

MURDER ON MOKULUA DRIVE
BY JEANNE BURROWS-JOHNSON

CHAPTER 7

...the midnight murderer... invades the sacred hour of silent rest and leaves, unseen...
Samuel Johnson [1709 - 1784]

The party had been a great success with friends coming from across O`ahu, the neighboring islands and even the mainland. Not only had we celebrated Keoni's sixtieth birthday in grand style, but we had established ourselves as a sociable couple concerned with maintaining the integrity of the Lanikai neighborhood of windward O`ahu. Therefore, it was gratifying to hear several guests comment on the balance we had struck between preserving the design aesthetic of my Auntie Carrie's bungalow and the conveniences of modern living.

Although there was no strike of lightning to announce her presence, I was sure my darling auntie had dropped in that night to see if my new love and I were doing justice to her home and neighbors. Throughout the evening we heard stories about her varied holiday hijinks. Several people chimed in to tell me about one significant night in the neighborhood.

Carrie had loved Halloween especially, when she could dress outrageously and offer unique treats to her neighbors' children and grandchildren. One year, when she had volunteered in experiments with dolphins at Sea Life Park, she transformed the classic bobbing for apples into a bobbing for baby dolphins event. Unfortunately, the carving of the apples had removed the fruit's peel, so the caramel topping slid off into the tub of water that had warmed during the preceding daylight hours.

With the night sky occluding a clear view of the tub, no one realized there was a problem until the first round of kids sat up from their attempts to capture the wee dolphins with caramel smeared all over their faces and worse yet, in their hair. To say their mothers were less than pleased was the understatement of the evening. This was at a time when neighbor Henri was still living, so he and Miriam had helped remove the tub from center stage. By the time they were finished, Miriam was the last fatality—with her Gypsy costume covered in a reddish film. After that event, Carrie took an oath to offer only store-bought Halloween treats in the future.

Another story related to a home just up the road. By this point in the evening, most everyone knew I was a writer who gathered stories like other people collect antique dolls. As with many historical tales of Hawai`i, this one included complexities of characters. Evidently the house had been owned for decades by relatives of royalist Robert Wilcox, who had tried to preserve the Kingdom of Hawai`i and its last monarch, Queen Lili`uokalani. The first of the Wilcox owners was one of Robert Wilcox's nieces, who frequently hosted her sister, Niau Johanna Wilcox, the first woman registered to vote in the Territory of Hawai`i. This was ironic since with the demise of the Kingdom and annexation by the U.S. in 1898 (the year of Johanna's birth), Hawaiian women had actually *lost* the franchise they had enjoyed in the Hawaiian Kingdom.

Evidently, Johanna Wilcox's voter registration was planned as a media event to inspire Island women to participate in the political process. Escorted by governmental powerhouses of the day, Johanna registered to vote shortly after midnight on August 30, 1920. I already knew several stories about the Wilcox family. This one reminded me of my grandmother who had given up the right to vote when she emigrated from Denmark at the start of World War I.

Shaking my head, I thought about how casual young women are today about the precious rights their forbears fought so hard to win for them.

For a moment, I lost track of the conversations around me. Thinking of Denmark, I remembered the recent vision I had interpreted as a young Jewish girl's escape from Denmark to Sweden in World War II. I still could not see any connection between the vision and my grandmother...or any other person in my life. Ah, well, the significance of each of my visions is eventually clarified.

Turning back to the people standing in the dining room, I was pleased to see Keoni visiting with Marty Soli. I had been delighted when he accepted my invitation. He was a medical examiner with the City and County of Honolulu and had been very supportive during the investigation of Ariel's death.

One of the highlights of the evening was meeting several of Keoni's buddies from his years in law enforcement. In addition to John Perry, a couple of Keoni's former partners had retired on O`ahu and he saw them on a fairly regular basis.

Unfortunately, I only met one of their significant others. Jerry Latimer's wife had died a couple of years earlier. Lenny Kojima's second wife had departed on a vacation with her daughter. Only Stan Carrington's girlfriend Tamiko Sato was in attendance. She was a delightful woman he met recently at the annual Sapporo Ice Festival, on the Japanese island of Hokkaido. Until she retires, they will be enjoying all the romance and trauma of a long-distance courtship. At this point, their romantic adventure was in its infancy and their mutual adoration was a pleasure to see.

One thing I've found especially endearing about my own love, is his desire to be part of every aspect of my activities—including the clean-up from an event like this. Once the last of our guests had wandered into the beauty of the tropical night, we began clearing the remains of our first event in Auntie Carrie's remodeled home. I carried a small waste can around to catch the odds and ends, while Keoni juggled a tray on which he stacked the last of the glasses and dishes. We alternated between companionable silence and sharing our observations of what we had learned about the neighborhood and Carrie.

Although Keoni only met her once, he is as dedicated to my auntie's home as I am. Always on the lookout for sources of unique materials to enhance White Sands Cottage, he was excited to tell me about an upcoming opportunity for further home improvement.

"You won't believe what Makoa Pane said tonight. Not only is he a contractor, but he's actually a master craftsman, working in exotic woods. As such, he gets invited to harvest fallen trees on government land. He said he was impressed with the work I've been doing around here and the next time he gets a call, he's going to invite me to join him. That means we'll probably get enough wood to embellish the porch posts and the dining room's cabinets."

"That's great dear. I've told you I think your work is wonderful."

Another popular topic that night had been home security. Larry Smith and Keoni had spent several minutes discussing electronic security systems. The General said he had experienced several incidents with their dog or grandchildren setting off motion sensors.

"I told him he probably had the lights focused too low to the ground. If you position the sensor too low, a stray cat walking by can set them off," Keoni observed.

As we compared conversations about area restaurants, I contemplated taking classes at a nearby gourmet culinary school. The master chef who owned it had worked at world class resorts and on a cruise line about which I had written. I might never be a true chef, but I longed to learn how to make some of his appetizers. Given my track record in the gastronomic department, I

decided to keep the idea under wraps until I had some tangible results to offer.

“Did you catch the funny exchange between Samantha and Makoa?” I asked.

“I don’t think I saw those two together at all,” replied Keoni.

“Well, the conversation started when I was introducing them and Samantha heard me pronounce his last name, “pah-neh.” She giggled slightly and told him that when she had stood in for Miriam at the door earlier. She had scanned the guest list to see who was yet to arrive. When she saw his last name spelled, p-a-n-e, she had assumed it was the English name “Pane.” We all laughed and talked about other Hawaiian names that have led to innumerable misunderstandings.”

Another topic in our summary of the evening involved points of environmental and historical interest for numerous day trips we might take. Over the years, I have stopped at the Pali Lookout several times, but had not realized the scope of the history and archeological remains at Kawai Nui Marsh below its jagged peaks. And despite the many articles I had read about Queen Lili`uokalani, I was surprised to learn of her links to the area.

I was familiar with aspects of the last Queen’s final years, since researching possible connections between Keoni’s family home in Kaimukī and a school founded in her honor. In fact, that project was part of what had shifted my relationship with Keoni from one of friendly acquaintanceship to romance.

After everything I learned at the party, I was especially pleased with my decision to move to this splendid corner of O`ahu. As I contemplated the many adventures awaiting us, I only regretted that Keoni and I would not be skinny dipping in the swimming pond I was told lay at the end of a hiking trail along one of the marsh’s streams. But with it being on a public path, I did not think my by-the-book ex-cop sweetheart would agree to that form of recreation any time soon.

Finally, with essential cleanup completed, Keoni and I collapsed on the porch swing on the back *lānai*.

“Hey, honey, I’ve got one last story from tonight. Did you hear about your Aunt’s attempt at scuba diving? It was in the eighties.”

“That’s a new one for me,” I answered.

“I guess she was getting ready to take a vacation in Papua, New Guinea, where she heard that deep-sea diving is preferable to merely snorkeling. She took a diving course and then, having purchased all the equipment the salesman could unload on her, she decided to practice in what we might call her own back yard.”

I laughed, trying to picture my never-slim auntie crammed into neoprene or whatever they used for scuba suits back then.

“No joke. Well, it sounds like a joke. But she had her diving suit on, and was carrying a bag with a tank of air and her fins and mask. She’d almost made it to the ocean when one of her flip flops caught on some roots in the beach access path, and she took a tumble.

“Luckily for her, Joanne and Izzy came along. They helped her up and carried her equipment. But when Carrie tried to dive into the water, she found the fins weren’t suited to the rocky bottom at this end of the beach. She ended up taking another nose dive—no pun intended. While she was struggling, her mask came loose, dislodging her oxygen tank. Sitting up, she looked as helpless as a little kid who hasn’t even learned to float.”

Shaking my head, I inquired. “After that auspicious beginning, how did the diving in New Guinea go?”

“Well, according to Miriam, the mainland friends who were to join in her South Seas

adventure had their vacation time cancelled and Carrie ended up with some very expensive scuba gear in the attic.”

“That’s got to be one of the few categories of junk I didn’t find when I inherited the cottage.”

“Well, according to Miriam, that junk eventually proved useful. Several years after her adventure, Carrie was visited by a couple who were actually going to New Guinea. They were on their way to where the woman’s father had died in World War II, while serving on a U.S. Navy ship that sank in the area. Carrie offered them the equipment, and they had it checked out by a dive shop. I guess the couple had a great time diving on the old shipwrecks that have provided homes to new coral reefs.”

I chuckled and said, “That’s a great ending to one of Auntie Carrie’s less-than-successful adventures. Like most events in her life, I can tell there was laughter and joy in it for *someone*, if not her.”

Settling into a corner of the swing, I extended my legs to Keoni’s lap. Recognizing my plea for ministrations for my aching extremities, he set down his glass of sun tea and applied his strong fingers gently to my feet.

“Now that’s what I call the ideal ending to a perfect evening,” I purred.

“What do you mean, ‘the end of the evening?’ This is just the warm-up to our private celebration of my birthday,” countered Keoni, with a leer.

I shook my head in response, and on that note, we decided it was time to go inside if I wanted a full body massage. First I took my nightly stroll around the outside of the house, calling for Miss Una to come in for her nightly portion of kitty treats. Once she was happily munching some dried *`ahi*, I joined Keoni in his methodical closing of the house. Despite our new security system, he insists on shutting all the doors and windows, except for those in the master suite.

As I took off my dress, I glanced out the French doors and noticed the cloud swept moon had moved far across the night sky. Pulling my hair back with a barrette, I moved into the master *en suite* bath where I found Keoni replacing our regular bath towels with the fluffy bath sheets he had bought after installing a new steam shower.

“Hi, beautiful. Ready for another adventure in the finer points of cleanliness?”

Later, I fell asleep snuggled in the arms of a very happy birthday boy. Unfortunately my peaceful sleep did not last through the night.

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When you think of Hawaiian beaches at night, the images that come to mind often showcase bright moonlight, undulating ocean waves and swaying palm trees. The images I was viewing were presented in sepia tones—alerting me that this was no simple dream. Evidently I was having another of my visions that usually present uncertainty, and too often lately, death.

I knew where I was because I could see Nā Mokulua, the two islets that dot the waters out in Lanikai Bay. The first scene of this vision did involve sand, water, and moonlight. But the palm trees along this part of O’ahu’s shoreline are at a minimum and there was no breeze to stir the few I saw.

As I watch the idyllic scene from a vantage point in Miriam’s front yard, I catch a movement along the walkway across the street leading from the beach. Suddenly, my vantage point shifts and I am hovering somewhere above the waters of the bay. I watch as a tall, erect man in a black diving suit and booties walks up from the beach toward Mokulua Road with the precise footsteps of someone who knows where he is going. As he strides up the center of the walled pathway, he looks neither to the left nor the right. Reaching the roadway, he pauses

briefly. At the approach of a speeding vehicle, he steps back into the shadows. As a Jeep passes, a blast of rap music with the cadence of Jamaica punctuates the otherwise silent night.

After a moment, the man returns to the edge of the empty road. He then crosses the street and moves up a few houses. Instantly, my position changes to the gate between my backyard and Miriam's. Looking to the left, I watch the man in black approach "My Ladies' Safe Haven," as Miriam refers to her home. He pauses at the arbor framing the gate on the front walkway and releases the latch to move under trailing vines of bougainvillea. He reaches into a pouch I have not noticed at his waist. With cloud cover passing across the moon, I cannot see the details with clarity. From the movement of his hands, I know he is putting on gloves.

As he rounds the left side of the house, I surmise he is going to the electrical panel that covers the wiring of the old security system that Keoni is in the process of replacing. Within a couple of moments, the man reappears at the front of the house. After glancing around, he walks decisively to the front door.

A moment of dark void passes and I find that I am standing in Miriam's kitchen looking down the main hallway. I watch as the front door opens silently and the man in the diving suit enters the house. Previously his face has been wholly in shadow. I now realize his head is covered with a scuba hood that reveals only his eyes, nose, and mouth. All that I see is that he is Caucasian and that his eyes are dark. There is no visible jewelry, birthmark, or tattoo by which I might identify him.

Unlike previous visions when I have been isolated from the unfolding scenes, I am now in the center of the action. I want to get up from my bed and scream for help. But there is nothing I can do. I am paralyzed with fear, as though the man can see me standing there watching him.

Bypassing what I know is a coat closet, he goes directly to the second door on the left. After placing an ear against it, he carefully turns the knob and pushes forward into a bedroom. Reaching again into his pouch, he brings out what looks like a bolo tie.

Without any conscious effort, I suddenly stand behind him at the open doorway. I watch as the man inches past a single bed in a seamless motion. He then halts at the back of a wingback chair positioned in front of a large mullioned window. Following his downward glance, I can see the long, blond hair of a woman's head resting in the crook between the back and arm of the chair.

As I try to force air into my lungs, I feel my heart pounding rapidly. The pace of the action in front of my eyes changes and begins to unfold in slow motion. As the black garbed figure reaches forward, a bright moonbeam pierces a diamond-shaped window pane. I stare in disbelief at what the man holds between his second and third fingers—two small sticks attached to the ends of something dark and smooth—like the black wire you find in an old piano.

Abruptly the scene reverts to normal time. Crossing his hands, the man drops the gleaming loop over the woman's head and then, with a jerk of the dowels, the man's task is completed. With little struggle, I see the body slump forward while the wire flips backward with a flick of the man's wrist. After placing the lethal device into a clear plastic bag, he puts it in his pouch and pulls out a second plastic bag.

Remaining frozen, I view the eerie ballet's last act. As the man yanks a few strands of hair from the body doubled over below him, the chair shifts slightly and dislodges a cane leaning against the wall to the left of the chair. When he has dropped the long pale hairs into the plastic bag, he zips it closed and replaces it in the pouch. Next he bends over to pick up the cane, and repositions it against the wall. Standing back, he pauses to analyze the deathly vignette before pivoting rapidly on the ball of his foot and turning toward me.

Inhaling sharply, I stand as still as I can. Without a second of hesitation, the man walks through me. I then watch as he moves back along the short distance to the front door. Opening it, the nocturnal diver turns to close it with the same quiet precision with which he has accomplished everything else.

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Panting from the horror of what I had seen and the exertion of trying to remain invisible, I awoke sweating and shaking with fear. I looked to my right side, but I was alone in the new king-sized bed. I did not know where Keoni was. If he had been present, I am sure I would have disturbed him as I flailed about tossing off the covers. As often happens when I have a vision, I felt disoriented. I have seldom observed a crime in progress, and the enactment of the murder I had just seen left me questioning the source of each component of my vision.

After swinging my feet over the edge of the bed, I sat upright for a few minutes to collect myself. Once my breathing eased, I began to analyze what I had just viewed. My first thought was that although the experience had been in the usual tones of my visions, I had never been so involved in the enactment of one. Then there was the fact that many of the elements of what I had seen were related, at least in part, to recent events or conversations.

Consider the man in the scuba suit. Just a couple of hours earlier, Keoni and I had been laughing over my Auntie Carrie's adventure with scuba diving. And, with the expansion of Keoni's business, residential security systems have been a frequent topic of conversation lately. As to the woman in the chair, I knew that with her broken leg, Miriam could not maneuver up and down the stairs of her home. In fact, she had mentioned she was having trouble sleeping, and often sat up through the night in her favorite chair.

In short, there were seeds of reality in the nightmare I had just watched...except for the fact that the scenes had been in sepia tones. Finally, there was the issue of the piano wire. I could not begin to think of any source from either the party or my life in general that would explain that aspect of the scenario.

As my pulse slowed, the solid features of my home displaced the lingering images of the murder sequence. Perhaps I had merely had a bad dream. Shoving my feet into my house slippers, I rose to use the bathroom. With a splash of water on my face, I felt somewhat renewed. I then went to the kitchen. After drinking a glass of cold water, I began to feel my normal self.

Deciding I had merely experienced a nightmare, I set out to find Keoni and Miss Una. Keoni is sensitive to my being a light and easily disturbed sleeper. On evenings that he's not sleepy, he frequently stretches out with a book or magazine on the new leather sectional in the living room, or the hammock he's strung up on the *lānai*. But after our long evening, I did not want to disturb *him* if he had fallen asleep, thinking he had allowed me to have a peaceful night's rest.

Wandering through the house, I continued to feel agitated. I tidied a few things in preparation for the Sunday brunch we had scheduled with Nathan and the O'Haras. Then hearing Keoni's soft snoring, I entered the living room. Sitting down quietly on the chaise lounge extension of the sofa, I picked up his ever-present glass of tea and took a deep sip. Sensing my presence, he stirred and turned around to lay his head in my lap. Without awakening fully, he hugged me and immediately fell back into a deep sleep. I stroked his hair and gradually my uneasiness subsided. Within a few minutes, I joined him in the Land of Nod.

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