

Murder at the Luau

Chapter Twelve: Rising Tide



Kitty sat in the fluorescent light of the morgue and wondered why, in every medical drama or murder mystery, the morgue always had flickering lights and dripping water. Not the ones she'd seen. Always spotlessly clean, brighter than day. Glaring in their brightness, actually.

If only the truth were as illuminated.

She lay, looking up at the bulbs. No flickering. Steady, bright, cold light beaming down on her face and body from where the fixtures were attached to the plaster ceiling.

Plaster seemed an odd choice in a humid place like Hawaii, Kitty thought to herself. Her mind was wandering.

Thought to herself? She wondered about that phrase. How does one think to someone else? Isn't that just...talking? How does one ever really give one's thoughts to another, even through words or deeds? What one does and says must, by definition, always be only a reflection or a representation of the thought, a pale shadow of the idea that can't ever

really be brought into the open.

Of course I'm thinking to myself, Kitty thought. Who else would I think to?

The cold of the steel tray beneath her was seeping through her clothing. She let it happen. The last two days had been draining, and the sun had beaten her down as surely as the constant flow of information. She had felt overwhelmed, as if the world was moving too quickly around her. The cold was comforting, it was a place to rest in the maelstrom.

She'd walked into the morgue and found it empty. She'd wanted a chance to speak to Noelani, but the coroner had been nowhere to be found. She needed to unpack her ideas a little bit, think at another person, just for a while, until she understood herself what it was she was uncovering.

There was something in her brain, almost fully formed, but the dots wouldn't connect. So when she had walked into the morgue and seen the wall of stainless steel doors of the cadaver storage arranged symmetrically across the wall, the repetition had been so soothing. It hadn't seemed odd at all to open one, pull out the unoccupied steel tray, and have a little lie down, just to take a load off.

Turned out, this was a truly meditative place to have a deep think. To connect some dots. To doze off.

The door to the morgue banged open and

Kitty whipped her head around, startled awake from her brief nap. She'd hardly rested at all since Angela's body had been discovered, and the cool of the metal combined with the silence of the room had erased the intrusion of the bright lights and made it easy to drift off. When the door slammed into the wall as it banged open, she'd opened her eyes like a shot, however, back on full alert.

Kitty's sleep-confused brain saw only a body in scrubs wrestling something into the room through the door. She froze, unsure of what to do. Her natural curiosity made her want to wait and see who it was and what they were pulling behind them before revealing her presence.

It seemed, from her odd angle lying down and behind, to be a man. Muscular, strong legs, but hunched over to wheel..a cart? Into the room.

A grunt as he hit his shoulder on the door-jamb. His arms were less developed than his legs, but he was tall. And blonde.

"Jonathan?" Kitty asked, propping herself up on one elbow.

The man in scrubs let out a tremendous yelp, and Kitty was sure she could see twelve inches of light under his soft-soled shoes when he jumped. There was a loud clatter as the gurney he'd been pulling slammed into the doorframe, rattling the tools arrayed across its surface.

Kitty sprang all the way up, apologetic. "Oh,

no, I'm sorry, I'm sorry! I didn't mean to startle you!"

She could tell from his reaction that he was operating on auto-pilot, and genuinely felt badly for scaring him. He must have been really on edge to react so strongly.

"Dude!" he said, far too loudly. "What the hell?"

It was an angry shout. If Kitty thought his jump was a big reaction, then she was overwhelmed with the look on Jonathan's face now. He was flushed red, sweating slightly, and very, very angry.

"Whoa, whoa!" Kitty said. She held her hands out in front of her, a gesture of supplication.

Jonathan froze, looked at her hard with his lips pressed tightly together, and took two long, slow, deep breaths through his nose. The color in his face slowly receded, and the muscles along his jawline tensed visibly before relaxing as he released his breath.

"I'm sorry...Dr. Campbell. You jumped out at me there, dude," he said, his voice tight.

"I didn't mean to startle you," Kitty repeated.

"No, no," he replied, shaking his head. "I'm just, this whole thing has me totally axed."

"You must be exhausted," Kitty said, looking at him closely.

He nodded vigorously. "Exactly."

“This has all been a little nuts,” Kitty said quietly. She watched him closely.

Jonathan said nothing. His hand rested on the edge of the gurney, and he slowly moved to begin maneuvering it into the morgue. Kitty watched as he wheeled it across the room to the wall where the desk sat, and smoothly lined it up with the cinder block, locking the wheels with his toes.

He turned around and rested his hips against the gurney, folding his arms across his chest and facing Kitty, eyes downcast toward the floor.

“You must be taking this hard,” Kitty said. “You said as much earlier.”

Jonathan said nothing.

“Axed,” Kitty said.

Jonathan didn’t react.

“Axed,” Kitty repeated. “That’s what you said earlier.”

Jonathan looked up at her, his expression confused.

“Yeah?” he asked.

“You surf?” Kitty said.

Jonathan’s expression clouded, his eyes became more secretive. He shrugged non-committally.

“Is that what you did, when you first got to the island?” she asked.

Jonathan shrugged again.

“It’s just, I was thinking in here,” she ges-

tered toward the steel tray where she’d been napping.

Jonathan looked over at the tray, then back at Kitty. A little of his natural affability came back, and he raised his eyebrows. His lip twitched. “You were napping in here?”

Kitty smiled a bit, shook her head at herself. “It’s been a long couple of days.”

Jonathan’s half-smile faded away again, and he nodded silently.

“I was thinking, while I was lying down,” Kitty picked up the thought, “about when we were all three here together. You and me and Noelani.”

Jonathan’s eyebrows squeezed together. “Yeah?”

“I was at that desk, over there,” Kitty gestured to the desk next to the gurney. “And I needed supplies. So I dug through the drawers.”

Jonathan’s face relaxed, but he wasn’t happy. Only the confusion left him.

His jaw tensed again.

“There’s a trophy in there. Would you like to see it?” she asked.

Jonathan sat silently for a moment, then shook his head no.

“Because it’s yours?” she asked.

He nodded.

“You’re a surf champion, Jonathan.”

He nodded again.

“You’re not proud of that?”

He shrugged one shoulder. His eyes were still on the floor.

“That trophy is at the bottom of a desk drawer. In the morgue. In the basement. You don’t seem proud of it.”

He took a shaky breath in, then looked up at Kitty. His eyes shined with tears.

“Angela got me into surfing,” he said.

“Yeah?” Kitty asked. But she sensed there was more.

“When she first met me, she thought it would be a good way for me to deal with, like, anxiety or stuff, get out on the water, learn to feel the clean surf, tell it apart from the chop.”

“She thought it was a good therapy tool, almost?”

He nodded. “She was right, it’s awesome.”

“And you’re pretty good at it.”

He nodded again. “I loved it. Loved it.”

His voice was soft and wistful.

“Not anymore?” she asked.

He shook his head. “Not anymore,” he repeated.

“Because Angela died?” she asked, wondering just when the trophy had gone in the drawer.

He covered his face with his hand.

“Before that,” he told her, his voice muffled.

“Was it when you found out...that she was your mother?”

Jonathan’s head snapped up and he stared at Kitty, transfixed as though she were a ghost.

“How...”

“She wouldn’t leave the island,” Kitty explained. Her voice was gentle. “Marcus Kelekolio was given the chance of a lifetime, and she wouldn’t let him take it. But by every account, she was the kindest, most generous woman Maui ever knew. Not cruel, not someone who would cheat her husband out of his dream. So, why? Why wouldn’t she leave?”

Jonathan’s tears rolled down his face, and he didn’t stop them.

“It had to be something big, I figured?” Kitty went on. “And when I thought about how she cared for you... Even for Angela Kelekolio, her attention to you seemed to go above and beyond. She’s not from Maui. She came here, and she stayed. Maybe because she couldn’t go back home again?”

Jonathan nodded and wiped his face before he spoke.

“I didn’t know, you have to understand,” he began. “I thought she was just some nice lady, and everyone loved her, so I figured, sure, right?”

Kitty nodded, watching him. Believing him.

“And she got me into surfing, which was

bomb, it was what I needed when I didn't want to try anymore, when I thought maybe it'd just be easier to go back and do what I'd always done. She care about me."

His voice was emphatic on the last words.

"And then something happened? You learned the truth?"

"I was at their house," he said quietly.

"The Kelekolios' house," Kitty said.

He nodded. "And I was waiting for her, she was in the kitchen, I don't know. Getting some mango or something? And I'm in the living room, and she's got this piano. Nobody on Maui has a piano, the houses are really small, who has the room? Whatever."

Kitty waited as he gathered his thoughts.

"But I took lessons?" he said, looking at her for understanding.

"On the mainland?"

"Yeah, before I came here, I had to take lessons, my mom made me."

He gulped a breath in. "My adopted mom, I mean."

"So you played that day?" Kitty wondered where this was going.

"I sat down, I played, whatever. But there were these photos, on the piano, like in a movie, all framed and fancy. And she was in them."

"And you cared for her, so you looked at the

photos, while you played," Kitty filled in.

He nodded again. "And then I see..."

His voice broke.

"I see...that in one of the photos, she's in my hometown. How could she be in my hometown? Right? Why wouldn't she ever say anything?"

He was searching Kitty's face for an answer she didn't have.

"Did Angela know you were looking at the photos?"

"She came in, she...was smiling. She heard the music...but then she saw me looking at that picture. And I looked at her and I knew something was wrong.

"I thought she'd lied to me? Chased me to Hawaii or something? But then she starts talking, she starts telling me all this stuff, about how she had a baby when she was young and she was ashamed because her grandmother wouldn't speak to her anymore, so she gave him away.

"Gave me away."

"And that's why she came to Maui."

He let out a shuddering breath. "And when I got here, she said she just knew? How could she know me, she never even wanted me!"

His face was red and sweaty again, rage was coursing through his body.

Kitty looked at his arms, which weren't as

strong as his surfer's legs, but were plenty long and strong enough to hurt someone when he was angry.

"She said she watched me before she reached out," he said in a voice dripping with disgust. "And that she was afraid to tell me but she was glad I knew now... I was so angry. I was so angry, Dr. Campbell."

"I'll bet," she said.

"Are you making fun of me?" he asked with venom in his tone.

Kitty shook her head. "No, I'm sympathizing, Jonathan. I can understand how you must have felt betrayed. She was kind to you, like a mother, but she never told you the truth. You found out on your own. You must have been so angry. So hurt."

"I was," he said, sobbing. "And now..."

"And now she's dead," Kitty finished for him.

He looked back at Kitty again. "You don't think I did that?"

Kitty asked, "Did you, Jonathan? No one would blame you."

"You're disgusting. How could you..."

Kitty backed away as he pushed past her and aggressively yanked the door back on its hinges, causing it to bang against the jamb again.

He looked back dramatically before storming out, long enough to catch Kitty's eye.

"I loved her," he said, his voice breaking.

And he was gone.

"People kill the ones they love every day,"

Kitty said aloud to the empty room.

Once again, she was alone with her thoughts.