

DYING for a DAIQUIRI

A Laurel McKay Mystery

By

Cindy Sample

Other Books in the Laurel McKay series

Dying for a Date

Dying for a Dance

CHAPTER ONE

“This mango daiquiri is to die for.” I popped a juicy red maraschino cherry into my mouth, lifted my tropical drink and toasted the bride.

Liz’s hazel eyes sparkled brighter than the diamond-studded wedding band placed on her left hand three hours earlier. She tapped her creamy pina colada, encased in a coconut shell, against my fruity concoction.

“Here’s to a marriage made in heaven.” I glanced at the fiery sun hovering above the white-tipped waves, ready for its nightly dip into the ocean. “Or in Hawaii, which is practically the same thing.”

“You can’t top this romantic scenery, Laurel,” she replied, “plus there are…”

“No dead bodies,” we said in unison.

Liz and I both laughed. I was grateful my British friend’s Valentine’s Day ceremony had gone off without a hitch, since her original wedding plans found me waltzing with a killer and narrowly escaping a frigid death in the depths of Lake Tahoe.

I breathed a sigh of relief. My best friend was officially Mrs. Brian Daley. All it took was flying 2,468 miles from Sacramento to the Big Island of Hawaii to make it happen.

Liz smoothed the skirt of her strapless white gown and lifted a perfectly waxed blonde eyebrow. “Maybe you and Tom will be the next to tie the knot.”

I stared at the horizon wondering how likely it was that Detective Tom Hunter and I would walk down the aisle any time soon. “I don’t see any weddings in my future. Tom and I spent more time together when I was a murder suspect than we do now that we’re—” I set my glass on the table to make air quotes for emphasis, —“‘dating.’ At the rate our relationship is progressing, we’ll need a church with extra-wide aisles to accommodate our matching set of his-and-her walkers.”

“Such a pity he cancelled his trip.”

“According to Tom, his latest homicide case takes precedence over a Hawaiian vacation.” I shrugged and sipped my drink. “It seems the only way to woo my cop is with a corpse.”

“Nice image, Laurel.” Liz wrinkled her nose. “So maybe Tom won’t turn out to be your Mr. Right. Don’t forget I dated over fifty guys before I found the perfect man.”

My best friend wasn’t kidding. While I’d embarked on a sensible banking career after college, Liz had traveled to exotic locales, seduced by the glamour of foreign countries. Not to

mention foreign men, of all shapes, sizes and nationalities. Her dating memoir should be entitled *Fifty Shades of Romance*.

My brief, almost deadly experience with a matchmaking agency would send most women to a nunnery.

Liz shifted her gaze to her groom who'd replaced his tuxedo with a red-flowered shirt and khaki cargo shorts. Brian had almost completed the metamorphosis from El Dorado County Assistant District Attorney to tourist. Someone just needed to tell him to dump the loafers he'd paired with black socks.

Brian's height made the stocky man chatting next to him look even shorter.

"Your brother and Brian seem to be getting along." Liz blew a kiss at her handsome, fashion-challenged husband. Her new husband and my brother stood at the bar taking turns doing shots, both acting a couple of decades younger than their early forties.

"It's nice to see Dave enjoying himself," I said. "He's looked so stressed the last two days. I swear his hairline's receded another inch since we arrived." I watched my bearded, balding older brother toss back another shot of an alcoholic concoction whose color bore a strong resemblance to Ty-D-Bol.

Yuck.

I peeked at my watch, wondering where my sister-in-law was. "Dave better not get drunk. Regan won't be happy."

"I still can't believe Regan missed our wedding ceremony," Liz said. "I've only met her the one time, but considering we held the reception at Daiquiri Dave's, you'd think she would make it a priority."

My gaze scanned the interior of the restaurant my brother and his wife had opened three years ago. They'd purchased a decrepit local Tiki bar, situated on massive lava rock formations twenty feet above the ocean, and transformed it into one of Kailua-Kona's most popular dining spots. Hard work and an oceanfront setting, combined with twenty varieties of colorful fruit-flavored daiquiris, had paid off.

"Dave mentioned Regan's been putting in long hours at her accounting job, but I don't understand why working at a coffee plantation would be so demanding." I folded and unfolded the tiny lilac paper umbrella that came with my tropical drink. "This is Hawaii, after all. Headquarters for hanging loose."

The sound of chattering female voices drew my attention. "Talk about hanging loose. I think the entertainment just arrived."

The eyes of every man in the place veered to the five bronzed beauties moving through the restaurant. Their fluid grace was either hereditary or acquired through years of hula lessons. The women ranged in size from a five-foot tall gal whose dark hair flowed past her knees, to a lithe dancer whose coconut-shell bra struggled to contain her mammary exuberance, to a woman on

the far side of middle age and middle girth. A wreath of woven green ti leaves perched on each dancer's head.

The female leading the procession, who seemed to be drawing the majority of male attention, was Keiki, a server at the restaurant. Keiki performed in their Saturday night shows and on special occasions such as tonight's reception. Her facial features were exotic perfection as was her Hawaiian Barbie body.

The last dancer to climb on the stage also wore a matching sarong and coconut bra, although his shells dangled limply above his skinny waist. What was my friend and Hangtown Bank co-worker, Stan Winters, doing among all of these women?

Liz burst out laughing at my surprise in seeing our gay friend's insertion in the troupe. "You know Stan. He's never met a stage he didn't want to perform on. At least he's not wearing his Zorro outfit and dancing the Argentine tango."

Brian and Dave joined us at our large table, which overlooked the crashing surf far below. The bride welcomed her groom with a lusty kiss. My brother sat down and directed his gaze to the dancers on the small stage. As the owner of the restaurant, Dave obviously wanted to ensure every part of Liz's reception was perfect, even the entertainment.

My mother appeared behind me, her smile as wide as the Pacific Ocean that normally separated Dave from the rest of the family. Ten years ago, Dave had moved from the foothills east of Sacramento where we all lived, to Hawaii. Our reunions were infrequent and always far too short.

My mother, the former Barbara Bingham had recently wed Robert Bradford, a retired detective. Despite my initial misgivings about my widowed mother getting involved with the man who'd been determined to prove I was killing off my dates, true love won out. I now couldn't be happier they'd found one another. It helped that my teenage daughter, Jenna, and seven-year-old son, Ben, adored their new grandfather. He'd agreed to babysit them while my mother and I attended Liz and Brian's island wedding.

"I've been looking forward to this show," Mother said. "Maybe I can pick up a few tips and perform a private hula for Robert when I return home." She giggled and attempted to roll her hips, proving once again that the two of us are related and that Hawaiian hip rolling is *not* in our DNA.

I loved that my tall, elegant sixty-two-year-old mother wasn't as uptight as she used to be, but remarks like that made me want to stick my fingers in my ears.

Keiki grasped the microphone. Her sultry voice sounded as seductive as her body looked. She introduced the dancers and congratulated the bride and groom. "Tonight we will perform several dances for you. By special request," she turned and winked at Stan, "our first number is the 'Hawaiian Wedding Song.'" Stan bowed and his wreath slipped onto the stage. He plopped it back on his head where it hung over his left ear.

Three musicians in Hawaiian shirts and khakis strummed their guitars and ukuleles as the dancers began to move. The five women moved as one to the sensuous rhythm. The youngest musician couldn't keep his eyes off Keiki. Although all the women were graceful, she shone like the star she clearly was.

Stan moved like no other Polynesian dancer, sort of a cross between Derek Hough from *Dancing with the Stars*, and MC Hammer, the father of hip-hop. Despite Stan's wild gyrations, when the song ended, I teared up all over again. Just like I'd done earlier at the ceremony.

When a huge round of applause erupted, I worried Stan might plan on becoming a permanent fixture with the troupe, but Dave strode on to the stage, thanked him, and gently shoved him in the direction of the stairs. Stan nimbly hopped down and dragged a bamboo-backed chair over to our table, squeezing in between Liz and me.

One of the servers stopped to take our drink order. "Would you like another daiquiri?" she asked. I nodded and she turned to Stan.

"I'm thinking of going with a Tropical Itch," he said.

I stared at him. "Is that a drink or a disease?"

"Ha, ha. Fruit juice, rum, vodka, and a backscratcher. You can't beat that combination," Stan replied. "Although maybe I should hold off in case they want me to perform an encore."

"In that case, drink up."

"Very funny. That was a blast and the dancers were terrific to me. I appreciate Dave giving me Keiki's phone number so we could practice before the reception. She said she would teach me more dances before we head home. Can't you see me throwing flaming swords in the air?"

Yes, I could. Although I visualized the swords bouncing off Stan's head and searing his remaining hair into a crispy fringe. Stan shifted his chair closer to mine and whispered something.

"I can't hear you," I said. "Speak up." The dancers were performing again and the sounds of "A Little Grass Shack" overpowered his low baritone. He moved so close I could practically taste the wasabi on his breath, which made me crave more of the spicy sushi rolls Dave's chef had prepared for the wedding feast.

"Keiki and her sister, Walea, were arguing before the show," Stan said. "I had a question about the routine and didn't mean to eavesdrop, but I overheard Walea accuse Keiki of carrying on with a married man. Keiki seems like a sweet girl so it's hard to believe."

"That's surprising, but it's none of our business how she handles her personal life."

"I'm afraid Keiki's private life is about to become personal for you." Stan's gray eyes communicated his concern.

"Huh?"

"Keiki is having an affair with your brother."