

# The Neighbors

by Katie Norton

The first apartment Troy and Lynn lived in was managed by an alcoholic former army officer, who lived in the complex with his wife and teenage daughter. He was a lush who didn't do much in the way of management. Lynn had barely noticed him before Troy moved in with her.

The upstairs neighbors were gangsters. One evening after work, Lynn found some of their mail in her mailbox. Without thinking, she ran upstairs to give it to them. As she arrived, breathless from running up the stairs, at their front door, which was open, she blurted out "I've got some of your. . ." and was greeted by the sight of a giant pile of marijuana on the dining table, with a .44 magnum (it looked like Dirty Harry's gun) sitting next to it. A middle-aged Hawaiian woman and a young man were sitting there, ". . .mail. Uh, it came in my mailbox." Lynn quickly thrust the mail at the woman and ran back downstairs.

Lynn told Troy about the incident. He said, "Don't ever, ever get on Ruby's bad side. Don't make her mad. She's somebody to keep clear of."

Wouldn't you know it, Ruby took a shine to Lynn and wanted to hang out. She would come down to Lynn's apartment to tell Lynn her life story. A sad story it was. How could you have four kids, knowing that you were being sentenced to jail for horrible crimes and that your kids would be raised in foster homes? Ruby was completely nonchalant about her childrens' situation and claimed to love them all very much. Her children had been scattered to the winds, raised by others, while she was in prison. Ruby's husband, of course, was in prison. Her sons had been in and out of prison since he was a kid, as had Ruby. Ruby cheerfully carried on, hanging out with the gang. It was all she'd known. It dawned on Lynn that there were criminal families that went back generations and were raising kids into the lifestyle.

One night when Lynn was coming in from work, the manager stopped her as she was putting her key in the door. "The police have been here. They had some very bad things to say about Troy. Either he goes or you both go. He can't stay here." Lynn couldn't imagine what the police had told him. She was in love with Troy and so she had to find a new place to live.

Finding a new place was not easy. Apartments in Hawaii are expensive and landlords can afford to be picky. While Troy was out with his street friends, Lynn went apartment hunting. Her aim was to look like a Kaamaaina, a long-time Hawaiian resident, an ultra-nerdy schoolmarmish one. She wore a gingham muumuu trimmed with eyelet ruffle and put her hair up in a bun, wore glasses instead of contacts. The ruse worked and she rented a bright airy condo in a lovely building. It had been too easy. Lynn told the condo manager, an alcoholic Australian, that a roommate would be moving in with her. Of course, he assumed Lynn's roommate would be someone like her when he approved her application.

On moving day, as Lynn was hauling in boxes, with Troy looking like a TV wrestler on acid, trailing along behind her, already causing a ruckus just walking down the hall (that was Troy, a walking ruckus), the Aussie was apoplectic. "What?! Who?! How?!" He sputtered, unable to speak. "I told you I have a roommate," Lynn said innocently. They moved in. But that place didn't last long, as the owner of the condo put it up for sale just a few months after they moved in. Lynn knew it had been too good to be true, and she had to start all over.

When Lynn and Troy moved into their newest dumpy apartment, Lynn was dismayed to encounter Ruby and her gang at the swimming pool. Ruby remembered her and wanted to hang out. Fortunately for Lynn, their hours did not mesh, Lynn having a day job downtown and Ruby being a creature of the night. So they rarely saw each other.

There was one poor little guy in the apartment complex, who made the idiotic mistake of befriending Ruby's sons. Bill was an enlisted man stationed at Hickam Air Force Base. Bill was from

some small town in upstate New York. It sounded horribly dull and cold and Lynn was sure Bill had never encountered tough Hawaiians such as Ruby's gang.

Bill worked in the PX on the base where he had access to truckloads of retail items at the loading docks and in the warehouse. His apartment was filled with the latest gadgets and consumer goods, all of which Bill had obtained on his 5-finger discount. Ruby's sons began putting in orders for him to steal certain items for them. At first Bill complied, enjoying the friendship of the gangsters. But they ratcheted up the pressure on him to bring home more stuff. Bill tried to explain to the gang that he had to be careful and he couldn't blatantly carry out loads of stuff from work. This fell on deaf ears, none of them having ever worked at a real job with supervisors lurking around, and they beat the shit out of him daily, whether or not he brought home what they wanted. Bill couldn't please the gang no matter what he did. They were playing with him as a cat plays with a mouse. Of course, Bill's supervisors found out pretty quickly that he was stealing and he was court-martialed and given a dishonorable discharge from the Air Force. Nothing at all happened to Ruby and the gang. The poor kid had to go back to his hometown in upstate New York and explain to his parents and fiancé what he had done.

This apartment complex was home to a troupe of Samoan fire dancers from a hotel hula show. These guys hated Troy on general principal. One day Troy came home and parked the car in the wrong spot and they beat him up just for the fun of it. Troy was good at staying away from them.

One day Lynn was home alone when one of the fire dancers pounded at the door, which Lynn refused to open. "Troy said for you to give me his boom box," he said through the closed door. "I don't think so," Lynn said. He began pounding on the jalousy windows. Lynn was afraid he would break them. "Give it to me," he yelled. Lynn stayed quiet, and he finally went away.

Troy became friends with a drug dealer from New York who lived in the building across the street. Robert had grown up in a NY

mafia family. He was in Hawaii to make Hawaiian weed connections for his people back in New York. Robert looked exactly like the cartoon character Fred Flintstone. His girlfriend was a young woman about Lynn's age from California named Joyce, who had a daughter in California that lived with the father. Lynn was always suspicious of women who have their children removed from their custody. Joyce also had a 2 year old daughter with Robert. The cops came and arrested Robert one day. They left Joyce and the baby alone. Robert's mother flew out from New York with bail money. Lynn was astounded to learn that people in the mafia put aside money for bail like normal people put aside money for their child's college education. Robert's mother did not even yell at him for getting arrested. She just calmly handed over the money. Joyce said it was time to clean up her act. She said she had to stop the baby from putting an entire sheet of blotter acid into her mouth. She and Robert left stuff like that laying around.

The complex was managed by a Hawaiian man and his haole wife who hated Troy. Troy was easy for any landlord or manager to hate. He was loud, he partied all day and night, he entertained the entire brigade of Waikiki's street people in the apartment while Lynn was at work. Once again, Lynn and Troy were evicted.

Lynn and Troy's next apartment was in a tiny, cheap building, a relic from old Honolulu, set among luxury condos and hotels on the Waikiki back streets near the Ala Wai Canal. Their neighbors were mostly criminals. Neighbor Dave was a hotel bellman. Bellmen do not simply carry luggage. No, no, no. They procure. They procure anything the guests want, for a price. Lynn thought of all the swanky hotel lobbies she'd innocently walked through with her parents during childhood travels, of all the uniformed bellmen in those lobbies, and now she was learning the true facts from her neighbor. Dave had a thriving drug trade going.

Dave was a salt of the earth type, pleasant, good looking. He liked to hang out and share a few beers with Troy. Dave could have had a nice woman, but he was in love with a crazy girl, Mitzy, a petite, luminous, blond angel, 18 years old, whose mother was a topless

dancer. Mitzy's mother had Mitzy dancing topless when she was 14, so you can imagine how screwed up they both were. Mitzy was a mom herself, of a darling two year old daughter. Dave was trying to do the whole happy family thing with Mitzy and her baby. Problem was that Mitzy was just not cut out for that. Mitzy would dump the kid with Dave and off she went, gone for hours.

Mitzy preferred to work as a call girl. Here's another thing Lynn learned from the neighbors. Prostitutes are after one thing and one thing only: your wallet. Don't ever leave it unguarded, or they will steal it and race out the door faster than you can say "lickety-split." This was a particular problem in Hawaii in the 1980s. The majority of the tourists who sought out prostitutes were Japanese. In Japan, nobody steals apparently and the Japanese men were sitting ducks. Mitzy's specialty was stealing wallets and dashing out of the hotel. She would grab the cash and turn the credit cards over to her pimp, who had accomplices at Liberty House Department Store. They would purchase as much expensive stuff as possible before the card was reported stolen. It was a wild race to cash in.

Mitzy and Dave fought all the time. He wanted her to stay home and mind the baby and to have dinner ready for him when he got off work. As if that was ever going to happen. The thought of her in hotel rooms with other men made Dave crazy. Mitzy didn't care. She was just using Dave. She had a coke habit and fueling it was her main objective in life. Dave was always sad.

