

Infamy

by Kristen Thomas Easley

These were the kind of days children dreamed of. A warm sun shone over Coronado, California. December weather on the island did not prevent outside play. The wind off the bay remained soft, even if chilled. Church let out early. There was time to play before the mid day meal.

Jeremy Turner had been charged with his sister Sue. He dragged her along on his adventures with the Palmer boys. Jeremy was showing off his brand new red Schwinn by racing up and down H Avenue. Brain and Doug Palmer took turns on their grandmother's relic trying to keep up. Doug and Brian never fussed about Jeremy dragging Sue along and Jeremy never made fun of the boys on a girl's bike.

The boys dismounted their bikes and sat on Mrs. Drake's lawn. A large Boxwood hedge ran between The Turners and Mrs. Drake. Mrs. Drake recently lined her front walk with red poinsettias from Tijuana. Sue thought it was a path laid for Santa Claus. Mrs. Drake liked having children in her front yard. Her three boys were all in various stages of the Navy. The youngest would graduate from Annapolis in June. Her middle excelled in his Florida flight school. The oldest had the good fortune of being stationed somewhere off Hawaii; all doing justice to the memory of their distinguished father the captain.

It was quieter than usual outside. Jeremy peered over the Boxwood for signs of life. Up the street, the Browns called their children in. Their requests to continue the game of catch were summarily denied.

"The street is empty. Let's have a race." Jeremy said.

"Jeremy? Sue?" Their father called out to them. Spotting them, Mr. Turner motioned them into the house.

"Ah, Dad! You said we could stay out until lunch."

"Well now I am telling you to come inside."

Jeremy and Sue made their goodbyes and hurried inside. Doug and Brian set to watching some ants. They heard the Turner's screen door open and shut again.

"Doug? Brian?" Mr. Turner called. The boys reviewed anything they might have done wrong in the last half hour. Mr. Turner never had time for the Palmer boys. He made comments about them being left alone while their mom worked up at the hotel concession stand. He had nothing to say about a man like Mr. Palmer who ran out on his wife with two small boys. He shook his head when he looked at the boys' grandmother's house. It was rougher around the edges since she'd died.

"Doug? Brian?" He called again. The boys stood up as straight as they could.

"Where's your mom, Boys?"

They looked to the ground.

"Is she at work?" Mr. Turner asked. This was usually an accusation.

Doug nodded. Mr. Turner looked up and down the street. He waved the boys over.

"Come on in, sons." The boys walked quickly to the Turner house. In all the times the Palmers had been in the Turner's home, never once had it been at Mr. Turner's invitation. '*Sons*' sounded nice in his powerful voice.

Mrs. Turner, momentarily interrupted from performing needless tasks, regarded the boys. "I will call the hotel and let Patricia know where they are." She said to Mr. Turner. "Go on up to Jeremy's room, boys. They're playing up there." She motioned up the stairs.

The boys went up as quickly as they could without seeming disrespectful. They made it in the room before anyone changed their minds.

Jeremy and Sue welcomed them excitedly. Children don't question a sudden change of heart when the result is something they desire. Why the Palmer boys were being allowed to play with the Turners on a Sunday afternoon when they had not even attended church was not a question they asked. Instead, Jeremy showed off

all the new toys he'd received for his recent birthday. Sue hummed to herself as she combed her doll's hair.

"Look at these!" Jeremy proudly displayed a couple of die cast Spitfires in his hands. He made them arch and dive as he performed "whooshing" sounds.

"I could defend London! At your service, Your Majesty." he exclaimed proudly in between machine gun noises.

Mrs. Tuner entered with biscuits and milk for the children. Snack was never allowed anywhere but the kitchen table.

She gasped when she regarded Jermey firing his jet, "Stop that this instant, Jeremy Parker Turner!"

The children froze at the sound of Mrs. Turner's harsh tone.

"I don't ever, *ever*, want to see you doing such a horrible thing again." She cried. She grabbed the toys from Jeremy's hands and quitted his room. Afraid the Palmers would be sent home, Jeremy and Doug settled on a safe game of jacks. Brian read the latest Superman comic book. Sue sat on the bed, making up stories to which no one listened. It was a perfect Sunday afternoon.

A knock fell on the door. Mr. Turner entered. "Boys, your mom is here."

Brian and Doug made their way slowly downstairs, praying Mr. Turner had given their mom a good report. Before the hit the bottom step, their mother grabbed them in a powerful embrace. Embarrassed by her show of affection, she straightened and offered several words of gratitude to the Turners. She instructed the boys to do the same. Mr. Turner asked after their radio and canned goods. Mrs. Palmer assured him they would be fine. Mrs. Turner offered to watch the boys if Mrs. Palmer needed to work after their school got out. Mr. Turner did not correct her. Doug and Brian barely concealed their excitement. Their mother promised a better life in California when they were set to come out here. Perhaps she wasn't wrong after all.

As they left, Mrs. Palmer turned to Mr. Turner and asked nervously, "Will they make it to us, Mr. Turner? Is that possible?"

"I don't know, Mrs. Palmer. I did not think it possible to have the US Fleet sitting on the ocean floor in Honolulu."

"God help us." Mrs. Palmer said, clutching the cross at her throat.

Mrs. Palmer thanked the Turners one last time and walked the boys across the street. Doug turned for one final look to imprint the day on his memory. He noticed Mrs. Drake looking out her large living room window. He waved vigorously at her. She seemed not to see him. Instead, she stood wringing a dish towel in her hands. Her eyes looked nervously for something in the distance.

