

Unpublished excerpt from
Mixed Girl Survival School
by Laurie Panther

Chapter One – Waiting on Jack

My red-haired mother, with her swollen ankles propped up on the king-sized bed, lamented for the hundredth time, 'this darned baby refuses to be born!', while just two miles away, John F. Kennedy (or Jack, as she referred to him) approached a heavily draped podium. She was two and a half weeks past her due date and desperately wanted to be in those stands, but no.

The Campanile bells rang in the distance as she twisted the knob on the transistor radio carrying his speech. Through the intermittent crackle, she heard the famous New England cadence of the man boldly leading the country forward. She envisioned his thick brown hair, boyish, but also ruggedly handsome, tugged by the swirling gusts inside the CAL Berkeley Football Stadium.

Would Jack announce today he'd do something to make her family legal in all states? Even though they were safe here (excepting the knock on the door from good-Catholic lady down the street who accused her of sneaking her *Nigger-husband* into the neighborhood), Sam, my Daddy, could be arrested if he went back to Arkansas to see family. He'd left a little earlier that morning for work with a perfunctory peck on her cheek, planning his route to avoid the crowds and traffic.

She'd been so grateful when he'd adopted her red-headed son Larry, who didn't have a real father. Their adopted son, Joji (the result of a lonely Negro G.I. and Japanese girl), was down the street at Cragmont school with Larry. They were in the 6th and 4th grade. Tow-headed little Lee, her first biracial (natural) son, played at the kindergarten. Her daughter (the result of a lonely Negro G.I and Korean girl) was arriving by boat soon to join her Rainbow family...a girl at last!

My mother laid back. She gave up making out each word of the speech and let her imagination fill-out the scene; a few clouds rose up from behind the nose-bleed seats,

intermittently blocking the warm sunlight illuminating Jack and the fashionable crowd. When the wind blew towards the hills, the shaggier students perched in the trees outside the walls and caught his amplified voice. Jack quipped about his first visit to this very same stadium as a post-grad for one of the famous football games between CAL and Stanford. Then quickly becoming serious, solemnly listed all the famous people that had graduated from CAL Berkeley and the grand contributions they'd made to past and current governments. The crowd erupted in applause and admiration as he continued on that spring day about the state of the world, about negotiations with Russia on space travel, how knowledge equals freedom and how Berkeley modeled that in such an exemplary manner. Then, finally, he recounted a fable in which an impatient young girl lamented the slow growth of a strong, beautiful and sturdy tree, and how the wise elder exclaimed:

“Then let's not wait! Let's plant the seed today...” The President assuring the packed stadium and all those listening that we were planting the seeds of peace today, then turned humbly aside to the roar of cheers.

My foot pressed into my mother's liver interrupting her thoughts until she turned onto her side. In her mind's eye she saw Jack ducking into the long black Lincoln Continental after the speech ended, an aide informing the president about the amazing family she'd created, about the seeds she was sowing, and how Jack then commanded his entourage to make a brief detour on the way to the airport, to arrive at 1030 Cragmont Avenue. How he'd stride purposefully up past the young ivy and juniper landscaping onto her new front deck and tell the secret service agent to step aside as he himself knocked firmly on the door.

I tried to stretch and shift inside the tight warm cocoon, my head wedging harder against my mother's bladder. She rolled over and hefted her body to a sitting position, the first step in yet another trip to the bathroom. And yes, I did emerge a few days after the President withdrew from town. I couldn't stay in forever after all. Grabbing a little extra time was good for my brain.