

# **Hulas and Homicide**

**By Jack Pachuta**

## **Act 1**

*The action takes place in the Coconut Lounge of the Kikiwai Queen Hotel. Mort Barks is playing music on a piano/keyboard and singing popular tunes. He stands up and speaks to the audience.*

MORT

Thank you all of my fans – I know many of you are here in the audience tonight. I’ve been entertaining people here in the Coconut Lounge for a long time and my melodious tones have become a fixture at the Kikiwai Queen. Some of you have asked me why I was replaced as the emcee of the hula contest. *(Hesitates.)* I’m not sure I can answer that question. But, like the true performer that I am, I’ll respond to your many requests by singing the song that I wrote and sang every year as the new hula champion was being crowned.

*He sits down at the keyboard, flexes his fingers, clears his throat and begins to sing to the melody of “There she is, Miss America.”*

“There she is. She’s our hula gal. There she is. What’s the deal?”

*Chief Lawrence Law approaches from the back of the room and stands in front of Mort at the foot of the stage. The chief climbs the steps to the stage as he speaks.*

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

### CHIEF

Pack up your vocal cords, piano man. We have important police business to attend to. *(Mort gives quizzical look to the Chief and stops playing. Every so often as the Chief speaks, Mort plays a few melodramatic notes on the keyboard, reminiscent of an old-time radio drama. Chief moves to center of stage, turns to the audience and speaks.)* Sorry for the interruption, ladies and gentlemen, but I need your assistance. As you read in today's edition of *The Grass Skirt*, Winnie Waheli is dead. Her body was found this morning under a coconut palm tree on the beach outside of this hotel. My department has been diligently investigating what happened and we have determined that *(Mort plays a few notes, Chief stares at him, and turns back to the audience.)* Winnie Waheli was murdered. *(Suspects gasp and Mort plays the first few notes of Dragnet theme, then smiles at the Chief who looks irritated.)* I require your assistance in solving the case.

### MINNIE

*(Minnie Molawi rushes to the stage and angrily confronts the Chief.)* What are you saying, Chief? You think one of us is a killer? It was an accident. Coconuts fall out of trees all the time. Winnie was just in the wrong place at the right time – I mean wrong time. I've been her chief assistant judge for many years and I think that a gust of wind might have loosened the coconut – you know how strong the wind can be off of the ocean - or maybe the coconut was just ripe enough to fall on its own. Do you really think that someone was hiding in a palm tree just waiting for Winnie to walk under it? If anything, she probably yelled at the tree – she yelled at just about everything - and the tree decided to react. It wouldn't be the first time. *(Chuckles.)*

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

MITCH

*(Mitch Awave approaches stage.)* Hey, man, what's up? I heard something was going on in here at the Coconut Lounge, my favorite spot for a pina colada. You wanna know about climbing coconut palms? Just ask an expert like me. I've been hanging around this beach for 35 years. The waves are the best ones on the islands. When I got here, Kikiwai was a great place to catch a wave and hang ten. Now, it's packed with tourists. They get in the way.

CHIEF

You're somewhat of a legend on Kikiwai Beach, Mitch Awave. Everyone knows you're still looking for the perfect wave.

MITCH

Yeah, lawman, this used to be a paradise, but now look at it. It's that crazy hula contest that's the problem. This beach has more people than aphids on an orchid. If the contest would go away, maybe we could get back to nature – the way it should be.

CHIEF

Aren't you a little old to still be surfing?

MITCH

Age is not something I think about. I don't wear a watch or own a cell phone. When I need a little cash, someone hires me for a few days. When I need a little rest, what

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

better place to grab a few Zs than right on the beach? When I need a little music, Mort sings to me. It's a rough life, but someone has to live it, man.

### CHIEF

*(Turns to Minnie.)* Minnie Molawi, I've heard rumors that you suspected the fix was in for the hula contest. Hasn't the same dancer won for the last five years? You must have thought something was wrong.

### MINNIE

It did seem strange that Winnie wouldn't let anyone see how she calculated the results. We all turned in our score sheets to her. She tabulated them and announced the winner. *(Hesitates slightly.)* OK, OK, I did think that something wasn't quite right – but Winnie never was very good at math. I had my own way of dealing with that. Besides, Leia Lailani, is a great dancer and deserves all the money she's made as a hula champion.

*Hula music plays as Leia dances in doing hula moves. As she approaches the stage, Pono Pahu rushes in and begins drumming with his hands on anything available that makes a sound. After 10 seconds, he screams in pain. The Music stops, Leia stops dancing and everyone stares at Pono.*

### PONO

*(Stares at his fingers as if in great pain, then shakes his hands in the air and looks at his hands.)* These fingers can still pound out the best hula beat in the islands, even on days when my arthritis is acting up. It would be even better if I still had my old

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

drums. *(To audience.)* They were made of coconut shells and had just the right sound for Hawaiian music. Ask anyone on the islands who the best drummer is and you'll get the same answer – Pono Pahu. That's me.

LEIA

*(Approaches Pono and rubs his fingers.)* You'll always be the best - no matter what Winnie thought. I would never have won all of those contests without you. I couldn't believe that she'd fire you just before the contest started. My victory last night was dedicated to you and to all the years we've spent together.

HANNA

*(Hanna Hobart approaches stage and talks to Leia. She is wearing athletic gear and a baseball cap with a "B" on it. She speaks with a Boston accent to Leia.)* Victory, schmictory. Everyone knows my performance was the best one, Leia Lailani. I know Minnie feels that way, too. But what happened? You won again. Something smells worse than the fish market in Boston. You might be a better dancer on the beach, but on a stage, I'm the best. I hate dancing on sand. It affects my style. I can't get any traction in it.

LEIA

*(Speaks to Hanna.)* You may be the amateur champion, Hanna Hobart, but you're not a pro like me. Besides you're not even Hawaiian. Everyone knows that native islanders make the best hula dancers. Why don't you just catch that plane back to Boston?

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

HANNA

It leaves in the morning. And, the team is glad to have me back. The Baked Beans would have won more softball games if I hadn't been sidetracked by all of this hula stuff. You have to admit, though - my pitching gyrations are perfect hula moves. *(She gyrates her body, over-emphasizing the moves required to throw a softball with an underhanded motion, ending with hula moves.)* You try throwing a fastball. That's a contest you won't win – even with your favorite drummer making a loud ruckus.

MORT

*(Speaks to Pono.)* You weren't the only one to get canned last night, Pono. After all of those years as the star attraction of the contest, Winnie decided she needed some new blood. The Kaulana brothers are a flash in the pan, two seashells in the surf that will get washed out to sea with the high tide. I'm so angry that *(Plays a few chords.)* I feel a little song coming on. *(Mort plays a musical riff and begins to vocalize as Flora comes in carrying a vase of flowers.)*

FLORA

*(Puts the flowers on/near the keyboard.)* Mort, sweetie, don't be so sad. I brought these here just for you. I was planning on using them to decorate the stage at the hula contest, but Winnie was livid because she wanted orchids and I couldn't find enough of them. We have so many beautiful flowers here in the islands that I had to find other ones to use – but that wasn't good enough. Didn't she hear about the problems we florists have been having? I tried to figure out a way to get extra orchids, but she still wasn't happy.

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

MORT

*(Mort smells the flowers, sneezes loudly, wipes his nose, then smiles at Flora.)* Flora, honey, this is for you. *(Plays musical riff and sings while looking into her eyes. Flora looks at him and swoons.)* “You light up my life . . .”

FLORA

*(Gazes lovingly at Mort.)* You have such talent. I’m so lucky.

NORM

*(Norm enters sipping a pina colada in a coconut shell. He interrupts Mort’s song.)* Relax, Mort. Have a pina colada. We’re famous for our pina coladas here at the Kikiwai Queen. I usually take one to my room with me for a nightcap here at the hotel. *(Climbs to stage and speaks to audience as if doing a TV commercial.)* What’s better after a busy day than looking out at the beach and the ocean while sipping a relaxing tropical drink? Take it from me, Norm Room, when the lights are turned out, the sound of the waves on the beach fill the night air, and the Kikiwai Queen is magical - an absolutely breathtaking experience.

MORT

You’re right, Norm, I need to relax more. You and I have been together for so many years that – well, I feel a little song coming on. *(Plays musical riff.)*

CHIEF

*(Chief stops Mort from playing.)* Enough of this. We have a murder to solve. I’m convinced that one of you is a killer. *(Mort plays several theatrical chords.)*

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

NORM

A homicide at my hotel? How terrible. How disgusting. *(Tone changes from disbelief to calculating when he thinks of the free publicity the hotel will receive.)* How much coverage do you think it will get in the press, Chief? Oh, be sure to spell my name right. And write down that the Kikiwai Queen will be the home of the hula contest for many more years to come.

CHIEF

You must know that the Kikiwai Empress will be opening soon. What makes you think the contest won't move? My team has been in there checking out the security system and everything in that place beats what you have here.

NORM

Call it a hunch, Chief – and tradition. The contest has always been held at the Kikiwai Queen. It was my idea to hold the contest in the first place. I hired Winnie to run it after she hurt her back doing one of her famous hula moves. She was the best dancer on the islands until that happened.

CHIEF

So you're the one in charge of the contest.

NORM

I thought I was, but somehow Winnie just took over. She brought in so much money that I backed off and let her run things her way.



## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

CHIEF

We've heard that Winnie was thinking about moving the contest to the Kikiwai Empress. You had to have known about that.

NORM

*(Stammers and tries to answer. His tone and body language make it apparent that he is lying.)* I didn't, but that wouldn't matter now, would it? Winnie is no longer in the picture and it looks like Minnie will be taking over as the new Hula Honcho.

MINNIE

To me loyalty and honesty are important. Norm has always treated me fairly. I certainly wouldn't move the contest.

MORT

*(Speaks to Minnie.)* And think of my fans, Minnie. They want me back as emcee.

MINNIE

I've always loved the way you sing, "There she is. She's our hula gal."

MORT

This is just for you, Minnie. *(Mort starts to play the piano and sing the song, but the Chief interrupts him. Mort looks frustrated because every time he starts to sing, he's interrupted.)*

CHIEF

It looks like several people here have strong motives for murder.

## **Hulas and Homicide by Jack Pachuta**

---

FLORA

Surely, you can't believe that Mort would do it. Why, he's so kind and gentle. (*Swoons in Mort's direction.*) Did I mention that he's got talent and that I'm lucky to have him?

LEIA

What could my motive be, Chief? I'm a winner. It would be losers like Hanna Hobart who'd have wanted to kill Winnie.

HANNA

Who are you calling a loser? (*Speaks to audience.*) I never wanted to be a hula dancer, but I was recruited into it. Somebody who knows more about hula dancing than I do told me things needed to change around here. (*Speaks to Chief.*) After a while, I got into it. You know, the moves are similar to my softball moves, and I love competition. But - give me a choice between a hula championship and a softball trophy, and I'll take the softball trophy every time.

PONO

How much do you know about Winnie's past anyway, Chief? I've been around hula dancers all my life on these islands. I know from personal experience that Winnie would do anything to get her way – and make herself rich in the process. I'll bet everyone in this room had a motive for killing Winnie. (*Looks around at audience and points to several people.*)