

Code Name Rascal, Excerpt
Dorothea N. Buckingham

Chapter One

December 5, 1941

Wo Fat's Restaurant, Waikiki

Carmela Jean Martino wanted it all—and she almost got it.

On Friday, December 5, 1941, CJ arrived in Honolulu and that afternoon, she and Lieutenant Joe Delano were married.

CJ wore her yellow linen suit, her grandmother's pearl earring, and a white rose corsage that Joe pinned on her lapel. There was no cascading bouquet. No flower girl or bridesmaids.

When the Justice of the Peace proclaimed them "man and wife," Joe kissed his bride, and they skipped down the courthouse steps to the street, where Joe hailed a cab.

"Wo Fat's," he told the cabbie.

Joe opened the back door, but CJ didn't get in. She gawked at the women in silk sarong dresses and men in white linen suits. She half-expected Bogart and Bacall to walk down the street—

Bogie in a Panama hat, Bacall with a red hibiscus tucked behind her ear.

"Oh, Joe, this is New York in Paradise!"

He smiled and winked.

The Salvation Army Santa Claus was dressed in green plaid shorts, a flowered shirt and sandals—at least the bell and kettle were the same.

She slid into the cab, still pivoting her head, listening to barefoot newsboys hawk the afternoon paper, inhaling air perfumed with flowers. Flowers instead of bus fumes.

When Joe put his arm around her, she leaned her head on his shoulder. She was with Joe instead of reading his letters!

"If this is a dream, Joe Delano, don't even think about waking me up."

She breathed in his Old Spice and the faint linger of a cigar. There was no grand Italian wedding. It was just her and Joe.

Joe lifted her chin. "You ain't seen nothing, kid." And he kissed her.

She smiled and rested her head back on his shoulder so she could glimpse downtown

Honolulu—the palm trees wrapped in swirls of red and green lights, the women in muumuu, and the department store Santa being pulled by canoe by eight 'flying' dolphins.

She popped up her head. "This isn't New York! This is pure Hollywood!"

"Wait until you see Wo Fat's," Joe said. "It's right out of *The Road to Hong Kong*."

"Starring Crosby and Hope?"

"Starring Delano and Delano." He kissed her again.

CJ figured Wo Fat's would be a two-bit chop suey place like all the other hole-in-the-wall dives they ate at in New York's Chinatown—Formica tables, cracked red vinyl chairs, and stained dog-eared menus.

But when the cabbie pulled over in front of a Chinese palace, floodlights sweeping the sky, CJ knew Joe could never afford a place like it.

"Isn't it top drawer?" Joe asked.

"I really feel like I'm in a movie."

A valet dressed in black silk pajamas opened the cab door and offered CJ his hand.

If the folks at the bakery could only see me now!

Joe introduced the Chinese man in a tuxedo standing at the restaurant gate. "PY, this is my wife. CJ Delano."

CJ caught the glint in PY's eyes as he bowed and said, "CJ, you Number One beautiful lady. Welcome to Wo Fat's, the finest Chinese restaurant in the world, and me, PY Chong, Number One cook."

"Don't let him fool you," Joe said. "PY is the owner and chief dictator here."

"Not dictator. I am Emperor." PY winked.

"Good to meet you." CJ grinned.

Joe started to tell PY they were meeting Eve Russell and Doctor Holt, but before he could finish his sentence, PY raised his hand. "They're already here."

PY waved to a man wearing a red silk top and black trousers. "I saved you the best table. Ah Ching will show you."

The couple followed Ah Ching down a corridor of dark wood panels carved with swirling dragons and flying cranes. The ceiling was a painted mosaic, and the sconces were red silk lanterns.

When the waiter held back a red beaded curtain, the dining room was revealed. CJ gawked. Bolts of light pinballed around the room from gilded mirrors, crystal chandeliers, brass trombones, and trumpets, and it glinted off the black sequins on the soloist's gown.

"There." Joe pointed to a table next to the dance floor. "Linc's here." Joe waved to him.

CJ hadn't seen graduation at the Naval Academy where they posed for family photos.

Linc Armstrong, a lanky Wisconsin farm boy who believed in God, Country, and anything topped with cheese, and Joe Delano, a fireplug of a Brooklyn kid who declared his opinions like dogma and had never laid eyes on a cow.

CJ spotted Linc—smiling, tanned, his hair streaked blonde. Hawaii agrees with him.

Joe said, "The other guy is Parker Holt. He was our unit doctor when I first got here. The gal next to him is Eve Russell."

"Are Eve and Parker an item?"

"No." Joe laughed. "For lots of reasons."

"What about Linc and Eve?"

"No one lassos Eve Russell."

CJ and Joe snaked to their table through the couples on the dance floor, where Linc hugged her so hard that he lifted her off the floor. "Gosh, it's good to see you." He let her down.

"Watch it, Lieutenant. I'm a married woman now." CJ flashed her wedding ring.

"Damn, I'm so sorry I couldn't make the wedding. I tried like hell, but when the Navy calls. . . He stepped back and eyed her head to toe. "You look great. . . What's it been two years?"

"A very long eighteen months." Could it have been that long since Joe was gone?

"How are your parents doing with this?"

She shrugged slightly and tilted her head. "They're happy for Joe and me, but they're disappointed."

"No grand Italian wedding?"

CJ raised her eyebrows. "No Cathedral High Mass."

The officer next to Linc stood and extended his hand to CJ. "Parker Holt."

"Great to meet you."

Parker was handsome in an Ivy League prep school kind of way—fine-featured, horn-rimmed glasses, and hazel eyes.

The platinum blonde next to Parker introduced herself. “Eve Russell.” A perfect society-page smile. A practiced flip of the wrist when she blew CJ a kiss

“You got one of the good ones,” Eve told Joe.

CJ turned to Joe. “I think he got a pretty good deal himself.”

“Did Joe introduce you to PY?” Satin slip of a dress, cascading waves, penetrating blue eyes.

“He did,” CJ answered. “PY said I was ‘Number One Beautiful Lady.’”

Eve feigned offense, tossing her hair over her shoulder. “That PY should say only about me!”

“Don’t fret, my dear.” Parker put his arm around Eve in mock consolation. “You’re always my number one.”

“You’re a wise man, Park.” Eve patted his hand. It was more sisterly than anything romantic.

“Joe said you were the unit doctor,” CJ told Parker.

“If you mean I patched them up after bar fights and dispensed copious amounts of penicillin? Yes, I was.” Parker smirked.

Eve raised her eyebrow. “Must you be so crude?”

“It’s from hanging out with Marines too long. They’re a bad influence,” Parker said.

“Count yourself lucky that Marines hang out with you. We may win you over,” Joe said.

“I’d be thrilled to be won over by a Marine with . . . impressive credentials.” Parker raised his eyebrows.

CJ wondered if he meant what she thought he meant.

“All I know is that Parker was the best damn doc I’ve ever seen,” Joe said.

“I accept the compliment.” Parker graciously nodded.

Linc said, “Park, you’re one of the Navy’s best docs; I wish you’d be a bit more discreet at work.”

“Even the Navy can turn a blind eye when they’ve got a Harvard-trained doctor in the clinic.

Besides,” Parker said. “Discretion is my specialty.” He tipped his glass toward Eve. “She can vouch for that.”

So, she did get Parker’s remark right.

“I wish he’d be less discreet with my mother,” Eve said. “She’s still hoping the two of us will get married.”

Parker put his hand on his heart. “Oh, my dear, we’ll always have Valentine’s Day.”

CJ furrowed her brow. “Translation?”

Eve explained that every Valentine’s Day Parker proposed to her. “And we’ve agreed if neither of us is married by the time we’re forty, I’ll accept.”

“Valentine’s is a great party,” Parker said. “You and Joe should come. But, enough talk about me. Tonight’s about the two of you. How did you meet?”

“I got this.” Linc raised his hand. “It was at a party after the Navy-Columbia game. Columbia wiped the floor with us.”

“Navy never had a defense worth a damn,” Parker said.

“Neither did Joe,” CJ quipped.

“We all spotted CJ—Joe, Charlie Banks, Fritz Holbrook, and me. Who wouldn’t? A dark-haired beauty with an attitude you could read from a mile away. But the rest of us had the good sense to recognize trouble when we saw it.”

“The rest of you were cowards,” CJ jibed.

Linc continued, "The first thing you need to know about these two is that Joe is a fierce Dodger fan, and CJ worships the Yankees."

"She's a Yankee bully," Joe chimed in.

CJ cupped her hand to her ear and leaned toward Joe. "How many World Series have the Dodgers won?"

When he didn't answer, she formed a zero with her fingers.

"As you can see, CJ doesn't believe in second place." Linc went on with his story. "On the train ride back to the Academy, Joe told me he had met the girl he would marry. I laughed it off. The poor boy was drunk."

"Drunk with love." Joe put his arm around CJ.

Linc paused and shifted his eyes to a couple walking toward their table. "Be on your feet, boys. Commander Elliot and his lady are headed straight for us."

The commander looked to be in his 40s, with a ramrod posture, a pleasing mustache, and steel-gray eyes—quite distinguished for an older man.

Joe and Linc snapped to their feet; Parker, a commander himself, remained seated.

"Good evening, sir," Joe and Linc recited in perfect unison.

Commander Elliot nodded in response.

"Ruth!" Eve jumped up, hugged the commander's wife, and kissed the air next to Ruth's cheek. Eve introduced CJ to Ruth, "This is CJ Delano. A blushing bride, married to Lieutenant Delano for not quite three hours now."

"Congratulations, and welcome." Ruth extended her hand.

CJ guessed Ruth to be no more than 25, but she was dressed like a matron in an understated gray Chanel suit, a double-strand pearl choker, and a fox stole with its head and claws still attached.

"Is this your first time in Hawaii?" Ruth asked.

"It's my first time west of New Jersey."

"I'm sure we can get you into the swing of things," Ruth said. "I'll have someone from the Officers' Wives Club call you. I'm confident we can find a project for you to volunteer," Ruth said.

CJ gave her an I'm-smiling-but-there's-no-way-in-hell-I'm-joining-the-Officers' Wives Club smile. She wanted a job, preferably as a reporter, and she wanted it as soon as possible.

"But I can see you're in excellent hands with Eve," Ruth said. "Between Eve and her mother, you'll be well taken care of." Ruth turned to Eve. "And you and I need to talk about your mother."

"A bit of territorial warfare?" Eve smiled.

Ruth suggested, "How about breakfast on Monday at Coco's?"

"Perfect."

And as if on cue, Commander Elliot took his wife's arm. "We'll let you get back to your evening," he said and led her away.

CJ looked over at Linc and Joe, standing at attention shoulder to shoulder, the wet-behind-the-ears junior officers.

As soon as they were out of earshot, the boys sat and Joe launched into his rant, "That old codger S.O.B. robbed the cradle."

"I'd say bully for him," Parker said.

"And Daddy being a three-star admiral was a nice bonus," Linc added.

"How do you know that?" Parker asked.

“Elliott was my Communications and Intelligence professor at the Academy. There were two hundred of us in the class. Obviously, I didn’t stand out.”

Parker said, “It sounds like a marriage made in Navy heaven.”

Eve tapped her knife to her glass. “Enough about Ruth and Gordon. We’re here to celebrate CJ and Joe’s wedding.” She turned to Parker. “We need champagne!”

“Mumm ’38?” Parker suggested.

“Demi-sec,” Eve added.

As Parker got the waiter's attention, Linc asked Joe who was watching the store that night. CJ didn’t know what Joe did in Hawaii. All he wrote to her was that he was in charge of the Military Police Detachment.

Joe lit his cigar and took a puff. “I’ve got the airfield locked up. All the planes are parked wingtip to wingtip, and I’ve got six sentries walking the perimeter.” He took the first deep inhale of his cigar, then held it away from himself as if he were admiring it. “That airfield is wrapped so tight. No Jap can get near the place.”

“Scuttlebutt says they're planning an air attack,” Parker said.

Joe scoffed. “That's ridiculous. How the hell are they going to fly in? First of all, not one of them can see worth a damn. And second, where are they going to fly from? Carriers? We'd spot them.”

Joe jabbed his cigar at Linc. “That's what we've got PBYs for. Right, Linc?”

Parker held up his hand in surrender. “I'm just repeating what I heard from the brass.”

“Exactly,” Joe said. “And we all know the brass have their heads up their asses.”

CJ squeezed Joe’s thigh. It was her signal to him to calm down.

Joe asked Linc, “Have you ever seen a carrier on the horizon?”

“I've spotted a few Zeroes out past Midway. We know the carriers are out there somewhere.”

“To hell with the carriers,” Joe said. “I’m not worried about the Japs, it’s the locals I’m aiming my guns at,” Joe said.

Eve glared at Joe. “Just be careful which locals you're aiming at.”

“I'm not talking about the white ones,” Joe said.

CJ took in a deep breath. If he could only phrase things differently.

“Neither am I.” She pulled a monogrammed silver cigarette case from her evening bag.

“Look.” Joe was jabbing his cigar at Eve this time. “With 160,000 Japs on this island, it doesn't take a genius to figure out that a few of them are rooting for the old country.”

“Not all locals have horns and pitchforks,” Parker interjected. “Some of us are beyond reproach.”

Joe was like a dog with a bone. “I'm just saying all you have to do is play the odds, and the numbers don’t lie. There’s a Fifth Column Face it, and they’re the ones we should be throwing in jail.”

“I’m telling you, it’s the locals that are the threat!”

CJ watched Eve shift in her seat, just as she was about to say something, Parker rested his hand over hers.

She flipped his hand away. “Keep in mind, Joe,” Eve said, “if it weren’t for the money of these local families . . .”

Linc leaned toward Eve. “. . . The military appreciates all the support local families have given us.” He turned to Joe. “Some of us don’t know how to thank you diplomatically.”

CJ watched the veins in Joe’s neck bulge, dug her fingers into his thighs, and tried to lighten the mood. “Joe missed the diplomacy class at the academy.”

Parker laughed and picked up the cue. “Hell, if it were up to me, I wouldn’t spend a dime on the lot of you. My father’s the one with the checkbook.”

"But, dear Parker, our parents are depleting our trust funds." Eve tapped a cigarette out of her case.

"The funds have an everlasting bounty." Parker huffed. "We won't live long enough to spend them."

"I intend to live a very long time." Eve held her cigarette for Parker to light it.

CJ felt like she was missing the secret code. "Will somebody tell me what's going on?"

Joe explained that between Eve and Parker's family, "they own half of Honolulu."

"I wouldn't say half," Eve said.

"Parker's family is in banking and real estate, and Eve's family owns the *Honolulu Advertiser*, among other things," Joe said.

CJ's eyes widened. She turned to Joe. "You didn't tell me Eve's family owns a newspaper."

"Why should that matter?" Eve twisted her cigarette into a red lacquer holder.

"CJ was a reporter," Joe said.

"Is a reporter," CJ emphasized. "I'm a reporter looking for work."

"That's no problem. I'll take you over to see my Pops."

There it was—her chance for a job, and in a flash, Eve went from *femme fatale* to CJ's fairy godmother.

"I thought you came out here to have a baby," Joe said.

CJ gave Joe a smile that would freeze hell, then turned to Eve. "Thanks, Eve. I appreciate it."

"Don't thank me yet. Pops isn't easily impressed." She leaned toward Parker so he could light her cigarette.

"All I want is a shot."

CJ knew she was a good reporter, a hard worker, and a fast learner. Besides, how many Columbia School grads could there be in Hawaii?

"Maybe you could work part-time?" Joe offered.

"We'll talk later." Her smile thinned to a warning gesture.

"If you'd rather not . . ." Eve started.

"No. I would. I very definitely would," CJ said.

"Tomorrow then. We'll work out the details." Eve blew a perfect circle of smoke to the ceiling, and Parker announced the arrival of a waiter carrying a standing bucket of champagne. "And just in time," he said.

Parker stood, poured the champagne, and raised his glass. "A toast to CJ and Joe."

In a stage whisper, Eve tugged at Parker's uniform jacket and said, "Sorry, Park. You're not the best man."

"*Au contraire*." He glanced down at her. "I'm always the best man."

"Not this time." Linc stood. "I put up with four years of living with this guy, I earned being best man—even if I couldn't get to the wedding."

But as Linc took out a paper from his pocket, the band struck up *Chattanooga Choo Choo*, and the couples on the dance floor sang along.

Linc raised his voice, "To my best friend and his lovely bride."

It sounded like every guest at Wo Fat's sang out the refrain. "*Track Twenty-Nine. Can you give me a shine?*" They drowned him out.

He tried again, but Parker ran his thumb across his neck and shook his head.

"You're right," Linc almost shouted. "I give up." He handed Joe the notes. "It took me two weeks to write this toast, my friend!" He exaggerated mouthing the words.

The crowd belted out, "*Chattanooga Choo-Choo. Choo-Choo. Choo-choo.*"

Linc leaned toward Joe. "When you get bored, take some time to read it. It's damn good." Then he raised his glass again and bellowed, "To CJ and Joe, may they live long and happy!"

"To CJ and Joe." They toasted.

When the song ended, Joe asked Linc if he wanted to try the speech again.

"I'll pass," Linc said, "But one more time." Linc raised his glass. "Here's to you both. Have a fabulous life and a fantastic honeymoon."

"Where are you spending your honeymoon?" Eve asked.

"The Kamehameha Suite at the Royal Hawaiian," Joe said.

"Oh, don't you just love the Royal?" Eve almost cooed.

"Actually, I haven't been there. We went from the ship to the Justice of the Peace!"

"How virginal," Parker quipped.

CJ affected her best Mona Lisa smile.

Eve ignored the remark. "CJ, you're going to love the Royal. They have the best bands. Harry Owens is playing there tomorrow night. What if we all go? How 'bout it, Linc?"

CJ caught Eve baiting Linc.

Linc exchanged glances with Joe. "We've got a big maneuver scheduled for this weekend. All hands on deck."

"They've even have the docs scheduled for mock casualty duty," Parker said.

CJ asked Joe if that meant he was working, too.

"Yeah, but I'm off on Sunday, and after that, I have a 72-hour pass."

"I don't know how you military wives handle life." Eve stubbed out her cigarette. "I could never tolerate it."

"You can't tolerate your soup served cold," Parker said.

CJ admitted, "I wasn't expecting you to work on the first day of my honeymoon."

"I've got it!" Eve said. "Let's go to the newspaper tomorrow."

"Tomorrow's Saturday," CJ said.

"Pops works six days a week, and on the seventh day, his rest is that he only calls the paper every hour."

CJ smiled. "He sounds like a true newspaperman."

"It's set. I'll meet you at the *Advertiser* at ten o'clock."

"That would be swell," CJ said.

Okay, Joe never masked the details of military life. She'd have to live with it. She was in Hawaii, married and had an interview arranged with a major newspaper.

Who knows? By Monday, she could be a cub reporter.

It was a picture-perfect evening, and a future was waiting just out of the frame. So, why was she so cautious and suspicious of Eve? Was it the way she circled Linc? How she leaned into him when she spoke? Letting the slip of a dress fall off her shoulder? Or how Linc slid his hand down her back when they were dancing.

"Linc's a big boy," Joe said when he caught her staring at the couple.

"He's a babe in the woods with that one," CJ said.

"Hey. Look at me," Joe said. "Linc doesn't need a vigilante big sister." He pulled her closer,

"I'm the only man in the room."

CJ rested her cheek against Joe's.

"That's more like it," Joe whispered.

CJ double-timed her step to avoid Joe stomping on her feet. She loved the way he thought he was Fred Astaire, and when he clenched her waist and dipped her back to the floor, she held on for dear life, not so much out of love but fear of being dropped.

For the rest of the night, they danced, drank, told lies, and laughed until the band signaled the end of the evening. They played “Good Night, Ladies,” and the couples melted off the dance floor. Parker, Eve, CJ, and Joe said their adieus, and CJ led Joe to the Royal, where, with any luck, he wouldn’t drop her again