

## Chapter One

Deputy Sheriff Sawyer Lane shoved out of his sheriff's department SUV and headed for his place.

Thank God this day was over. Most of the time, being a deputy sheriff on Maui suited him. Usually, he dealt with petty theft and lost tourists. *Easy*. There was no one shooting at him. No friends dying.

He stopped at the base of the steps to his front porch and rubbed the back of his stiff neck. Today was the exception to that rule. There had been a bad car accident on the Kahekili Highway. Two carloads of tourists had hit each other. An eight-year-old boy had been trapped in the twisted metal. Sawyer had held the boy's hand, trying to keep him calm, while the firefighters had cut him free.

Hell, he hoped the kid made it. The boy had been airlifted to the Maui Medical Center, and his prognosis had been good. Sawyer would call into the center in the morning and see how Tyler was doing.

His boots clunked on the wooden steps, and he pulled out his keys and unlocked the front door. He wanted a beer, and a few moments of solitude. He slowed on his walk to the kitchen, and stared out the window above the sink. Looking at the ocean never failed to soothe him. Just looking at the water evened out the ragged edges inside.

Sawyer knew that moving to Hawaii after he'd left the military had saved his life.

The memories tugged at him—both good and bad. Sometimes he missed his team, missed the importance of the work. Most of the time, he didn't. Especially at night when he couldn't sleep.

He couldn't remember the last time he'd had a full night's sleep.

He pulled open the fridge and grabbed a bottle of Black Pearl made right there on Maui by the Maui Brewing Company. He popped the top and had just lifted the bottle to his lips when his cellphone rang.

"Dammit." Setting the bottle down, he pulled his phone out and saw Benny's name on the screen. "Lane."

"Bro, you know it's me, why do you always answer with your surname?"

"It's how I answer the phone." Despite the bro, Benny was Sawyer's cousin. Somehow, despite being born and raised in Montana, Benny had fallen in love with the ocean. He had long, sun-bleached hair, and was a champion windsurfer. He'd come to Paia, on Maui's north shore, as it was the windsurfing capital of Hawaii. He'd then fallen in love with a local Hawaiian woman.

"You home?" Benny asked.

"Yeah, I just stepped inside."

"Sawyer, man, I need a favor."

Sawyer sighed. His hope of a beer and solitude evaporating. "Go on."

"Uncle Duke called and said the smoke alarm is going off at Archer's place."

Sawyer's gaze moved to the window again. Down closer to the water he saw the roof of Archer Kent's holiday home. It was perched right on the water's edge and fancy as hell. It was nothing like Sawyer's simple, traditional, wooden cottage.

Archer only used the place a couple of times a year and was rarely there. He and Benny were

friends from their early windsurfing days. Archer had gone on to become a successful stuntman, and lived in LA.

Sawyer frowned. "I don't see any smoke."

"Can you check it out? Uncle Duke was walking past and heard the noise. I'd drive over, but Kalani just got in the shower. We're going to her parents' place for dinner. Some of her aunts and uncles are over from the Big Island."

Sawyer knew exactly how big Benny's wife's family was. They'd welcomed Benny with open arms, then when his cousin had convinced Sawyer to come and stay, they'd welcomed him, too.

Benny was on the other side of town. If he came over to check, he'd be late for his family dinner. "It's fine. I'll go over and take a look."

"Bro, I owe you. Thanks."

"Say hi to Kalani, and I'll see you later."

Relaxing with his Black Pearl would have to wait.

He didn't bother driving, and instead, took the winding path through the trees. Flowers were blooming somewhere, scenting the air. This path led down to the beach, and he often went down to jog on the sand when he had the time.

Archer's place came into view. It definitely made Sawyer's simple cottage look bland and boring. It was modern, with lots of glass, wood, and steel. As he neared the front door, the insistent beep of a smoke alarm became audible.

He also noted a rental car out front. A flashy, little BMW.

He frowned. Had someone broken in? As far as he knew, Archer wasn't planning a visit any time soon.

He knocked on the front door. “Sheriff’s Department.”

There was no response. He suspected if there was someone here, they couldn’t hear him over the racket of the smoke alarm. He tried the door handle, and it opened. He entered and briefly touched the gun holster on his hip. There was no smoke at least.

“Sheriff’s Department.” He walked through to the sleek living area. Hell, it sure was something, with a shiny, marble-tile floor and furniture with clean, modern lines. He had a perfect view of the glittering pool, and the ocean beyond. He turned into the kitchen, and the smell of smoke hit him.

He took another step, then his brain sort of short-circuited.

The first thing he saw was sleek, smooth legs.

The woman was standing on a chair, wrapped in a towel, and reaching for the blaring alarm. The towel barely covered what Sawyer assumed was a very naked body. Her long, dark hair was wet and falling over her smooth shoulders in a loose mess, so he guessed she’d just come out of the shower. His gaze drifted lower. Her toenails were painted red.

He cleared his throat, attempting to get her attention, and let his brain cells start firing again. She didn’t hear him.

“You damn, annoying, crazy-inducing—” She went up on her toes.

The towel rose another inch, barely covering anything.

He took a step closer. Her head whipped up, and brilliant-blue eyes went wide.

And for the first time in his life, Sawyer forgot his own name.

She had a beautiful, oval-shaped face, with pale, creamy skin, and perfect lips. Her hair wasn’t brown as he’d first thought, but a deep red.

And he realized he’d seen it before.

She let out a squeak and lost her balance.

Sawyer lunged forward and caught her before she hit the floor. She landed in his arms.

“Oh, my God.” She pressed a hand against his chest.

He set her on her feet, and she scrambled away from him. The towel slipped and with a gasp, she grabbed for it.

Too late.

The towel slithered to the floor, leaving Hollis Stanton—Hollywood’s hottest, Oscar-winning actress—naked.

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Hollis froze.

*Oh, God.* Thoughts ran through her head, lightning fast. The smoke alarm was ringing painfully in her ears. She was naked—something she usually got paid a lot of money for. And there was a strange man in her house.

Added to all that, her coffee machine was on fire.

The man stepped closer and picked up the towel.

*Oh...* She snatched the towel and wrapped it around herself. Her throat tightened. Why was this guy in her house? Was he going to hurt her?

Swallowing, she met the man’s gaze. He was staring at her with a kind of entranced look on his face. Then he shook his head, like he was waking himself up.

“Sheriff’s Department, ma’am.”

*Sheriff?* Hollis blinked, and that’s when she realized he was wearing a uniform—khaki shirt and dark green pants. *Oh, sheriff.* Relief punched through her. The tan shirt was stretched tight over massive shoulders, a broad chest, and muscular arms.

*Wow.* Hawaii knew how to make their sheriffs.

The sheriff didn't need the chair. He reached up, and with a ripple of muscles, turned off the smoke alarm.

Blessed silence fell. *Hallelujah.* Her ears were still ringing, though.

The sheriff stepped past her and eyed the smoking ruin of her coffee machine.

"Um, I'm not sure what happened. I started the machine and went to take a shower." She waved at the small fire extinguisher she'd found under the sink. "I used that, but I think the coffee machine is dead."

He lifted the fire extinguisher, and she watched him carefully spray the smoking coffee machine again.

She blinked. He looked so...competent and in charge.

She'd worked alongside actors who'd portrayed cops, soldiers, and heroes. They always seemed so fake.

Not this man.

"It's definitely dead." His voice was a low rumble. He leaned over to set the fire extinguisher down, and her gaze went to the most muscular ass she'd ever seen—and she'd seen quite a few in Hollywood.

Then he turned to face her.

*Rugged.* There was no other word to describe that face. Well, maybe solid, masculine. She'd heard actors called rugged, but they didn't hold a candle to this guy. The beard—something more than scruff but less than full lumberjack—just added to the rugged vibe.

"Thank you." She tucked the towel a little more securely around her body and tried *not* to focus on the fact that she'd just been completely naked in front of this man. "I didn't mean to

start a fire.” She glanced at the black ruin and winced.

“I’m Deputy Sheriff Sawyer Lane. You’re a friend of Archer Kent?”

That deep voice shivered through her. She stared at him and realized he was waiting for a response.

Right, he’d asked her a question. She shoved a hand through her wet hair. “Yes. Archer is letting me stay here for a bit.”

That direct hazel gaze hit her—his eyes were mostly green, but with a few flecks of gold. She felt like his gaze could see inside her, see all her secrets.

Hollis had been an actress since her teens. She’d gotten very good at never giving her secrets away...because they’d likely end up in a tabloid.

She lifted her chin. “I’m...Holli. Thank you, Sheriff.”

“Deputy.” He eyed her. “You staying long, Holli?”

There was no sign of recognition on his face. She wasn’t surprised since she was wet, makeup free, and only wearing a towel.

“I’m not sure yet. I’m taking a...break.”

She wished it was that simple. She was trying to escape from the fact that she was either in danger or losing her mind. She wasn’t sure which one she’d prefer at this stage.

She straightened. “Well, thank you again for silencing the alarm.”

Deputy Sheriff Sawyer Lane nodded, then strode past her. She caught his scent—some woody cologne that gave her an image of him chopping wood.

*Jeez, imagination, we’re on Maui. He’s not a lumberjack.*

Near the front door, the deputy paused.

“Ma’am, if you want coffee, there’s a good place in Paia. It’s called Island Brew.”

She nodded. “Thanks. I don’t really function without a decent caffeine hit.”

“They’ll definitely be able to provide that.” He gave her a chin lift.

As he closed the door behind him, heat filled her cheeks. Hollis pressed her palms over them.

*Way to go, Hollis. You burned down your coffee machine and flashed the local deputy.*

She lifted her chin. Hell, she was no stranger to some embarrassment and humiliation. Being an actor, you frequently had to deal with bad reviews, critics, and Internet trolls.

She’d probably never see Deputy Hottie again, anyway. She was here to lie low.

A cold shiver ran down her spine.

She needed to finish her shower and attempt to cook some dinner with the groceries she’d bought after she’d landed. Hopefully she could manage that without burning the house down.