

Doubts of the Heart by Eva Shaw, author of *Games of the Heart*

I put on a coconut bra. Don't tell me you've never wanted to do that because down deep every woman has. But you know what the scary part was? It fit. For coconuts.

Turning around in the shop's microscopic dressing room at the International Market Place in downtown Honolulu, I tried to scrutinize my reflection in the fuzzy, fun-house mirror.

"And what's become of your pride, Nica Dobson?"

This was not a rhetorical question because I really did ask myself that. Self didn't answer, which is a good or a bad thing depending on where my psyche was living at that second.

I slipped out of the bra and back into shorts and yellow t-shirt, sandals, and Cubbies baseball cap. What had happened to me? Who was I? What was my purpose in life?

Sorry, if you think I have any of these answers, I don't, so quietly close this book and check out the ones on the self-help shelf. Life is a big, fat mystery to me. That's why I found myself in Honolulu, a year after surgery for breast cancer, six rounds of chemo, and then seven weeks straight of radiation. I was on leave, not from my senses, but as a confidential consultant for the Federal Bureau of Investigation. It's like being a temp, but I got to carry a gun if needed, and an ID card, and swore to uphold apple pie, Mom, and the American way. But as a consultant, I could give my opinions, but had no clout when terrible things happened and received no pats on the back when things went well, which often made it tough to tell the difference between a good outcome of an investigation and a rotten one. Want details? Just as my cousin, Pastor Jane Angieski about that. She exposed all sides of me in her best-selling memoir *Games of the Heart*. Alas, I was okay with me for about ten years, but then this cancer diagnosis happened.

My co-workers at the Bureau thought it was for the medical reasons that I was on leave. Made sense, since I did need time for my body to get stronger, but honestly, I'd begun thinking the leave was necessary for emotional ones. Could I continue to fight their fight? Who was I fighting? Could anyone ever win?

Not being clear why I was a consultant, I knew I'd become a danger for my partners, citizens, and even the criminals. Yes, for myself too.

Don't misunderstand. I believe in truth, justice, and John Wayne. However, doubts clustered and squawked in my brain like greedy pigeons in Central Park. For some consultants and agents, it takes a bullet for them to examine their lives and their bucket lists. For me, it was a nasty swarm of cancer cells right near my heart that

made me wonder if the absolutes shared by my fellow team members and agents could ever be mine again. The treatments for breast cancer, to me, were a blessing because after years of being undercover as a wealthy patron of the arts in Las Vegas, I was free. Of course, I'm still a wealthy patron of the arts, thanks to marrying the late George Wainwright (oil importing and banking) and the late Clayton Dobson (family fortune with the smarts to get into Microsoft in the beginning). You won't be tested later and I'll try to remind you if I bring them up again.

I loved them both and they loved me. Yet, I think they wanted a trophy wife rather than a life partner and because of my cover for the Bureau, I gave them what they wanted. These men always got what they wanted. George died of a heart attack when he was "away on business." Yes, even the death certificate had quotes around that. Clayton? Who knew that a bee would sting him when he brushed it off his face with golf towel before selecting a five-iron at the eighteenth hole at Pebble Beach? Who could imagine that an insect could end the life of a billionaire who even the president didn't call by his first name until he was asked?

Within twelve short months, I went from living in a mansion the size of Oprah's in Montecito, California (and yes, I have been her guest) to living at the Hilton in Honolulu. My friends who'd been through it and the counselors in the support group said, "Cancer changes things," but apparently not everything as I quickly found out.

I put on my hot yellow "I Love Waikiki" T-shirt and denim capris. I wasn't ready to buy or be seen in public in a coconut bra, well, quite yet. Then the second I flung back the fitting room's curtain, I was knocked back and then teetered forward. Blame it on the high-heeled sandals. I grabbed a chunk of a green Aloha shirt and snapped. "Listen, pal, if you take off the dark glasses and realize there are other people in this market, maybe you wouldn't be a menace to society," I barked.

"Me? You could get yourself killed moving like that, you know," he growled, but took my elbow as if to steady me. That's when I saw the two goons standing on each side of him. In the Bureau, I've heard that described as "packing muscle," and these guys looked like poster boys for that.

"No need to assault me, you creep. Take your grubby hands off me or bring on your buddies here because I can make them uncomfortable enough so they won't forget me for a long time." I growled the threat and yanked my arm from his grasp. It was then that I saw the spot where I'd previously been standing now housed a novelty cart pushed into place by two teenagers still texting and oblivious to who or what was in their way.

Before I could save the little dignity I had left, the man squinted, blinked, and then started into my eyes.

On a scale of one to ten, I would later tell my cousin, he came in at a firm seven,

about three inches shorter than me but I'm five foot ten inches without the wedge sandals. Even though I had taken a course to profile suspects, honestly? I was never good at it. This guy was about twenty pounds overweight, but broad shouldered and muscular. His short dark hair was receding a bit at the forehead, yet with that cool bristly haircut head look, it didn't matter. He was wearing glasses with dark rims and a crooked smile. His features were the typical melting pot of locals with more Chinese than Hawaiian, I thought. I did like what I saw even if he was annoying as all get out.