

EXCERPT FROM

## Aloha Betrayed

A MURDER, SHE WROTE MYSTERY

*Jessica Fletcher is on the Maui College campus to conduct a class on community involvement in criminal investigations to a group of police recruits. Her co-teacher is former detective and Hawaiian police legend Mike Kane. When the body of a young botany instructor is found at the bottom of a cliff, Jessica and Mike join forces to look into whether her terrible death was an accident—or murder. Here is an excerpt from Chapter Four.*

Mike's car was a dusty blue SUV with a dent in the front fender on the passenger side and with the distinct aroma of fried fish inside. A plastic bag hanging from a radio knob held balled up wax paper from a variety of fast food places. Two empty cans of Coke occupied the cup holders in the console.

"It looks like you do a lot of eating on the run," I said, hoping it didn't sound like criticism.

"Yeah," he said, as I buckled up. "Excuse the mess. My wife won't go near this car. She says it stinks. I cleaned it up for you. Not too bad, now, huh?"

"As a method of transportation, it's perfect," I said, pressing a button to roll down the window.

"You don't need air conditioning?" he asked as the car started with a groan of protest and rumbled to life.

"I'm fine without it."

"Where you from? Florida?"

“No,” I said, laughing. “I’m from Maine, all the way up the east coast, the last state before Canada.”

“Never been there. Actually the only place I been to on the mainland is California.”

“So you’re a Hawaiian, born and bred?”

“Relatively speaking,” he said. “My father was half Hawaiian. Like most of us on the island I’m pretty much a mutt. Got some Portuguese, Filipino, Samoan, French, Korean—I think there’s even some Irish in my blood.”

“My mother was from Ireland,” I said. “I knew we had something in common.”

Mike gave out with a belly laugh. “Then top ‘o the morning to you, Cousin Jessica,” he said.

“That’s not a bad Irish accent you have there, Cousin Mike.”

A police car passed us on the road and the driver honked.

Mike gave him a Hawaiian wave, a fist with thumb and pinkie fingers extended. He was silent a moment, then said, “After class tomorrow you should come to our family picnic.”

“Where is that?”

“We do a barbecue up in Iao Valley. Good food. You’ll like my wife. She’s a lot like you. Her name is Pualani. She calls herself Lani. Are you free?”

“I am, and I would be honored to come. Can I bring anything?”

“Just yourself,” he said, grinning. “It’ll save me a lot of time explaining to my wife who this woman is that I’ve been seen driving around with.”

From Kahului, where the college was located, we took Mokulele Highway across the island to Pi’ilani, a four lane road that paralleled the southwest coast and avoided the congestion of the main street through Kihei, a neighborhood of smaller condominiums, homes, and hotels where many of the resort employees lived.

Mike parked his car in a shopping center and we made our way between two luxury hotels to reach the Wailea Coastal Walk, a mile-and-a-half trail that ran behind waterfront resorts and private condominium developments. I'd explored a small portion of it the evening before. It was midday and hot. I followed Mike's example and put on a hat, grateful that I'd thrown a pair of tennis shoes in my shoulder bag so I could change out of the dress pumps I'd worn to teach the class. The paved part of the walk radiated back the heat and the air shimmered above it as we walked past a crescent shaped beach and down toward the field where the luau had been held.

A few runners, undaunted by the high temperature, coasted by us, but most of the pedestrians must have opted to wait for the cooler evening or early morning hours to enjoy the spectacular view. The luau field was empty, the tables and chairs gone, the stage dismantled and stored away until the next performance. We ambled around the curves of the coast, Mike taking his time and examining the vegetation along the path.

"So Miss Kapule was at the luau last night," he said, pausing to peer over a bush near a rocky outcropping.

"I can't confirm that," I replied, "but one of the women at my table said that she'd seen her talking with someone."

He moved on. "Who would that woman be?"

"Her name is Grace Latimer," I said, glancing over the same bush that seemed to interest Mike. "What are you looking for?"

"Just admiring. Tell me about Miss Latimer."

"About twenty-five, blond, blue eyes. Pretty, but a little restrained. She doesn't smile much, but perhaps it was the company. She's a graduate student working with Professor Abbott Luzon on her master's project. The professor and his wife were at the luau as well."

"In what context did Mala's name come up?"

"I mentioned that I was looking for her. Mala had told me that one of her cousins was a dancer and that I might see her there."

"But you didn't."

"No. We never found each other. At least, I didn't find *her*. I have no idea if she was looking for me as well."

"Was there any reason why she would have avoided you?"

"None that I can think of, although she had made a point of saying we might not run across each other because of the crowd."

"How many people were there? Any idea?"

"I would guess several hundred, but the luau organizers should be able to give you a more precise number. As I understand it, everyone needed a ticket or reservation to get in."

He grunted. "You didn't make plans to meet in a particular area?"

I shook my head. "When I last saw her, she was going into an appointment in the science building and wasn't even sure if she would make it to the luau. I simply suggested that we look for each other. That was the extent of our plans, if you can call it that."

"But this Grace Latimer said she saw Mala at the luau? Did she speak with her?"

"I asked the same question. The answer is no. But that's certainly understandable; at the time, Grace didn't even know I was hoping to see Mala."

"Who was Mala talking to?"

"You'll have to ask Grace. All she said was that Mala was engaged in a serious conversation and looked as if she didn't want to be interrupted."

Mike thought about that a moment, then said, "You should tell this to the police."

I smiled. "I thought I was."

He looked down at his feet and shook his head slowly. "Sorry for the interrogation. Once a cop, always a cop," he said with a bemused expression. "Hard to break old habits."

"So I hear."

"I'll introduce you to a buddy on the force."

"Why would he even be interested if they believe Mala's death was an accident?"

"Just to cover all the bases."

"Do you think it was an accident?"

"I already told you. I'm reserving judgment."

"Just checking to see if you're still telling the same story," I said.

"You sure *you're* not a cop?"

"Maybe in another life, but not in this one."

"Yeah? You believe in that reincarnation stuff?"

"I'm reserving judgment," I said.

Mike laughed. "Touché," he said. "I don't think there's a word for that in Hawaiian."