

## Wings Over Kal'hi

### Episode 1: Pilot 1936

Katherine Stewart gently pushed open the door. It had been hanging half ajar, a radio blaring from within the office. The sign on the door said “Be back in five minutes” but she’d stood outside for at least fifteen.

“Hello?” she called. There was no one inside. The place was a disaster; it looked as if a bomb had gone off. Papers were scattered everywhere, centered around a wooden desk towards the back of the room. A round table was covered with empty beer cans and the remains of several meals. Flies were omnipresent.

“Dear God...” she murmured, thoroughly disgusted. She picked her way across the room and set her bag down in the relatively clear space in the center. “Hello?” she called again.

Stepping over a pair of worn work boots she reached over and clicked off the cabinet radio that had been blaring Benny Goodman. The silence was welcoming. Katherine looked around again. “Hello? Mr. O’Malley?”

“This is the man who’s supposed to fly me home?” she asked the office aloud. She’d won trip to Kal’hi in a raffle, but she realized, belatedly, that return arrangements had not been included. The man at the hotel had recommended a local charter airline as her best bet to get back as far as Fiji, where she might be able to get a flight to Hawaii.

She stood in the center of the room for a few more moments, arms crossed, drumming her fingers, looking around the room anxiously. She shifted uneasily from one foot to the next, looking at the randomly stacked papers. Her usual distractions – crossword puzzles and sketch pad – were all packed away in her luggage, which was still at the hotel.

She stepped back outside, but the small yard area was no better, with a scattering of empty bottles and stray parts...whether automotive or aeronautical she couldn’t tell. Her fingers twitched as she went back in side.

She stood in the center of the room again, holding her arms to her body. She leaned over the desk. *Maybe if she just straightened the papers.*

She straightened a stack of paper, and felt a small tick of satisfaction as she did so, but she knocked over a pile of take out containers.

“Gah!” she gave a small shriek, and she was lost. She dumped the paperwork off the desk chair and sat down to work.

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By the time the door swung open again, and a tall, lanky man whistled his way in, Katherine had found trash bags, filled three with garbage, and made some order of the chaos. The mortgage was three months overdue, and the checkbook hadn't been balanced in over a year. She'd updated the books as best she could, and had laid out a payment schedule.

The man pulled up short when he saw the round table clean. He looked directly at Katherine. "Who the hell are you?" he asked.

"Who the hell are *you*?" she shot back.

"I'm Lucky O'Malley, this is *my* place," he said, a bit taken aback by her response. "What are *you* doing?"

"Well, it won't be *your* place much longer if you don't start paying your mortgage!" she snapped at him. "Your finances are a shambles! This place was a disaster, how did you ever stand it?" she demanded, rising, unaware that her face and clothes were now streaked with dust. "Is this any way to run a business?"

She had backed him into the corner by the radio. "Hey, lady, it's my business, not yours, what's it to you?" He was intimidated by this strange, yet, very attractive young woman who had seemingly appeared out of no where to clean his house.

"What's it to me? What's it to me?" she demanded, and then trailed off. "I...uh..." she backed away, looking embarrassed. "I was hoping to get a flight to Fiji so I could get back to the mainland."

"How long have you been waiting?" O'Malley asked.

Katherine glanced at the clock. "Two hours."

O'Malley let out a low whistle as he looked around the room. "All this in only two hours? What's the hurry to get back to the mainland?" he asked, jokingly. "I'd hire you on as my secretary."

"I need to get back...I...uh..." Katherine trailed off as she realized she didn't have any reason to get back. At all. She'd been laid off, again, just before leaving for the free vacation. Times were bad everywhere. "How much?" she asked.

"How much what?" O'Malley asked, taken off guard.

"How much per week?" she clarified.

O'Malley raised his eyebrows in surprise. "Oh...um," he considered. "It would depend on how business is doing, but I can swing, oh, say...35 dollars a week? And a room."

*Thirty-five dollars a week?* That was nearly a third again what she'd been making. "Where's the room?"

O'Malley pointed over his head. "There are two apartments upstairs. I used to rent one out, but he moved out. I live in the other one."

She considered. "Five day workweek?"

O'Malley laughed. "Hell, lady, I'm lucky if I can get enough work to fill four days."

Katherine was still wary, but the idea of staying here, in paradise, for pay, was very appealing. "Are you married?" she asked.

"*Hell no,*" O'Malley roared. "Don't go putting ideas in your head, lady. I'm single and I like it that way, so don't even think about putting your hooks in me."

Katherine bristled at the idea that she would tempt him. She'd been worried about the other way around. "I wouldn't dream of it," she said icily. But it did answer her question. "I'll take the job."

"Fine, then," O'Malley stuck out a greasy hand. "Patrick O'Malley."

"Katherine Stewart," she said, taking the hand gingerly.

"Welcome aboard, Kat," O'Malley said. "I'll be down at the water, putting in a new set of spark plugs on the port engine. That's where I went, to get 'em," he said, holding out the bag he was holding in his other hand. "Here's the receipt," he said, handing her a credit slip.

"My name is Katherine!" she protested.

"Oh, sure, sure," O'Malley said as he walked out the back door. It slammed behind him as he went, leaving Katherine holding the greasy slip. Heaving a deep breath and glaring at where he'd disappeared, Katherine finally turned back toward the desk.

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## **1937, Kal'hi, French Polynesia**

It was still morning, but the humid air promised another tropical scorcher. The small desk fan clicked as it oscillated back and forth slowly on the windowsill. From somewhere on the lagoon, a buoy rocked on the waves, ringing gently. The cabinet radio in the corner of the office was playing the gentle swing of "Moonlight Serenade." The door creaked open and the young woman scratching away at the desk looked up.

"Hello?" she asked.

“I’m sorry,” the man said from the doorway, “I’m looking for...Mr. Patrick O’Malley?” he pointed at the sign on the door that read ‘Lucky Air Service, Lucky O’Malley, Proprietor and Pilot.’”

The young woman, with shoulder length brunette hair, stood up smiling. “You’ve come to the right place,” she said. “Lucky Air Service, at your service. Are you interested in booking for passengers, or cargo?”

“Actually, I’m looking for Mr. O’Malley, the man,” the man said. He brushed a lock of dark hair out of his eyes. “I have...news...for him.”

“Oh,” the young woman looked disappointed, and then eyed the man warily. “You’re not from the bank, are you?”

“No...” the man said slowly.

“Well, Lucky’s this way,” the young woman said, gesturing. She led him out the backdoor into the sunlight. A wooden porch led down to a long dock, where a Sikorsky S-43 seaplane was tied up. There was a hammock tied between the pontoon strut and the engine supports, and a half empty bottle of Jack Daniels on the dock.

“Lucky,” the woman said gently, nudging the hammock. Someone was snoring from its depths. “Lucky!” she repeated, louder this time. The sleeping figure snorted and rolled over.

“*Patrick Francis Xavier O’Malley!*” she roared, breaking the stillness of the morning. Birds flew out of the bushes near the building.

Lucky kept sleeping.

Disgusted, the woman grabbed the edge of the hammock with both hands, and yanked with all her might. The hammock whirled, and Lucky O’Malley spilled out into the clear, blue water of the lagoon.

The tall, lanky red-head broke the surface of the water, sputtering and spitting, thrashing his arms around, and his visitor wrinkled his nose at the slowly expanding oily slick emanating from loudly cursing man.

“Lucky!” the woman called angrily. “You have a visitor.”

The man stood up in the shallow water, flowered shirt stuck to his frame, hair down over his eyes. He was wearing worn, grease stained khaki pants that had denim patches on the knees. He grabbed his peaked cap, bobbing in the water with one hand and stuck it on his head. “What the hell did you do that for, Kat?”

“Because you wouldn’t get your lazy ass out of the hammock, that’s why!” she shot back at him. “And my name is Katherine!”

The visitor blinked at the coarse language, but it didn't phase Lucky. "Yeah, well, you're fired, *Kat-er-ine*," Lucky said angrily, pronouncing each syllable

"That doesn't work on me anymore, mister. This place would fall apart without me, and you know it. If it weren't for me, the bank would have foreclosed this place and repossessed your precious plane and you'd be in a gutter somewhere." Lucky's bitter expression suggest Katherine was right. "Where were you yesterday, anyway?"

"I got in late last night!" Lucky protested.

Katherine picked up the bottle of Jack Daniels from the dock and threatened to throw it at him. "Late from Jacques's place, no doubt!"

"Don't throw that!" Lucky protested. "It's the last bottle on the island!" Lucky held up his hands in surrender.

"Hmph," Katherine set the bottle back down on the dock, crossed her arms and glared at Lucky. The visitor wasn't sure if the two even knew he was there anymore. "I heard you come in with the Wild Card last night around 8. What kept you out so late after you got back, hmm?"

"I picked up a few things in Tango-Tango for Jacques, I had to drive them over there," Lucky explained.

"And one drink led to another, right?" a thought occurred to Katherine. "Patrick Francis, you better not have been driving that truck drunk."

"I didn't, honest! It's not here, it's still at Jacques's. I walked home." Lucky pointed back up toward the wooden building. There was an empty parking spot next to a ramshackle shed.

Katherine looked slightly mollified, but she stilled glared down at him in the water, and his slowly expanding oil slick. "And would it kill you to take a bath once in a while?" she asked.

"Hey, lady, you gave me one this morning!" Lucky fired back. "I'm set for a month!"

"Why you...you..." Katherine stamped her foot on the dock, and glared daggers at Lucky. "*man!*"

Lucky chuckled, and wiped the hair out his eyes. "Who the hell are you?" he asked, turning his head to the visitor.

Katherine turned, and flushed red with embarrassment about having forgotten the visitor.

"Lucky, this is...say, I didn't get your name, actually..." Katherine realized belatedly.

The visitor grinned, "Quite all right," he said. Then he sobered. "Actually, my name is Howard Bell, and I'm an attorney."

"Attorney?" Lucky said, on guard. "What do you want?"

"Well, Mr. O'Malley," Bell took off his panama hat and held it in his hands. "I'm afraid I have some bad news. Perhaps if we go inside...?" Bell suggested.

Lucky O'Malley put his hands on the dock and hoisted himself up. "Bad news, huh?" he took off his hat and scrubbed a hand through his hair. He wrung out his cap, letting the salt water drip onto the dock. He replaced the cap and then grabbed the untucked tail of his shirt, and wrung it out as well. "Well, lead the way, Mr. Bell," Lucky said. "Best get this over with." He looked Bell up and down.

"You're not from 'round here, are you?" O'Malley asked. "You come all the way from the mainland?"

"All the way from Boston, Mr. O'Malley."

That brought Lucky up short. "Boston?" he turned on Bell angrily. "What the hell does Boston want with me? I don't want to have anything to do with Boston."

"Please, Mr. O'Malley," Bell soothed. "Please, don't make this harder."

"All right, fine," O'Malley said, "Let's just get this over with. What the hell is going on? If you're from Boston, that means my mother sent you. What the hell does the old battleax want with me anyway?"

Bell sighed. "Well, there's no easy way to say this, Mr. O'Malley, but your mother is dead. I'm sorry."

O'Malley stopped for a moment, took a deep breath, then shrugged. "All right, had to happen sooner or later. I appreciate your condolences and you coming all the way out here to tell me, but what the hell for? A telegram would have sufficed, and I know for a fact she cut me out of the will when I got drummed out of the navy and Susan left me." O'Malley snorted. "The old bird always liked her more than she liked me."

"Well, I'm afraid Mr. O'Malley, that that's not all...your sister..."

O'Malley suddenly seized Bell by the collar, and Katherine, previously silent reached out to try to pull O'Malley off him. "What about my sister?" he demanded, resisting Katherine's efforts to pull him away. "What's happened to Bridget?"

"Your sister, her husband, and your mother were...erm," Bell began, struggling to pull away from the strong man's grasp. "traveling home from the symphony, when their car...erm...was struck by a delivery truck. It was no one's fault, the brakes..."

O'Malley slowly released his grip on Bell, rocking back on his heels as the import of what Bell was telling him sank in. "No," he whispered, "not Bridget."

"I'm terribly sorry, Mr. O'Malley," Bell said.

"Oh, Lucky," Katherine said, laying her hand on his arm. "I'm so sorry."

O'Malley pulled away and turned out toward the lagoon. Katherine and Bell were silent as they watched his shoulders heave for a moment or two. "So they're gone, then?" he asked finally, without turning around. "I'm it then," he said. "the end of the line."

Bell nodded, even though O'Malley wasn't looking. "Your mother left everything to your sister, and your sister's will specified that you were to be the benefactor. You know her husband had no family..."

"Yes, David was an orphan," O'Malley said without turning around. "He was a good guy, David. Drove mother nuts, one of his best attributes... Poor David. Poor Bridget...and little Mikey and Kathleen... Mikey wasn't more than...what, 12?" O'Malley reminisced.

Bell grimaced. "Actually, Mr. O'Malley..."

There was a crash inside the office, and O'Malley and Katherine looked at each other sharply, and they turned to race for the office door. Bell sighed, and followed.

O'Malley threw the door open and looked in. Just picking himself up off the floor was a young boy, who had tipped over Katherine's rolling desk chair. A little girl was scolding him. "Mr. Bell told us to wait in the car! Now look what you've done!"

"What in the name of St. Patrick...?" O'Malley exclaimed.

The boy looked up as Bell arrived. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bell, sir, I waited outside, but I got bored...and..." He paused looking at O'Malley. "Uncle Lucky?"

O'Malley's eyes bugged out. "Mikey?"

"This is why I'm here, Mr. O'Malley," Bell explained. "Your sister specifically stated in her will that you were to receive custody of her children."

Kathleen, looking a bit intimidated, looked at her brother. "Why is he all wet?"

Wondering, incredulous, O'Malley looked between Bell, Michael, Kathleen and Katherine, then back to Michael. "*Jesus, Joseph, and Mary!*"