events of the many recent months. Perhaps I do it to relieve the long, monotonous hours that I spend recovering from all my injuries. Maybe it is to reassure myself that it really did happen—or to convince myself that it did not. But it *did* happen, I know that it did! That's why I'm relating this story now, in the hope that someone will believe what I say, and help me.

To tell this story properly, I suppose I should backtrack a bit. I served a four-year hitch in the Navy, including two tours of duty on a carrier in the Persian Gulf. Not wanting to make this a career—and not wanting to go back home to San Diego—I settled in Honolulu. My first job was at a fitness center. I also found a part-time gig as a deckhand on a chartered fishing boat, this more for fun than anything, for I never got tired of sailing around the islands.

Denny McVey and I became friends during our time together in the service. He worked in the engine room and was an absolute whiz when it came to anything mechanical. After his hitch was up he joined me in Hawaii and found a job in an auto repair shop. Denny was a year younger than me, and we had lots in common. We shared an apartment and, when not working, we shared other things, including an appreciation of Honolulu's young women. Denny proved quite adept with the ladies, and I usually got to go along for the ride.

We also speculated on the day when we could venture into business for ourselves and impress the islanders as big-time entrepreneurs. Somehow, we never could decide just what kind of business we'd start, but we liked talking about it anyway.

One evening, Denny arrived home after work all excited. "Rollie, it's happened!" he managed to blurt out while trying to catch his breath. "We won't have to wait any longer!"

"Now whoa, slow down and tell me what you're talking about," I said as I grabbed his shoulders and sat him down.

"A boat, Rollie, a fishing boat!" he replied. "We can have our own fishing boat. I saw it today. It's the chance we've been waiting for!"

"And what makes you think that we would be able to buy our own boat? We're not exactly rich."

"You don't understand!" Denny exclaimed. "I ran across a guy today who wants to get rid of an old boat for practically nothing. It's a beauty, Rollie, it really is! Of course, it needs a little work—"

"Of course," I interrupted. "Just a *little* work."

"But it *is* salvageable, I'm sure of that. And the price is right. Listen, neither of us has to work tomorrow. At least come down with me in the morning and take a look at it."

I finally agreed to check out the boat, if only to calm Denny down. However, he spent most of the evening talking excitedly about all the things we could do with such a prize. I must admit that, after an hour or so, I became caught up in his enthusiasm and began to look forward to seeing the object of his praise.

The next morning I became half owner of the *Maui Queen*, though I have to say she looked anything but royal. The *Maui Queen*, some thirty feet long, appeared to have outlived her usefulness. Most all of her paint had been chipped off, and the wood was rotted in places. Barnacles clung in great masses just below the water line. All the visible hardware had rusted, and one of the wheelhouse windows was missing. But the unregal outward appearance of the *Queen* was easily matched by the disaster in the engine room. The engine, a conglomeration of rusting parts, had apparently been taken apart and put back together again without success. Many pieces were left over, these scattered here and there all over the floor. Scurrying sounds foretold of other occupants in the hold, not only in the engine room but in the seedy cabin. The price was right, however, as Denny had reported, and with his assurance that he could repair the *Maui Queen*, we made our purchase.

For the next two months we spent most of our free time working on her. Both of us toiled on the outside of the boat, replacing rotted wood and hardware that could not be cleaned, caulking the seams, painting, and installing a new wheelhouse window. We had it hauled into dry dock after evicting the rats, and I scraped all the barnacles from her. Soon the *Queen* began to actually look regal.

Down below, things were not quite as simple. Denny made the engine room his private domain. While I considered him the master of all things mechanical, I doubted whether anyone short of a miracle worker could coax life from that hunk of junk. But Denny would not give up. I busied myself by making the cabin habitable, while he continued his seemingly impossible task. When the day finally came that Denny allowed me to set foot in the engine room again, I was overwhelmed by what I saw.

“Well, it looks as good as new,” I said. “But will it run?”

Looking hurt, Denny replied, “Will it . . .? I’ve done everything one could possibly do to an engine, and some things that aren’t usually attempted. I’ve talked to this machine, babied it, nursed it. It has feelings, you know. It won’t let me down, you’ll see.”

So with little ceremony, we returned the *Maui Queen* to the sea. On Denny’s signal I started her up: once, twice, nothing. The third time the engine turned over and, in Denny’s own words, began to purr like a kitten. Denny ran up on deck, and we high-fived, shouting like a couple of kids. We had ourselves a great boat. Her short maiden voyage around the harbor pushed us to the heights of euphoria.

In the months that followed we took the *Maui Queen* out every weekend. Sometimes we went for fun, exploring the bays and hidden lagoons. On other occasions, we took out fishing parties. But the venture that proved most lucrative for us was finding rare and exotic fish, which we sold to brokers for shipment to collectors and universities. We had bought some diving gear and were fortunate to locate previously untapped areas that abounded in these specimens. We were never at a loss for deckhands, as the docks were full of young guys eager to earn a few bucks. One grad student named Kim proved quite capable, and he accompanied us on many voyages.

Soon the few runs that we could make each month became profitable. We began to weigh the pros and cons of attempting it full time. True, our jobs were steady and helped us pay the bills. But we both loved what we were doing and somehow believed that the future was bright. Being young—and maybe stupid—we quit our jobs and undertook the operation of the *Maui Queen* with great enthusiasm. We continued taking out fishing parties now and then, but most of our time was spent in gathering exotic fish and coral. To save money, we moved our meager belongings into the cabin of the *Maui Queen* and gave up the apartment. The *Queen* had become our home in every sense of the word.

Things went better than we expected for a while. We put Kim to work full time, and he accompanied us nearly every day. He learned to handle almost anything that we could, including some of the diving.

Then came the day that I will never forget. Kim had to take an exam, so it was just us. We left the harbor about five-thirty that morning after fueling up, our destination the tiny island of Moku Manu, just off the northeast coast of Oahu. Weather conditions were ideal. Halfway there, I heard Denny shouting from the bow.

“Porpoises, a lot of them!”

Soon they flanked our boat, leaping playfully in and out of the water. We always enjoyed watching their antics. They stayed with us for about five miles. Then, inexplicably, they veered off in opposite directions. I looked at Denny and said, “What do you think is bugging—?”

I did not finish my question, because at that moment the engine, Denny's pride and joy, sputtered and died.

"Well, you must have cheated on her or something," I said with a grin. "Looks like the love affair is over."

"Impossible!" Denny snapped. "There should be no reason for it to quit. It was working great. I'll go down and check her."

He disappeared below, and I began gathering up our gear from the deck, anticipating the possibility that we would not be getting much work done that day. About ten minutes had passed when I noticed that we were drifting into a light fog. Concerned, I called Denny back up.

"Did you find out what's wrong with it?" I asked.

"There's nothing wrong with it."

"What do you mean there's nothing wrong? It isn't working, is it?"

"That's just it, Rollie. It *should* be working. I checked it over from top to bottom and can't find a thing wrong with it. The engine just stopped!" He leaned over the railing, his head down.

"Denny," I said, slightly annoyed, "you're a mechanic. You know that a machine just—"

"Damn, Rollie! What's that in the water?"

I ran to the railing and peered over the side, where the reason for Denny's agitation became evident. The water had turned white!

"What do you make of that?" he asked.

"I don't know, but I intend to find out."

I raced to the bow, where I saw that the white water was a broad strip about twenty feet wide. The *Maui Queen* sailed right down the middle of it. Up ahead, the gleaming ribbon stretched as far as I could see.

"Rollie, do you realize that we're moving?" Denny asked, as he joined me. "Is this thing some kind of current?"

"I've never *seen* a current before," I replied, "and yes, I guess we are drifting."

"No, Rollie, not drifting. We seem to be riding on top of this thing. If we were drifting, we'd be bounced around like a cork. And notice the speed. We're moving faster every minute."

I did notice the speed of the *Queen* now, and it had increased. I also realized that the light fog of a few minutes past had grown quite thick. We decided that our next course of action was to radio for help, and together we ran to the wheelhouse. Denny sat down at the set and switched it on. The radio was dead! Coincidence? Not likely. It probably went out at the same time the engine did. I looked at my watch, noting that it too had stopped. Our cell phones? Dead. And our compass? It spun uncontrollably. Was this some kind of magnetic field? Or . . . ?

"Rollie, this is freaking me out. When I dive, I run into sharks, and that doesn't scare me as much because I can see them. But this? I don't get it."

"I'm as confused as you are, pal," I said. "I guess we have no choice but to ride this thing out and see where it's taking us."

"You can stay topside if you want, but I'm going down and see if I can't get the engine going again. Maybe we can pull ourselves out of this thing."

Denny went below again, and I did not try to stop him. I'm sure he realized, as I did, the futility of attempting to repair anything mechanical on the *Queen*, but he at least had to try. I sat down at the radio and tinkered with it for a while, but soon gave this up.

Hours—or what seemed like hours—had passed since the engine stopped. Denny remained below with his pride and joy. I stood on the bow of the *Queen*, trying vainly to see where we were. The fog enshrouded the boat now, a cold, clammy fog. We were moving even more rapidly than before, just how fast I had no way of telling. Shivering from the cold, I decided to join Denny below.

Suddenly, I noticed something—hard to distinguish at first, but I believed it to be . . . yes, it was! I could *see* the ribbon of white water, or whatever it was that we were riding on. But how was this possible? I could not even see the deck of the *Maui Queen* below my feet through the fog; but the ribbon was becoming visible! First dimly, then bright—now even brighter. It glowed with an eerie phosphorescence that pierced the dense shroud encircling it. I called Denny up to have a look.

"What in hell do you make of that?" he asked.

“I don’t know, but I have a strange feeling that the journey is coming to an end. Anything to report about the engine?”

“Nothing. I’ve taken it apart, and put it back together again. You can’t repair something that isn’t broken. I think—Rollie, am I crazy, or are we slowing down?”

He was right; we moved much slower. I looked over the railing again, and the ribbon appeared even brighter. During the next hour or so the glow increased in intensity, while the *Queen* continued to slow. The light became so bright that we could not look directly at it. All the while the denseness of the surrounding mist remained unchanged.

The glowing strip on which we rode now widened to cover a vast expanse of ocean. Soon the *Queen* sat in what appeared to be the center of this sphere, where it stopped moving.

“I think we’re here,” I stated.

“Yeah, but where the devil is *here*?” Denny replied.

The *Queen* began to spin, slowly at first; then faster, like a carousel. Between the motion and the brightness I felt myself growing dizzy, and I noticed that Denny was already staggering.

“Grab the railing,” I shouted, “and hold on tight!”

We wrapped our arms around the metal as the *Queen* gyrated faster and faster. I felt a sinking sensation, almost as if we were falling. The fog lifted, only to be replaced by the dazzling whiteness, which rose up along the sides of the *Queen* and encircled us. Denny let go of the railing and slumped to the deck, unconscious. I crawled over to him to see if I could help. The *Queen* continued to spin, the speed now beyond reason. I fell to the deck beside my friend and remembered nothing else.