

NURSE JANE GOES TO HAWAII
(Excerpt)

EDGAR CHISOLM and VIVIEN BLISS enter through the front door. EDGAR, DORIS' husband, is a rumpled man in grey flannels. Shy and awkward, he thinks he is in love with VIVIEN. VIVIEN, mid-thirties, is a delightfully flighty writer of Harlequin romance novels. She carries a portable tape recorder over her shoulder.

VIVIEN. *(looking around the living room)* Why Edgar, it's so ritzy! It's like I always dreamed it would be! I mean it's Bungalow City! Oh but I feel wicked.

EDGAR. May I take your coat?

VIVIEN. Not yet. Just let me breathe in the -- oh my, an Eskimo carving. Did you make it?

EDGAR. Just into ceramics I'm afraid.

VIVIEN. How cruel of me not to notice them first. I spy with my little eye something beginning with "ashtray." *(picks up ceramic)* I remember when this came out of the kiln. Oh, but I admire your textures. The way they seem to say, "Hello little cigarette, I'm going to hold you in ways you've never dreamed!"

EDGAR. Yes. And there's the typewriter. With Doris in Windsor, it's yours for the weekend.

VIVIEN. *(indicating tape recorder)* Thanks, but I've got Constant Companion. He's taped all my novels and I mustn't be unfaithful. Bad luck. Oh -- there's one of your abstracts! *(goes to woe-begone piece of clay)*

EDGAR. Very rough.

VIVIEN. YES! Why, it looks like Hawaii!

EDGAR. Pardon?

VIVIEN. Little volcanoes all over. I can almost see the palm trees.

EDGAR. Doris thinks it should go in the garbage.

VIVIEN. She doesn't even like this one?

EDGAR. When company comes she packs them all up in a box in the basement. Says she doesn't want to see me embarrassed.

VIVIEN. The cad-ess. Why must we artists suffer at such unfeeling hands? Let me comfort. *(She embraces him.)*

EDGAR. Vivien.

VIVIEN. *(releasing)* Oh Edgar, isn't it strange and wonderful and beautiful, the two of us? You, geography teacher by day, artist by night; me, a novelist of passion and romance

seeking intrigue; each guided by some Unseen Hand to an extension course in ceramics at the Ontario College of Art! Oh Edgar -- *(they are about to kiss.)* -- I want a drink.

EDGAR. Whiskey Sour?

VIVIEN. You're a psychic!

EDGAR. And would you care for a seat?

VIVIEN. Thank you but no. I'm still exploring this playground of adventure.

EDGAR. Good. *(They blow each other kisses and he exits into the kitchen.)*

VIVIEN. *(looks around the room, then says to a ceramic:)* Hello "Hawaii." HAWAII! EUREKA! TELEPHONE! BETTY! WHERE'S THE -- HAWAII! *(touchtones furiously saying:)* Ceramics live. They breathe. They -- they -- oh thank you, Edgar -- *(on phone)* Harlequin? This is Vivien Bliss . . . Yes, I know my novel was due yesterday. DON'T YELL AT ME, I'M IN THE PROCESS! Tell Betty I'm luxuriating with my paramour at 16 The Bridle Path. Tell her it's paradise and I'm calling it *Nurse Jane Goes To Hawaii*. I can see it now -- lagoons, Ferraris and tsetse flies! Bye! *(hands up, to tape recorder)* *Nurse Jane Goes To Hawaii*. Chapter One. Nurse Jane sighed. Paragraph. She had just arrived in Honolulu from Pleasantville Hospital for an International Symposium on Malaria. And she had met the continental Dr. Edgar Sterling from Britain. He had a strikingly cleft jutting chin, piercing blue eyes that danced and a silver tie clip on which was emblazoned his family crest. "Oh, to call him Ed instead of Dr. Sterling." she mused, as they strolled along the shore, listening to the crashing waves while porpoises whistled playfully beyond the coral reef. Paragraph. An aged denizen approached. "Aloha. You might please to join our lau?" he inquired. Dr. Sterling replied in the affirmative and guided Nurse Jane into the nearby bamboo hut with professional ease. Chapter Two. *(EDGAR re-enters from the kitchen with a tray on which are two Whiskey Sours and a rye bottle.)* Suddenly Nurse Jane found herself plied with exotic libations.

EDGAR. Here we are.

VIVIEN. *(to tape)* . . ." said Dr. Sterling.

EDGAR. *(offering drink)* Pardon?

VIVIEN. *(taking drink, to tape)* "Thank you," she replied huskily.

EDGAR. Vivien???

VIVIEN. *(to tape)* Dr. Sterling advanced.

EDGAR. Are you all right?

VIVIEN. *(to tape)* "I've never been better," she breathed. An inner voice beckoned. It said --

EDGAR. Are you sure?

VIVIEN. (*waving him off, to tape*) It said . . . (*turning tape off*) Never mind, it's gone.

EDGAR. Gone?

VIVIEN. (*realizing he doesn't understand*) Sorry. My novel.

EDGAR. I interrupted?!

VIVIEN. It's not your fault. It's . . . What can I say? (*VIVIEN and EDGAR clink drink glasses. He sips. Unaccustomed to drinking, she finishes hers in one slow, steady swallow.*)

EDGAR. (*beat*) Can I get you anything else?

VIVIEN. (*trying to recover the thread of her novel*) I'm not sure.

EDGAR. Perhaps some music?

VIVIEN. Oh! Love songs!

EDGAR. Perry Como, Herb Alpert, Tony Bennett --

VIVIEN. No, you!

EDGAR. Me?

VIVIEN. Sing to me, Edgar! Put me in the mood. We'll dance while you sing.

EDGAR. Vivien . . . have we had a little too much?

VIVIEN. No such thing as too much.

EDGAR. But . . .

VIVIEN. Pretty please? For me? Your inspiration? You're so cute when you say that. Come on. (*VIVIEN sings the first line of a popular romantic upbeat Hawaiian song. She looks expectantly at EDGAR who awkwardly repeats it. As VIVIEN exuberantly continues the song, she motions EDGAR to sing along, which he attempts to do, repeating the last word or phrase of each line with great embarrassment in an unintentional parody of an Hawaiian lounge act. As the song builds, VIVIEN adds "hula-hula dance movements" which EDGAR, mortified, attempts to copy. At the song's finale, VIVIEN hits a high note and collapses on the couch.*) Gosh, I'm possessed. Thank you.

EDGAR. Vivien . . .

VIVIEN. Ah hah? (*winks*)

EDGAR. I . . . look, I'm sorry.

VIVIEN. What about?

EDGAR. This wasn't such a good idea.

VIVIEN. But you sing so well.

EDGAR. Not that. It's just that I've never . . . I mean I don't know what I should be doing. I mean, Doris was the first girl I ever dated and what am I saying? I was married once before for heaven's sake. To my first wife, Betty. But that was a whirlwind affair, a matter of weeks actually, because of my . . . habit. I was obsessed with Atmospheric Optics -- reams of charts and statistics which Betty would throw in the air --

VIVIEN. Say no more. My editor's a Betty too, and she's a terror.

EDGAR. Forget your editor. Forget Betty. What I'm trying to say is -- I feel like a fool.

VIVIEN. Why?

EDGAR. Never mind. I'll drive you home.

VIVIEN. But you said we'd have the weekend. You promised and I've told Harlequin I'm here and -- oh Edgar, this weekend means so much to me!

EDGAR. You don't have to pretend.

VIVIEN. But I want to pretend. And with you. All weekend. Passion, desire, romance . . .
(*pause*) It's something I've done, isn't it? I've done something.

EDGAR. No, no, you've been delightful. It's me.

VIVIEN. You don't have to lie. I always do something. Always. I meet someone really interesting, a kindred spirit, someone I love who I think loves me -- and I meet them everywhere: at weaving class, pottery class, life drawing class -- my life is class after class after class. And it always ends up the same. I get in the door having a wonderful time, thinking we're getting along famously, and all of a sudden I'm back in the car being driven home and he won't even look at me. And I let myself in and go up to my bedsitter, praying Miss Clement won't ask how the date went -- and she keeps her hearing aid low so you practically have to *scream* "I failed again" to all the neighbours -- and I go into my room and rummage about in my hope chest, through quilts, linen, stitch-work -- or maybe just stare at the one corsage I ever got to press in my Bible. And I have a good cry. Because I don't know what I've done -- they never say. And it must be me because it's always the same. Then I pull out a Kleenex and turn on the tape and talk about Nurse Jane and her exciting adventures. And it's not fair! I'm a virgin, damnit, and it's not fair! Of course so is Nurse Jane -- but at least she gets more than a parting embrace! (*She turns away.*)

EDGAR. (*quietly*) Vivien . . . I'm sorry.

VIVIEN. Don't tell me you're sorry. I'm tired of people saying they're sorry. Do you have a subway token?

EDGAR. No, Vivien, no.

VIVIEN. That's okay I can hitch-hike. (*goes to the front door*)

EDGAR. No Vivien, please -- stay with me?

VIVIEN. Very good of you, but I don't need mercy. And besides, the linen needs ironing.

EDGAR. Vivien, I . . . Look at me? . . . Vivien? (*She does.*) Stay with me? Please?

VIVIEN. (*throws herself in his arms*) Oh Edgar!

EDGAR. I thought you thought I was a boring old fool.

VIVIEN. Edgar, you're the most marvellous man I ever met.

EDGAR. And make sure you catch Miss Clement in the hall Sunday night.

VIVIEN. "I did it Miss Clement! I did it!"

EDGAR. (*as Miss Clement*) "Eh?"

VIVIEN. "I'm a fallen woman at last!"

EDGAR. "Ooooooo." (*They laugh*)

VIVIEN. Edgar?

EDGAR. Yes?

VIVIEN. You will see me after this weekend, won't you? I mean, you will call me?

EDGAR. Forever.

VIVIEN. Oh Edgar.

EDGAR. Yes?

VIVIEN. Let's have some wine.

EDGAR. On top of Whiskey Sours?

VIVIEN. Absolutely. Let's make tonight a celebration -- of life and earth and us.

EDGAR. And your novel.

VIVIEN. Oh yes.

EDGAR. Red or white, what's your fancy?

VIVIEN. Who cares? Something grand but simple.

EDGAR. Elemental without being tawdry?

VIVIEN. Oh my, do you mind if I steal that?

EDGAR. I'd be flattered.

VIVIEN. Nurse Jane can exclaim it in a tornado! Are there tornadoes in Hawaii?

EDGAR. No. (*VIVIEN turns away disappointed.*) Tropical cyclones though.

VIVIEN. You're a Godsend!

EDGAR. They come with the trade winds -- your basic Trade Wind Littoral Climate under the Koeppen Classification.

VIVIEN. And when they hit little Hawaii -- look out!

EDGAR. Yes.

VIVIEN. Tell me more.

EDGAR. I'm not boring you?

VIVIEN. Lord, no! Go on, go on!

EDGAR. Well -- (*he beams, then professorially*) we start with moist, warm air . . .

VIVIEN. Moist warm air.

EDGAR. Yes. In a low pressure area. With easy convection. Now a drop in this pressure -- no matter how slight -- starts the moist warm air circling or spinning . . .

VIVIEN. Or gyrating madly?

EDGAR. Exactly. Nice phrase.

VIVIEN. I use it a lot.

EDGAR. But as moisture condenses in the convection column, the updraft of air speeds up, gyrating even more madly.

VIVIEN. With passionate abandon?

EDGAR. Yes! And our air pressure lowers uniformly toward the vortex of our tropical cyclone. And how do we know our air pressure is lowering uniformly?

VIVIEN. How??

EDGAR. By observing the concentric pattern of isobars!! (*in flight*) And there's so much more to discover!! The influence of jet streams, for example. Do tongues of polar air at high altitudes sweep south, pulling or dragging lower air with them as the axis turns, pressing northward?? God, but it's a motherlode of intrigue to the initiated! But to the wine. "Farewell mylove," he said. "I'm off to stalk the wine cellar." (*He picks up the drink tray.*)

VIVIEN. Hooray! Oh don't clear that. (*takes rye bottle off tray*)

EDGAR. With wine?

VIVIEN. Of course not, silly. After. (*puts it under the couch*) Let's hide it under the ceremonial altar for a surprise nightcap. Like pirates and buried treasure. (*whispers*) Shhh. X marks the spot.

EDGAR. Ahar matie. (*lifts one leg in imitation of Long John Silver*) When I get back I'll give you all the dirt on Atmospheric Optics.

VIVIEN. Aloha. (*Blows him a kiss which he catches.*)

EDGAR. Aloha. (*Blows her a kiss which she catches. He exits with the tray down the corridor.*)

VIVIEN. (*to tape*) Dr. Sterling left to find her a bottle of Maui wine, perhaps squeezed by the same brown toes that surrounded her now. "pray he be not carried out to see in the embrace of a passionately gyrating typhoon," she breathed. Chapter Three. Nurse Jane prowled the parameters of the little hut. (*at the couch*) In horror she observed the altar. Here had many a virgin been ravished in times past. The stench of animal husbandry filled her nostrils. She removed herself behind the shallow bamboo curtains, little knowing what lurked ahead.

(*She exits into the kitchen as DORIS enters from the bathroom in her caftan with a towel around her head and her undergarments in her hand. She exits humming into the bedroom, closing the door after her. VIVIEN leaps back on from the kitchen saying to the tape:*) "Unhand me you savage," she expostulated. (*She picks up her overnight bag, left D.S. of couch, and heads toward the bathroom saying:*) Her body moist with the humid clime, she retrieved her practical patent leather purse and, threading through the dusky throng in matching low-heeled sling-backs, made her way to a secluded spot to freshen up for Dr. Sterling's return. (*She closes the bathroom door behind her as DORIS enters from the bedroom humming. The phone rings.*)

DORIS. Lord forgive them. (*answers the phone*) Hello? Sorry, but if it's advice you want, my advice is to write Cloris care of the paper and wait in line with everyone else. Understood? . . . HEART FUND??? Sorry, this is Cloris, what can I do for you? . . . What about my cheque? . . . BOUNCED! But I've enough money at home to cover. First thing Monday I'll . . . But that's *too* kind . . . Why how flattering. In that case I accept . . . I'm at 16 The Bridle Path. See you soon. Bye bye. (*hangs up*) Chivas here I come. (*DORIS exits into the kitchen and closes the door after her as VIVIEN, dressed in pink baby dolls and furry slippers enters from the bathroom, tape recorder still over her shoulder. She scurries to the typewriter, types a brief note and runs giggling into the bedroom with the sheet of paper, saying into the tape:*)

VIVIEN. Man enough in the operating room, was Dr. Sterling man enough for her? She would test him. (*re-enters minus the paper*) He had hunted tigers in India and cheetahs in the Azores, but could he track down the elusive maid in white? (*She hides in the front closet as DORIS re-enters from the kitchen with her Chivas. Humming, she exits into the bedroom, reappearing immediately with the paper VIVIEN left.*)

DORIS. (*reading*) "It's hide and seek sailor. You're it"?

EDGAR. (*off*) Eh bien, ma petite cockatoo, I've la bouteille la plus superieuse!

DORIS. Edgar? (*The bottle smashes on the floor.*)

EDGAR. (*off*) Doris?