

A photograph of a person's back and shoulder, showing a detailed black tattoo of a dragon or mythical creature. The person is wearing a dark, ribbed tank top. The background consists of horizontal corrugated metal slats, which are lit with a warm, orange-red glow from the bottom, creating a strong contrast with the dark top. The overall mood is gritty and urban.

THE KULAI STREET KNIGHTS

QUICKREADS

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Eddie gazed into a sea of angry faces. The men and women gathered in the Kalihi Community Center were people he'd known all his life. But tonight, their fear and frustration made them seem like strangers.

“—Why can't you do something?” Everyone was talking at once, so Eddie heard only part of what Mr. Chang was asking. But he could easily figure out the rest. Everyone in the Center was wondering the same thing. *Why can't you protect us, Eddie Kahele? You're a cop!*

He held up his hands for silence. Bit by bit the talking stopped.

“Mr. Chang,” Eddie said patiently, “I'm

only one cop. This neighborhood is not the only trouble spot in Honolulu. That's why you folks need to form a Neighborhood Watch. You have to look out for each other."

Mr. Chang made a disgusted face. "I grew up in Kalihi," the old man said. "We had gangs when I was a kid—but not like what we have today. Back then, kids were mischievous, not vicious or even mean. Things are worse now."

"I know," Eddie said quickly. "Things have changed a lot. But that's not what we're here to talk about. Let's stay on the subject, please."

An elderly woman in the front row stood up. Eddie smiled to himself. Auntie Malia had seemed old when he was little, but now she really was old! She was also one of his favorite aunts. Not that she and Eddie were related by blood. In Hawaii, young people called their elders "auntie" and "uncle" out of respect.

"Eddie," she said, "I'm too old to patrol the streets. What can I do to help?"

Eddie explained that not everyone had to go out on patrol. He talked about block captains. He explained how the people in the neighborhood could look out for each other. But he could see it was a lost cause. By the time the meeting was over, only a handful of people had signed up for the Neighborhood Watch.

When Eddie left the Center, he felt frustrated. Deep in thought, he headed for his small apartment a couple of blocks away.

A full moon splashed silver light over the monkeypod trees that lined the street. The warm air was sweet with the lemony scent of plumeria blossoms. As he walked, Eddie remembered being a kid here, playing ball in the street on nights like this. In those days he hadn't had a care in the world.

Then he grew up, and the world changed.

Hawaii had breathtaking rainbows, beautiful beaches, and perfumed air—but it was not really paradise. Honolulu had the same problems as any other big city. Kalihi was an old neighborhood, a poor

neighborhood. But people of all different races lived, worked, and played here together. Eddie loved that. As far back as he could remember, living in Kalihi meant having a sense of “ohana”—a feeling of family.

Kalihi had always had its share of crime. Now and then, kids ripped off something from Mr. Chang’s little grocery store. Sometimes a car got stolen for a joy ride. But for the most part, the gangs were a nuisance, not a threat.

Then the face of crime began to change. The criminals started packing knives and guns. And stealing wasn’t enough. They seemed to get a thrill out of beatings and killings. They respected no one and nothing. In fact, just a week ago, old Mrs. Shiroma had been badly beaten after cashing her pension check. She had stubbornly refused to hand over the money to her attacker.

Eddie was thinking about Mrs. Shiroma when a loud scream ripped through the night. He froze, trying to figure out where the sound had come from. Then he heard men’s voices

raised in anger and the sounds of fighting. Eddie tore down the street and into a narrow alley.

It was pitch black. Eddie had to slow his pace. Halfway down the alley, he tripped over a trash can. Luckily he caught himself before he fell, and kicked the can to one side. The sound of metal scraping asphalt echoed in the night air.

When Eddie reached the mouth of the alley, he saw Auntie Malia and the shadowy figures of four men. Eddie yelled, hoping to distract them. At the sound of his voice, the figures vanished into the shadows.

Eddie hurried to Auntie Malia. The old woman was shaking from head to toe. She clung to Eddie's arm as she talked excitedly. "It was unreal, Eddie. Three young *kolohe*—rascals—tried to knock me over and steal my purse. But then four guys came out of nowhere to help me. They *saved* me, Eddie!"

Eddie shook his head, trying to make sense of what Auntie was telling him. "Who—" he started to say, but Auntie Malia

went on excitedly.

“They said they were the Kula‘i Street Knights. I never heard of that gang before.”

Neither had Eddie. And he wasn’t sure he liked what he was hearing. The trouble was Auntie. As far as she was concerned, these Street Knights were angels sent from heaven.



When Eddie arrived at the station the next morning, he told his sergeant all about the incident. Sgt. Amosa shrugged. “Not much we can do unless your auntie fingers the punks who tried to rob her. All the same, keep your eyes and ears open. Let’s just hope these guys aren’t outsiders moving in to start a gang war.”

Eddie nodded. “What I can’t figure out is why they stopped to *help* an old woman.”

The sergeant shook his head and grinned. “Maybe heroism is back in fashion,” he said sarcastically.

Eddie raised one eyebrow. “Yeah—and maybe I’m going to Vegas next weekend and

win a million bucks.”

Both men burst out laughing.

Eddie didn't think much more about the Street Knights that morning. But when he stopped for lunch at a local diner, everyone there was talking about the denim-clad angels. The story of Auntie's rescue had spread through the neighborhood like wildfire.

“Eddie, did you hear?” Mr. Apana said as he wiped the counter. The diner was old. The paint was faded, and the plastic-covered stools were mended with tape. But Mr. Apana made the best plate lunch in Kalihi.

“Did you hear how those Street Knights saved Auntie Malia?” Mr. Apana went on. The old man was grinning. Eddie noticed that everyone else in the diner was nodding and smiling, too.

Eddie nodded. “I was there when it happened,” he said. “I'm just glad that Auntie wasn't hurt.”

Then Mrs. Apana handed Eddie his favorite plate lunch—teriyaki beef, two

scoops of rice, and macaroni salad. Eddie lifted a big bite of teriyaki beef with his chopsticks. In spite of everyone's enthusiasm over the Street Knights, he couldn't shake the feeling that something about these heroes was just plain *wrong*.

"No need now for a Neighborhood Watch," someone said. Eddie glanced over his shoulder. Other folks in the diner were nodding in agreement.

Eddie spun around on the stool. "Look," he said firmly, "just because these guys helped Auntie doesn't mean they'll help anyone else. If they're so wonderful, why did they run off before I could talk to them?"

Their smiles quickly disappeared. It was as if the temperature in the room had dropped. Eddie could feel the people's hostility.

"Come on, Eddie, cut it out," Mrs. Apana scolded. "How come you have to find fault with everything? Those boys saved Malia, and that's that."

Eddie sighed, swung back around on the

stool, and went on eating. He knew it would do no good to argue. The neighborhood people *wanted* to believe that they had a team of guardian angels looking out for them.

That afternoon at work, Eddie kept thinking about the incident from the night before. Why hadn't the four men hung around? Maybe they had records and were afraid he would recognize them. Who *were* they? Just another gang moving into the neighborhood? Eddie sighed. That didn't make sense, either. Gang members didn't bother to save little old ladies.

Later, while he was filing some reports, he heard a loud commotion. Sgt. Amosa stuck his head around the door. "Hey, Eddie, you might want to hear this," he said.

Eddie raised an eyebrow. "About—?"

"Mr. Fernandez just got mugged. He came in to report it. He says he was on his way home when three guys stopped him. They threatened to hurt him if he didn't hand over his wallet. Then all of a sudden, out of nowhere, four more guys appear. They tell