



tug-
of-war

QUICKREADS

JANET LORIMER



“**H**ey, I like try da kine.”

With a sigh, Malia MacLeod silently counted to ten. Then she turned to face the student who was tapping her shoulder. It was Puna, the rascal, the kid who seemed to enjoy making each and every day more difficult for her.

“Puna,” Malia said calmly, “ask again—in proper English this time.”

The boy’s grin widened. “I did say it in English. *Pidgin English!*” Puna howled with laughter.

Malia started to count to ten again, but then she gave up. She’d just have to accept that most people in Hawaii spoke the dialect.

Pidgin English was as much a part of Hawaii's culture as eating *poi* or dancing *hula*.

“Okay,” Malia said with a sigh, “what do you mean by *da kine*?”

“You know,” Puna said with a grin, “*the kind*. It means anything you want it to mean.” Then he pointed at the new computer and said, “I like try that!” Malia nodded. As she turned to help another student, the bell rang. For a few minutes there was confusion in the classroom as students hurried out the door. When it was quiet, Malia dropped into her chair, gazing at the empty room. She loved teaching, but at the end of each day, she felt burned out.

“Of course, I'm still new here,” she told herself as she straightened her desk. “It isn't unusual that the students are still testing me. I wonder if they'll ever accept me.”

Then a shadow fell across the desk, and Malia looked up. Her cousin, Alani, smiled down at her. “I thought I'd drop by and see how you're doing,” he said.

Malia smiled back. “You mean, to see if I’m surviving?” she asked. “I don’t know, Alani. The jury is still out.”

Alani chuckled. “I also came to tell you about a family party this Saturday. It’s a baby *lu’au*.”

Malia smiled and shook her head in bewilderment. “A *what?*”

“In the old days, most babies died before they were a year old,” Alani explained. “So when a baby survived that first year, the family celebrated with a baby *lu’au*. We still celebrate the first birthday in the same way.”

Malia nodded. “It sounds like fun. Who’s the lucky child?”

“Your cousin Noelani’s baby. You haven’t met them yet, but you will.” Then he told Malia what to bring. “I’ll pick you up about noon,” he added.

“Hold on,” Malia said. “I didn’t say that I could—”

“Tutu said you must come,” Alani went on. “She said I’m to bring you.”

Malia felt her stomach tighten. Since

she'd arrived in Hawaii two months ago, her grandmother had made many demands. Malia was beginning to resent it. But before she could say another word, Alani headed out the door. "See you on Saturday!" he called out as he disappeared down the hallway.

Malia took a deep breath and started counting to ten. "I sure seem to do a lot of counting these days," she muttered crossly. While she erased the boards, she wondered again if coming to Hawaii had been such a good idea.



Malia had been born in the Hawaiian Islands. Her mother was Hawaiian, but her father was *haole*—Caucasian. When Malia was three years old, her parents moved to the mainland. Malia had been raised in Los Angeles.

In California, she had lots of cousins on her father's side of the family. But she'd always yearned to go back to Hawaii for a long visit. She wanted to know her Hawaiian

family, too. But there'd never been enough money to pay for such a trip. Still, Malia had promised herself that someday she would return to her homeland.

After graduating from college, Malia started teaching in Los Angeles. Then one day she'd learned that Hawaii was recruiting teachers from the mainland. She could hardly believe her luck. Here was her chance to live *and* work in Hawaii for a year! That would give her plenty of time to get to know her Hawaiian relatives. She could hardly wait to turn in her application.

Malia was thrilled when she was selected to teach in a rural high school on Oahu's Leeward Coast. But when she arrived, the place was much different than she'd imagined. The Leeward Coast—on the western side of the island—was much dryer than the eastern side. Malia was amused to see cactus growing on the hills.

She rented a small apartment a few blocks from the beach. The area was so beautiful! For a while Malia felt she was living in a dream.

Coconut palms and mango trees grew in her backyard. Beautiful sunsets, colorful rainbows, and amazingly bright flowers grew everywhere.

The only problem seemed to be her pushy family. Her Hawaiian relatives—especially Tutu, her grandmother—expected a lot of her. They counted on Malia to be at every family gathering. And they expected her to become active in Hawaiian political issues. Yet at the same time, Malia noticed that they seemed rather reserved around her.

Tutu had explained why. “Malia, sometimes you act so *haole*,” the old woman said with a smile.

“I *am haole*,” Malia replied. “Half *haole*. But what’s wrong with that?”

“Nothing,” the old woman said with a sad shake of her head. “Only that there’s so much you need to learn about the *kanaka maoli*—the Hawaiian people. *Auwe!* I can’t believe that your mother didn’t teach you more about this!” The old woman looked disappointed.

Malia felt a stab of annoyance. “My

parents raised me to survive in Los Angeles,” she said curtly. “I’m sorry, Grand—I mean, Tutu. I’m a California girl, no matter where I was born.”

Tutu’s eyes widened in shock, and Malia realized she’d hurt the old woman. She was sorry about that—but she knew she had to be firm. She didn’t plan to spend the rest of her life in Hawaii. She’d signed on for just one year!

“Malia,” Tutu said softly, taking her granddaughter’s hand in hers. “You are *also* Hawaiian. No matter where you live, that will never change. Hawaii is more than just your birthplace. It’s part of your heritage. You know about your *haole* roots, don’t you?”

Malia shook her head. “Not really. Dad never thought that was important.”

Tutu rolled her eyes. “Child! How can you decide where you’re going if you don’t know where you’re from?”

Malia shrugged and looked away.

That night a familiar bad dream came back to haunt her. As a little girl, she’d had

the dream many times. When Malia had asked her mother what it meant, Mama said that dreams were nonsense. They meant nothing.

In the dream, Malia always found herself in a crowd of people. They were dressed strangely, especially the women. One woman in particular seemed to stand out. Malia could tell that the people had gathered for some purpose, but she didn't understand it. When she awoke, Malia always had tears on her cheeks, although she had no idea why.

In time, the dream seemed to go away, and Malia forgot all about it. But it returned after she met her Hawaiian grandmother. Now, however, she recognized the strange costumes the women in her dream were wearing. The flowing gowns were Hawaiian *mu'umu'u*—the long, loose dresses introduced by the haole missionaries in the early 1800s. But these were not modern *mu'umu'u*. Somehow, Malia knew that she was dreaming about a time long before her birth.



On Saturday, Alani picked up Malia in his battered old truck. If he could tell that she was still annoyed, he didn't show it. "You're going to have a great time," he said, as he turned off the highway onto a dirt road.

Malia just grunted. Clouds of red dust swirled up from the tires as the truck bounced over the ruts. At last they pulled into a clearing. Alani parked in front of a small wooden house. Malia spotted her grandmother on the front porch. Tutu reached out and greeted her with a warm hug.

The afternoon began well enough. Alani showed Malia the *imu*—a pit in which food was cooked. Then Malia joined the other family members as Noelani opened gifts for her one-year-old. Later, sitting at one of the long picnic tables in the yard, Malia ate until she thought her stomach would burst. Everything was delicious, even the pickled *limu*—seaweed.