

Chapter 12 from Inside the Barbary Coast

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King David Kalakaua had arrived in the city aboard the *USS Charleston* on December 4. Ships fired their cannon in salute. It was not often that a reigning monarch visited the West Coast of the United States.

He had stayed at the Palace Hotel until two days after Christmas when he and his entourage left by train for Los Angeles, San Diego, San Bernadino and Santa Barbara. The King had intended to rest and simply see the sights during his visit to California. But too many politicians and would-be friends interfered. They played to the king's motto, *Houulo Lahui*, which meant "Increase the Nation." They offered to bolster the Hawaiian economy by buying pineapple and sugar. In exchange, Pearl Harbor would be a western outpost for the U.S. Pacific fleet.

There were rumors the King had decided to concede territorial status to the Sandwich Islands. But to those rumors the King merely smiled. It was his knowledge and his alone that such a decision would be left to Liliuokalani, his sister and heir.

"I am here simply to enjoy myself," the King would say. Then he would fall asleep, often at official functions, signaling that he was indeed not well.

Jack dashed into the marble lobby of the famous hotel and arrived panting at the front desk.

"I'm a doctor. Tell me how to get to the royal suite," he said to those who looked up.

"I beg your pardon, sir, but I can't let anyone upstairs who simply states he is a doctor," said the elder of the two.

"I'm sorry. My name is Jack Pitman..."

"John Pitman's son?"

John Pitman who failed to prevent our founder from drowning in the Bay? "I am his son," Jack acknowledged impatiently.

"Well, I shouldn't hold your father's reputation against you. Besides, Doc McLean has spread the word that we could call on you if we ever needed you." Jack let out a quick sigh of relief.

The man came out from behind the counter through a side door. He was Captain Smith, the hotel manager.

"No doubt you've heard the King has been in the hotel for a number of weeks before and after his trip to Southern California. At first they thought it was a cold. But Dr. McNulty of Los Angeles, who accompanied David up here—we've all started to call him David—says he is suffering from Bright's disease."

Bright's disease, thought Jack. Richard Bright of London earlier in the century had described the various stages of kidney disease leaving *nephritis* to become commonly known as Bright's disease.

"I had heard the King was suffering from diabetes," said Jack.

"That was before the weekend. Then for two days, the doctors up there wouldn't let anyone come or go from the room," said Captain Smith. "A reporter went up there but

came back down a few minutes later. They wouldn't let him in. I don't know what's going on. Now, though, all they talk about is Bright's disease."

The manager of the hotel consented to let Jack up to the sixth floor and showed him the elevator.

"You have to understand. A young medical student from Australia was just here and wanted to apply a local remedy—*croton* oil, I think he called it. He wanted to apply it externally."

"*Externally?*" Jack said incredulously. "That wouldn't have done any good."

"The King's doctors didn't think so either. The youth was rather put out. Said they'd be to blame if the King died for not having taken his remedy."

"So why do you think I might have anything else to offer?"

"Only on the basis of Doctor McLean's recommendation, son. Now you better get moving."

Young Dr. Pitman rode up only with the attendant in the elevator. Captain Smith obviously didn't want to be around if the King's entourage threw out a second medic.

The doors to the elevator opened, and Jack saw two guards down the hall at the entrance to the royal suite. Jack approached them, presented his credentials, and waited until one of the guards returned from inside with the verdict. Yes, he would be allowed inside.

"I'm Colonel McKinley, U.S. consul general for Hawaii," one man said, somberly shaking Jack's hand. "This is His Majesty's equerry in waiting, Colonel Hoapili Baker."

Jack looked past the entryway where the three men stood and saw at least eight people standing and kneeling around the bed where the king lay.

"Who are those people?" he asked.

Closest to the king were a young Hawaiian aide named Kalaua and Dr. Wood, fleet surgeon. Farthest away, Col. McKinley explained, were two attending physicians invited in by Dr. Wood, Drs. Sawyer and Taylor, both of whom Jack recognized.

"Why are they not closer to the King?" whispered Jack.

"Dr. Sawyer has bronchitis, and Dr. Taylor is suffering from pneumonia."

Then what were they doing in *there*, Jack thought.

The others included a Colonel Macfarlane, the King's chamberlain; Admiral Brown of the U.S. Navy, and two ministers, the Reverend Dr. Edward B. Church and Reverend J. Sanders Reed, both of San Francisco's Trinity Church. There were others McKinley didn't identify.

"May I step closer?"

"Yes. I'll introduce you to Dr. Wood."

King David Kalakaua, Hawaii's seventh monarch, was a big man who took up the entire length and most of the width of the poster bed. All the knowledge he had gained from traveling to Europe and all the wisdom he had acquired—King David had even written a book entitled "Legends of Hawaii" and was working on one called "Temple of Wisdom"—lay stilled by the disease that afflicted him. Kalaua, his attendant, wearing a dull-colored, loose-fitting gown, dabbed the King's forehead with a cloth and then, on her knees, reached above his chest and lightly massaged his blanketed body.

"It's a Hawaiian custom to do that," McKinley explained.

It was obvious even to the unfamiliar that the King's island complexion had become jaundiced. His temperature was 104, and, though sleeping, his pulse was 120.

Once an hour Dr. Wood would feed the King some warmed milk and brandy through a tube. In between feedings, the King was given stimulants to extend his life. It wasn't what Jack would have prescribed, but it was obvious the King's condition had so deteriorated that any true corrective measures would have been futile.

"We had thought the end was near for some time," McKinley said. "But the King is strong. Every now and then he rallies and is able to talk. I think he might have been hoping for a miracle."

"May I examine the patient?" asked Jack.

Col. McKinley walked over to the other attending physicians who shrugged, then nodded approval. The fleet surgeon introduced Jack to the others. They moved away, everyone except Kalua, to allow Jack to get closer. The bed had been pulled into the middle of the room in front of a dresser of drawers that was no longer of use to the king. From one side of the bed, Jack looked into the eyes of the king's lady in waiting. They were tired eyes, deep mahogany brown in color but swollen and red from lack of sleep and from crying. She dabbed the king's forehead again and resumed moving her hands lovingly across his chest, shoulders and arms.

"May I examine His Majesty?"

Kalua looked over to Dr. Wood who nodded affirmatively. She stood and pulled down the embroidered blanket that looked like an heirloom of the royal family.

The king wore a large sleeping shirt. There was a tube laying across one leg, indicating the patient had had a catheter inserted. Jack looked at his respiration. The king was taking shallow, quick breaths. Jack then placed his left hand on the king's chest between the eleventh and twelfth ribs and, after the king exhaled, pressed. He positioned his right hand just below the patient's rib cage to feel the right kidney. It was distended.

He drew the Hawaiian blanket back over the king and asked, "What about his urine?"

Dr. Wood lifted some blankets by the foot of the bed to reveal a glass bottle into which a half a cup of urine had collected.

"It's not very much," commented Jack. He asked and was allowed to examine it. It was light-colored but milky. He poured some of the urine into a test tube from Dr. Wood's bag, restored the collection bottle to its position, and walked over to a gas lamp, holding the test tube over the flame with a set of clamps. The liquid became more cloudy.

"It's not phosphates," Jack said. "It must be albumin."

The protein in the urine meant the kidneys were no longer extracting the nutrients being fed him in the milk solution.

"Do you have a microscope here?" asked Jack.

"No."

He asked if he could take an unboiled sample of urine in a test tube back to his office. Dr. Wood placed an empty test tube with stopper in his hand. Jack filled it from the receiving bottle, capped it, and put it stopper down into his pocket.

"I'll come back as soon as I've done some tests," said Jack.

"Come back in the morning, Dr. Pitman. We've been here for days. It's late. Go home and get some rest."

It was well past midnight when Jack arrived home, his thoughts dwelling on the noble king who lay helpless so far from his home. He switched on the light in his office, uncovered his father's microscope, and removed the test tube from his pocket. The trick

had worked. Sure as he had expected, sediment had collected on top of the stopper. He slowly turned the test tube upright and twisted the stopper until he could remove it. He took a new slide from a box in a top drawer and smeared some of the sediment onto the slide, staining it with a drop of smegma dye. Under the microscope, Jack saw bacilli and epithelial cells of various shapes. It confirmed Kalakaua was indeed suffering from acute kidney disease.

But something troubled Jack. He tested the specific gravity of the urine. It was over a thousand as he had suspected. Why were the kidneys failing so quickly? The king only on Tuesday had attended a dinner given in his honor at the California Hotel. He had even taken in Masonic ceremonies the following evening. Now he lay near death. Something didn't make sense.

The next morning, Jack knew what it was that had been troubling him. *"I had heard the king was suffering from diabetes,"* Jack remembered saying to Captain Smith. *"That was before the weekend,"* replied the hotel manager. *"Then for two days, the doctors up there wouldn't let anyone come or go from the room."*

Jack washed his face, left a note for Madam Wong to reschedule his morning appointments, and headed downstairs and out onto the street. The air was cold and smelled of ocean salt. It was only seven o'clock. He bought a newspaper from a hawker in front of a restaurant. "The King's Dangerous Condition Yesterday Morning" was one of the headlines stacked above the article about David Kalakaua's failing health.

He scanned the article as he waited for the cable car. At the bottom of the article, his eyes widened at what he read:

"The weakening disorder developed with frightful rapidity, and on Saturday morning the King realized, probably for the first time, that he was a very sick man. Fleet Surgeon Wood of the *Charleston* summoned a consultation of Drs. Sawyer and Taylor, and the result was an agreement that the disease had assumed its most acute form. The trio of medical gentlemen hoped to pull the King through by heroic treatment, but had no hesitation in informing him when he asked to know the truth that his recovery was problematical.

"Callers were denied, and for forty-eight hours the physicians battled for their august patient's life. The desperate nature of the case was kept a profound secret until yesterday morning, when, all means having been exhausted to overcome the fatal secretions, the physicians abandoned hope, and sought only to alleviate pain while waiting for the inevitable blood poisoning that must terminate the struggle."

The article confirmed Jack's suspicion about what had caused the king's kidneys to fail. Would he be too late? How would the doctors react to his claim?

Jack didn't even stop at the front desk of the Palace on his way up to the sixth floor. Only one guard was at the entrance to the suite. He let him in. At the foot of the king's bed with her arms across the monarch's legs, Jack could see Kalaua draped in slumber. She had fallen asleep. Admiral Brown greeted him in the vestibule.

"Earlier he opened his eyes but didn't even recognize us," said Admiral Brown. "Isn't there anything you can do?"

Jack walked over to the side of the bed and lifted one of the king's eyelids. The pupil was dilated. He checked his urine. It was the same color as before.

He looked around for Dr. Wood but didn't see him. Dr. Sawyer was asleep on a couch on the other side of the room. Dr. Taylor held a handkerchief to his nose near the head of the bed.

"May I see his chart?" Jack asked.

The slender, older doctor—probably in his fifties—reached over to the dresser and grasped a clipboard and handed it to Jack who studied it for several minutes before saying, "This shows his flow of urine was much better last week."

"Well, yes, that's true. It was better before the disease in his kidneys became acute."

Jack cross-examined: "What happened over the weekend that caused his kidneys to fail?"

"The disease progressed. That's all I can tell you."

"That's all you can tell me, or that's all you *want* to tell me?" questioned Jack.

The voices caused Kalaua to stir. She looked up, rubbed her eyes and excused herself. A minute later she came back with a fresh towel which she applied to the king's forehead.

"You gave the king mercury because you thought by doing so you could evacuate the impurities in his system. Haven't you learned that purgatives have not been proven to be effective? Healthy people have been harmed by them. You have hastened, not delayed, the ruin of this man's kidneys!" Jack said, now in a loud voice.

At that moment, the king's body stiffened and convulsed, then relaxed, then stiffened again. Jack checked his pulse. It was racing. "Bring a cold towel," Jack commanded. Admiral Brown sprang into action.

"What is all the commotion?" asked Dr. Wood, entering the room.

"His Majesty has just had a seizure. I'm afraid his kidneys have all but failed. His heart may be next," Jack said.

Kalaua rolled a silk blue scarf and placed it under the king's chin in order to straighten his neck.

Rev. Reed read a psalm from the Bible while Rev. Newman sang "Abide With Me" from a hymnal. Kalaua resumed stroking her king's shoulder, pausing every so often to wipe the tears on her sleeve. The pall of death was descending in the room.

Rev. Reed invited the others to kneel. "Oh, Lord. Oh, Jesus Christ," he invoked. "We pray you to look upon this, thy servant, whose spirit is about to appear before thee, and we ask for him thy blessing. Oh, Jesus, as thou hast led him on through life, take him, we pray thee, to thy bosom now. We commend his spirit to thy trust. Grant him, oh—"

Rev. Reed stopped his prayer, for he had noticed the king had ceased breathing. Everyone rose, and for a half a minute, David Kalaua's massive body lay still without a sound escaping it. Then, with a sigh that seemed both a sob and a groan, his labored respiration continued.

"Grant him, oh Lord, eternal life. Grant him a moment of conscious faith that he may have thy consolation and thy mercy. Oh, Lord, come into his heart and—"

Again the dying monarch had stopped breathing. As before, he was to all appearances dead, but a last few sparks of life within his body asserted themselves and again, with a gasp, air rushed into his lungs.

“...cleans his soul. Oh, Lord Jesus Christ, be with him yet in the body so that he may be present faultless before the Holy of Holies with every joy. Grant him, oh Lord, eternal rest.”

At that moment, David opened his eyes, as if toward the heavens, but there was no breath, no sign of life. Everyone in the room stood transfixed.

For a half a minute no one moved. Rev. Reed, who had been beseeching to his Maker, composed himself and concluded: “Lord who takest away the sins of the world, look down upon us, and hear our prayers, that he who has passed away shall sit with the Father who is everlasting. Amen.”

With a trembling hand, Kalaua reached over to the king’s chest, felt the stillness, then stroked the sunken cheeks of his once regal face. She withdrew, turning in a crying wail into Colonel Baker’s arms. Ashamedly, Dr. Taylor stepped into a side room leaving Dr. Wood to close the king’s eyes. He said to Jack, “There are some mysteries which shall remain mysteries.”

“His death and the cause of it are not a mystery,” Jack said somberly. “It wasn’t Bright’s disease that killed him. It was mercuric poisoning. The mystery is diabetes. That’s the one we have to solve.” And with that, Jack left the room.

The young doctor walked for blocks. Only after some time had past did he realize it was lunch time and that he had not eaten in twenty-four hours.

He headed for the Poodle Dog and made two phone calls—one to Madam Wong, to assure her he would be there in the afternoon, and the other to Warren McWilliams, to see if he could join him for lunch.

“I noticed they took down the Hawaiian flag that had been flying at the Palace,” said Warren arriving at Jack’s table.

“Did they put the American flag at half mast?” asked Jack.

“Yes.”

“The Hawaiians believe the monarchy is everlasting,” explained Jack. “I’m sure that’s why the Hawaiian flag wasn’t put at half mast.”

The two doctors ate and talked for an hour; but it was not their usual banter. This was a discussion of philosophy.

“We take an oath,” Jack said. “We take the Hippocratic oath pledging to give ‘no deadly medicine to anyone’ and yet that’s exactly what we do.”

“*You* don’t do it,” reminded Warren.

“No. But we in the medical profession do.”

“Sometimes we do things we ordinarily wouldn’t do when all else fails,” said Warren.

“Those things are shots in the dark. And, as in the case of King David, those shots in the dark hastened his death rather than prolonged it.”

“From the sounds of it, that may have been a blessing.”

“That’s not the point,” Jack shot back. “The thing is, those doctors up there on the sixth floor didn’t know what the hell they were doing! If you’re going to hasten or prolong life, you’d better know that that’s what you’re doing!”

It was why, Jack explained, he nearly thought of pursuing the way of the eclectics or the homeopaths. Eclecticism is what Campbell his pharmacist had nearly embraced. It had grown out of Thomsonism, a movement led by Samuel Thomson in the 1820s to oppose heroic therapy such as bloodletting and the use of purgatives. It involved ingesting

a sequence of plant-derived concoctions and taking plenty of steam baths. Eclectics used concentrations of herbal medicines, but there was a scandal in the late 1850s when it was discovered that many of the concoctions were not concentrations at all.

“That’s what we need—a scandal,” Warren said. “We need a scandal to blow the cover off our friend Dr. Louthan.”

“I had nearly forgotten about him,” said Jack.

“Geez, Jack. It was only two nights ago that we were in the lab analyzing his Viavi compound. By the way, what ever happened to his assistant, Marie?”

At that moment, Jack looked up at the door of the restaurant. “The answer to your question just walked in.”

“Pierre and Marie?”

The slim, dark-haired showman with Van Dyk beard removed his top hat and motioned for Marie to walk in front. There was no other path in the restaurant but the aisle that took them in front of Jack’s table.

“Why, Dr. Pitman. It’s so nice to see you,” exclaimed Marie with some surprise.

Jack stood as Marie continued: “Pierre, I believe you’ve met Dr. Pitman. He tried to save Prince Li from diphtheria. Remember?”

“Yes, we’ve met,” the showman said with an icy tone.

“It’s *Mrs.* Louthan, isn’t it?” queried Jack.

Looking perturbed for but a second, she said “Yes.”

“Mrs. Louthan, this is Dr. Warren McWilliams, my friend and associate. Warren, Marie Louthan.”

“A pleasure to meet you both,” offered the suave physician.

“Please. Don’t let us detain you,” Louthan said.

“We were just finishing,” Jack said, fishing in his pocket for money to pay the bill. Then he looked at Marie and asked, “When did you arrive in town?”

“Late last night. I had to stay longer in Boston on account of my stomach,” she said, Pierre Louthan waiting impatiently at her side.

“Was it stomach flu?” asked Jack.

“No. It was morning sickness. Pierre and I are going to have a baby.”