in the garden, Mina Beckwith watched the clouds racing over the Ko‘olau Mountains and the moon rising over Nu‘uanu Valley. She took a deep breath and turned her attention to the party inside. Stone arches framed a patio with sets of open french doors leading into the spacious and elegant parlor. From the garden, the arches created small moving vignettes of dancing couples, laughing groups, floating balloons, flying confetti, and moving figures in stylish and fanciful costumes. Beautiful as it looked, Mina couldn’t bring herself to go back in. She’d kept her mask in place all night, avoiding recognition and interaction. It would take more than fancy dress, she thought, to disguise the same old crowd and the same old small talk. Her harlequin costume glittered as she looked up at the moon. Where was her sister, Nyla? And Todd, Nyla’s husband, wasn’t there either. They’d agreed to meet at ten o’clock, and here it was ten thirty. Tired of waiting, Mina decided to leave and see the New Year in at her own bungalow on the beach. She stood up and collided with a tall man dressed in a priest’s cassock who seemed to have appeared out of nowhere. He wore a simple black mask that framed his eyes and was carrying a tumbler of brandy. A good part of it had just spilled on the front of his costume and the brandy smell filled the air.

“Well, forgive me father, for I seem to have sinned,” Mina laughed.
“I’m glad someone has.” The muffled voice behind the mask sounded British. “ Didn’t mean to intrude.”

“No, no, I’m just leaving.” Mina liked his voice. “ Beautiful view from this bench. Happy New Year.”

“And to you.” He raised his glass.

Mina left through the garden gate. Her car, a 1934 Packard convertible coupe, was parked under the dark overhang of a tree, so when she got in the driver’s seat and dropped the key, she was forced to bend down and grope around on the floor. A car pulled up near her, and then another. Car doors opened and closed. Then she heard voices she recognized, in rushed and animated conversation. Something made her stay down and hunched over in the dark, listening.

In the garden, the man who was dressed as a priest sat down on the bench, lit a cigar, and blew a smoke ring toward the moon. The explosions of firecrackers came at more frequent intervals as the New Year approached. He pulled out a flask from one of the cassock pockets and replenished his tumbler. Then, from the same vantage as his predecessor, he watched the same enchanting scenes in the house and up in the sky.

A few minutes later, he was joined by a man dressed as a sheik. “ Ned, I’ve been looking all over for you. The party is in full swing and you’re out here alone.”

“Where the hell have you been, Todd?” Ned asked.

“I got held up at the station.”

“Is the chief of detectives in big demand on New Year’s Eve?”

“Nah, I just had to talk to someone. Took longer than I thought.” The sheik sat down. “ Have you seen Nyla?”

“I haven’t seen your wife, old man. Perhaps she’s deserted you. I keep telling her, she’s way too good for you.”

“Where’s that brandy I gave you?” Todd held out a glass. “ I can tell you’ve already gotten into it.”

“Now I know why those priests wore these big robes.” Ned fished around in the folds of the robe and produced the flask.

Todd raised the flask in a toast before he drank. “ Here’s to the New Year and the Twenty-first Amendment.”
“There you two are.” A woman came walking toward them dressed in the same costume as the harlequin who had just left. She linked her arm with Todd’s.

“Was that you before, Nyla? Why didn’t you say so?” Ned was confused.

“What?” Nyla’s harlequin head tilted to one side.

“Before, out here, you bumped into me and said you were leaving.”

“No, I’ve been asleep in Ginger’s room.”

“I’m sure I recognize the costume,” said Ned.

“Rats! That was Mina! We rented the same costumes. She must have waited. She hates waiting. I bet she left. I dozed off, and now she’s come and gone. I really wanted you to meet her, Ned.”

“You mean you left me in the clutches of Ginger Raymond’s mother and took a nap?” Ned complained. “I thought she would never shut up. She gave me detailed biographies of all, I mean all, of her ancestors, and then showed me every piece of her Lokelani china collection. Ghastly stuff!”

“Well, we’re all together now.” Nyla kissed Todd on the cheek.

Soon the party began to spill out into the garden and the hostess passed out sparklers. At midnight they lit the sparklers and toasted one another with French champagne as a ferocious explosion of firecrackers and skyrockets overwhelmed the city of Honolulu, warding off the demons for another year.