

Book Club Kit



"A bittersweet story of cinematic proportions."
—BookPage on *Island of Sweet Pies and Soldiers*

SARA ACKERMAN

THE LIEUTENANT'S NURSE

A NOVEL





Dear Reader:

Part of this story has been with me since I was a young girl. My grandmother traveled to Hawai'i aboard the Matson steamship Lurline in 1934. She came from Minnesota, where she had recently met my grandfather at his younger brother's funeral. A few years earlier, my grandfather had been recruited to teach on the Big Island at a school called Konawaena. Leaving the bitter cold of South Dakota for Hawai'i sounded like a great tradeoff, so he was happy to accept. From the moment he saw my grandmother, he was smitten, and when he returned to Hawai'i after the funeral, he sent her a ticket to come visit. She accepted. On her way there, she met a handsome officer who she seemed quite taken with. They dined and danced (and who knows what else) in great style. But when the ship docked, my grandfather was waiting with a ring. He proposed then and there, and she said yes. She always spoke about this other man, even when she was old, and I know she wondered what became of him and how her life might have turned out if things had been different. I love to imagine *what if*.

This was the jumping off point for my story. Then, when I began looking into the Lurline in the 1940s, I was amazed to find that the luxury passenger ship had recently left Hawaii and was en route back to California when the Japanese attacked Pearl Harbor. The ship raced back to San Francisco at full speed. Even more surprising to me was a story I had never heard before, about the radio operator on the Lurline picking up mysterious radio signals on the trip to Hawai'i. Before the attack! I was vaguely aware of various theories floating around that America knew the Japanese were coming. The more I read, the more intrigued I became. In the book, I include many of these government notes, memos, and messages, but I leave it up to you, the reader, to decide.

Add to that numerous stories about the heroic nurses who worked at Tripler Hospital and aboard the hospital ship Solace, and I had enough to write a book. These women, many who had chosen Hawai'i as a cushy overseas job, were suddenly tasked with the unthinkable. While researching for *The Lieutenant's Nurse*, more than any of my others, I found myself in tears reading about the horrors that people endured during this horrible attack. War is ugly, but the human spirit is truly a beautiful and hopeful thing. As I wrote, I tried to focus on that.

Oh, and of course, there's a dog.

xo
Sara

A Night in Hawai'i

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. If you had the chance to sail off to Hawaii in 1941, do you think you would have gone? What part of the voyage appeals to you most?
2. Do you think Eva made the right choice to leave Michigan? Were her lies about what happened at the hospital justified?
3. Do you think it was right to keep Brandy at Tripler Hospital for morale of the wounded? Do you believe in therapy dogs/pets? Have you had personal experience with one?
4. Eva had to stand up to some powerful men who didn't necessarily respect her or her expertise. Do you think she handled it well? Would you have been able to speak up?
5. How did you feel about Eva's loyalty or disloyalty to Billy? Do you think she acted appropriately? Should she have followed her heart with Clark sooner? Not at all?
6. Do you have any relatives or know anyone who was at Pearl Harbor during the attack? During the war? If so, what were their experiences?
7. Unless one has been through an event such as this, it's hard to imagine the terror and fear they experienced. If you put yourself in the shoes of the nurses, how do you think you would have held up?
8. The nurses got each other through the days after the attack. Have you ever been in a situation where you needed to rely on the support of a group of friends or colleagues? What is the effect of shared trauma on a group?
9. What are your thoughts on the advance knowledge theory about Pearl Harbor—that some people knew the Japanese attack was coming beforehand?
10. What did you learn about Pearl Harbor that you didn't already know?

A Night in Hawai'i

MUSIC

Music was a huge part of the Matson steamship experience, as it was in Waikiki, too. The Royal Hawaiian Band, the Hawaiian Serenaders and "Beach Boy" musicians were but a few of the many popular entertainers. Tune into Pandora's Waikiki Radio station for popular music of yesterday.



COCKTAILS

MOSCOW MULE

Half a lime
2 oz vodka
6 oz ginger beer

Squeeze lime into copper mug or collins glass. Drop in the lime peel. Add ice cubes and pour in vodka and ginger beer. Stir and serve.

Copper mug recommended but not required.

MATSON'S MARY PICKFORD COCKTAIL

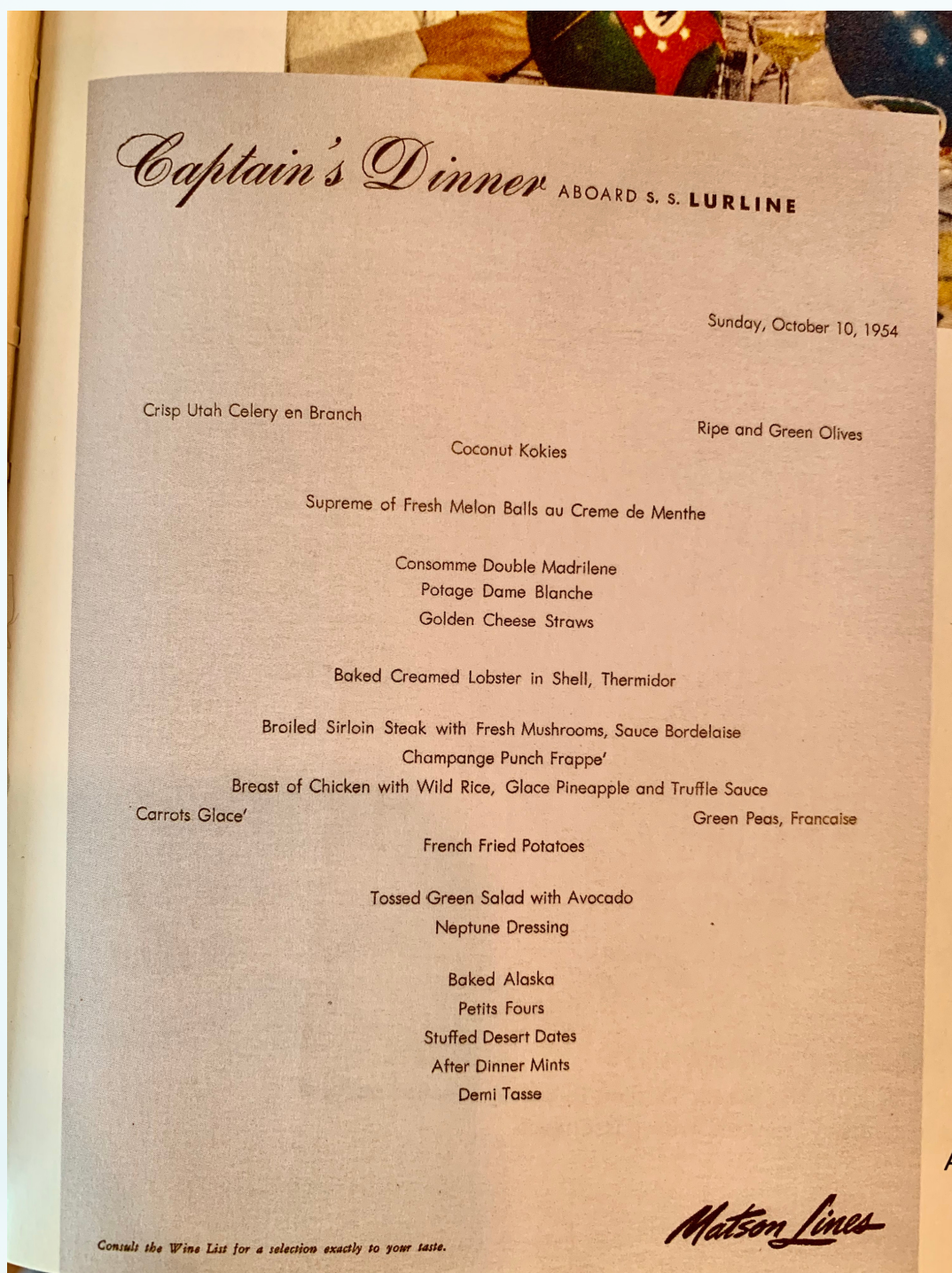
1/4 jigger pineapple juice
1/4 jigger grenadine
1/4 jigger rum

Shake well and pour over ice in a short tumbler.

(from the book *To Honolulu in Five Days*)

Captain's Dinner

This was one of the fanciest affairs of the Lurline crossings. Tables were adorned in flowers and set with the finest china, silver, and linen. Everything bore the Matson M.



Baked Alaska

Aboard the Lurline, this scrumptious dessert was all the rave. To serve, they'd dim the lights and waiters would sweep in holding high their trays full of candlelit deliciousness. This recipe serves 8-10, so adjust as needed!

Place rack in lower third of oven and preheat to 400.

Ingredients:

2 dozen whole, fresh strawberries

1/4 cup curaçao

8-10 T kirsch (clear brandy made from morello cherries)

1 homemade or store-bought pound cake, split in half to form two layers

6-8 scoops of high quality vanilla ice cream

4 egg whites

1 t vanilla extract

3.4 cup sugar

Hull the strawberries and put in a medium bowl. Pour curaçao and 1/4 cup of the kirsch over the top, toss lightly and set aside.

Place one layer of pound cake on an ovenproof platter and sprinkle the cake with remaining kirsch. Cut the remaining layer into slices about 3/8 inc thick.

Arrange scoops of ice cream on top of the bottom cake layer, filling the spaces between scoops with half of the marinated strawberries. Arrange reserved cake slices on top. Place in freezer while you make the meringue.

Beat egg whites (with electric mixer) until almost stiff, then gradually add vanilla and sugar. Continue beating just until stiff peaks form.

Remove cake from freezer, spread meringue over whole surface, turning a spoon or spatula in the meringue to create a swirled effect. Place in oven for 8 minutes. Check frequently, baking just long enough for peaks to lightly brown. Serve immediately with much fanfare.

(from the book To Honolulu in Five Days)

An Interview With The Author

(from Linda's Book Obsession)

1. What was your motivation in becoming an author and writer? What did you do before you were a writer?

Like most authors, my desire to write grew out of a love for reading. I started young and have gone through phases of reading all kinds of books, from Nancy Drew to David Baldacci to *Into Thin Air* to *Lord of the Rings*. I also fell in love with Barbara Kingsolver and Alice Hoffman's books, and they were a big inspiration for me.

I was a school counselor on Oahu for many years, then took some time off for acupuncture school, which is when I started writing my novels. Not long after I got my acupuncture license, I also got my first book deal. Since then, most of my focus has been on writing, but I also went back to teaching part time, which was nice because it got me out into the world. This year, however, I'm just writing.

2. How did you go about researching for *The Lieutenant's Nurse*?

I interviewed my mother and several family friends, as well as reading numerous books on Pearl Harbor. I sure wish my grandparents were still alive so I could speak to them! I also found many wonderful books. The ones I found most helpful were: *To Honolulu In Five Days*, about the five day crossing to Hawai'i on the Lurline; *Desperate Surgery in the Pacific War*, written by a trauma surgeon who served in the Pacific theater; *No Time For Fear*, a book of WWII nurse stories, and Joe Rochefort's *War*, which was not just about codebreaking, but a great Pearl Harbor resource book in general. A few internet articles were also instrumental.

Before writing, I read all of the books, which helped me to form my ideas. Thankfully, I had already done plenty of research on my previous book, *Island of Sweet Pies and Soldiers*, which is also set in Hawai'i during the war, so I was able to build off of that. Both books take place on different islands and one is towards the end and one the beginning of the war, but having that background helped immensely. And as always, I visited Pearl Harbor. There is a gravity there that is hard to explain.

3. What are your goals for readers to take away after reading?

Mainly, a deeper understanding of what it was like for the people who lived here in Hawai'i during the war. The early 1940s were dark times, to be sure, but I also got a real sense of nostalgia from my grandmother when she talked about those years. Mixed in with the fear and the horrors, was a deep sense of connection and love and hope. People banded together and leaned on each other. So much has been written on the horrors of war, so I wanted my story to portray the strength of the human spirit. I wanted it to show both the dark and the light — that though the war years were some of the worst years of my grandmother's life, they were also some of the most meaningful.

I also want to transport readers to Hawai'i, so they actually feel like they're here. Not the sandy beaches and coconut trees portrayed by the media, but true Hawai'i from all angles. On my website, I say that I like to write about love and life and all their messy and beautiful imperfections, and the same goes for Hawai'i.

4. What is a typical day in your life ?

On most days, I wake up early and write for an hour and a half or two - however long it takes me to write my first 400 words. Then, I'll go for a walk on the beach or in the mountains, or do yoga to clear my head and move my body. After that, I usually do promotional stuff and check social media, or work on other side projects (I am currently putting together a novel writing course and planning a Hawai'i Writers Retreat, stay tuned). In the afternoons, I write my next 400 words or so, which usually takes another couple hours.

I love watching the sunset and never miss it if I can help it. Even better if I'm in the ocean or in the forest. We have wonderful local beer here, so I usually enjoy a cold IPA with my sunset. After dinner, our cat is very insistent about going for a walk so we take her and our dog Lucy out. The stars on the north shore are amazing! Then off to bed early with a good book.

5. What advice can you give to someone that wants to be a writer?

For many years, I had a Post-It note on my door frame that said Patience & Perseverance. If you want it badly enough, and are willing to put in the time, the magic will happen. I do believe that writing is magic and you have to be open to letting your stories unfold. Writing a good novel is not something that can be rushed, and often it's not your first, second or even third novel that gets you a book deal. For me, it was my fourth. Conferences were (and still are) another key thing for me. They are the best way to hone your craft and meet other like-minded people. Being able to take critiques (from an editor or trusted reader) of your work is also very helpful, and an important part of being a writer.

Of course, you also have to love love love writing and be okay spending countless hours of your life lost in thought and daydreaming, or face down on the computer.

ALOHA