

# the house on the hill



**QUICKREADS**

JANICE GREENE



Susan Perry, a young real estate agent, turned onto a wide street lined with newly planted trees. “This new subdivision has some very fine homes in your price range, Mr. Johnson,” she said. “I think you’ll like what you see.”

“Please, just call me Devin,” her passenger said shyly.

“Certainly. Then Devin it is. And I’m Susan,” she said.

Devin tried to hide it, but he was uncomfortable. He hated being around people he didn’t know well. Only solitude suited him—until he’d met his wife Sarita. For the first time in his life, he no longer wanted

to be alone. He wished his young bride was with him now, but she hadn't been feeling well. They had both agreed that Devin should go ahead and at least get things rolling with the real estate agent. He hadn't intended to actually look at any houses today—just meet with the agent. But Susan had convinced him to go out with her just to “get the lay of the land.”

Now Susan pulled up in front of a two-story house—so new that it hadn't even been painted.

“This is a four-bedroom, two-and-a-half-bath model,” she said. “There's lots of room for your future family—and yard space for pets, if you want.”

Devin wasn't listening. He was staring at the big old house on the hilltop overlooking the town. The rambling Victorian stood alone—no other house was close by.

“*That* house—” Devin said, pointing toward the hilltop. “I'd like to take a look at that one.”

Susan blinked in surprise. “But—I don't

think it's available," she said.

"It won't hurt to look. I'd like to drive up there, please," Devin said.

"Why don't you just check out this new place while we're here?" Susan suggested. But her new client was already climbing back in the car.

When they reached the house on the hill, they saw a young man and woman loading a chair into a rental truck. Devin was out of the car before Susan turned off the engine. After introducing himself to Ed and Clara Baines, he asked if the house was theirs.

"No. It was my sister's," the woman said. Her face was grim.

"Is it possibly for sale?" Devin asked.

"Oh, goodness," said the woman. "We haven't even thought—"

"Yes it is," the man interrupted, putting his hand on the woman's arm. "May I look inside?" Devin responded.

The man seemed hesitant. "We—uh—haven't cleaned up yet," he said.

The woman's lips trembled. "My sister

and her children were *murdered* here,” she said in a shaky voice.

Devin didn’t react at all to this startling news. He turned away from the woman’s tight face and crossed the porch. When he stepped through the doorway, he felt something like a hot wind rush through him. To stay on his feet, he had to grab hold of the doorknob.

“Are you all right?” Susan asked.

But the strange feeling had passed, and Devin didn’t answer. He eagerly hurried down the dim hallway and started walking from room to room, as if he knew the place. In the living room, the others in the group stood waiting for him by the big bay window. Susan was trying not to stare at the great dark stains on the carpet.

Finally, Devin rushed up to them. “I’ll take it!” he said, his voice tight with excitement.

“Well, if you’re really serious,” Mr. Baines said, “I guess we could have the place ready in a month or two.”

Devin felt a stab of anger, as if a white-hot wire was poking his neck. “No!” he shouted. “I want it *now!*”

“Why don’t we all sit down in the kitchen?” Susan quickly suggested in a shaky voice. “What’s *with* this guy?” she mumbled to herself.

The deal was made in just a few minutes. Devin wrote the largest check he’d ever written. “A deposit,” he said, “toward the down payment.” He pushed it across the table, where Ed and Clara Baines sat stiffly. He saw that they were afraid of him. For some reason, it made him smile.



**W**hen they got back to Susan’s office, Devin felt exhausted, and his ring finger ached. Actually, the finger was only a stump. He’d lost most of it when he was a baby. He was never told how, and he’d never cared. Not until he’d wanted to marry Sarita and wear a ring.

As Devin drove home, he began to feel

groggy. To stay awake, he tuned the radio to a lively station. He was utterly amazed at what had happened. He had bought a house! And all he could remember about it now was that it had steep stairs and a basement. Why had he done this without talking to Sarita? What would she say?



It was late when he got to the apartment. The lights were on in the bedroom. Sarita was in bed, asleep, her slim brown arms spread out across the comforter. He smiled as he saw the photo album across her lap. She'd been arranging pictures from their honeymoon in Hawaii.

He leaned over and nuzzled her cheek. "Go away," she said sleepily, but her voice was soft and warm.

He tickled the back of her neck. She turned and gently swatted his hand.

"Baby, I—I bought a house," he said.

She was wide awake now. "You *what?*" She sat up suddenly, grabbing the photo

album so it wouldn't get knocked off the bed. "You bought a house that I haven't even *seen*?"

"I don't know what came over me," Devin said. "It seemed so right—almost like I'd lived there before. It felt like I was coming home. I just *had* to do it."

"That's pretty strange," she said.

"I know," he said quietly. Devin had been raised in a less-than-loving foster home. He'd never known a real family.

"First day out with the real estate agent and you *bought* a house!" Sarita shook her head. "Devin Tyrone Johnson, I don't believe it! This kind of behavior is very unlike you," she said.

"That's a fact," he agreed. He took her hands. "Look, let's go see it tomorrow. If you don't like it, we'll cancel the deal. I never meant to shut you out of this."

She smiled. "You're the best, baby," she said, putting her arms around him. "I'm probably gonna love it. We'll live there for years and years until we get old and fat.



And our kids will grow up there and bring all *their* babies to come visit us. Does it have a big yard?"

"I don't remember," he said.

Sarita's eyes twinkled. "Devin, I don't know about you!" she laughed.



The next day, Sarita wore a new, lemon-yellow dress. Devin told her four times how beautiful she looked.

As they stepped through the door of the house on the hill, he felt the same hot, rushing sensation as before. It made him weak in the legs and short of breath. Sarita didn't seem to notice. "It's pretty dark in here," she said, peering down the hallway.

Mr. and Mrs. Baines weren't there. Susan Perry made them coffee and said she'd be back in an hour. "I think that realtor is avoiding you," said Sarita, sitting down at the kitchen table.

"Could be she doesn't like the idea of an African-American family sitting up here in

this big house,” said Devin.

“I don’t think that’s what’s going on,” said Sarita. “I get the feeling she’s *afraid* of you—you, of all people!”

Sarita slowly twirled her coffee mug. “Devin—you know I love you?” she said.

He nodded, suddenly wary.


“I have to tell you, baby—I don’t like this place,” she said. “All this dark wood, and there’s a weird kind of smell—”

Again he felt the hot wire poking his neck. “This is our *home!*” he roared.

“Devin!” she said. “Am I wrong, or are we a *couple*? Which means that you *and* I are going to make this decision together! And I don’t appreciate—”

Suddenly Devin slammed his fist down on the table. Sarita pulled back, knocking over her coffee. An ugly brown stain appeared on the front of her new yellow dress. She stared at Devin, confused and frightened.

Devin turned away so she wouldn’t see the satisfaction on his face.



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.



**M**alia 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.