

The First Two Pages of “The Road to Hana” by R.T. Lawton
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An Essay by R.T. Lawton

For several years, my wife and I visited the island paradise of Maui in order to get away from the cold winters back home. On one of these trips a local newspaper article concerning the Trumpet Flower’s hallucinogenic powers and a missing man thought to have gone deep water swimming after smoking the flower’s petals stirred my imagination. Notes for a story were taken down. And then, they set there in my computer files for years waiting to be written. Finally, it all came together.

Here is the opening line for the story: “There’s only one road from Maui’s Kahului airport going over to the small town of Hana, located on the eastern coast of the island.”

With this opening, it sets the place and tells the reader that the protagonist and anyone else going to or from Hana by vehicle only have one choice. They have to take this road.

The second line—“This Hawaii highway has 59 bridges and 620 curves for the 52 miles it takes to get there”—foreshadows that the road can be treacherous for travelers. This is a situation where the land itself plays an important part in the story. The reader may not necessarily know this yet, but soon will.

“I’ve got no idea who took the time to count the number of curves in the road.” Here, the curves are emphasized to keep those many sharp turns in the reader’s mind for when the reader comes to a victim of the road—and, later in the story, when the

protagonist must travel this same road back to the airport when his vacation is finished.

Whoever he was, he must've really been bored that day and had nothing else to do. Fine by me, I was looking for boredom right about now. There's nothing like being shot on the job to make you want to stop the world and smell the roses, hell, smell any kind of flower and thank your lucky stars the other guy wasn't a better shot.

These lines imply that the protagonist is some kind of law enforcement, was shot in the line of duty, and currently seeks nothing more than rest and recovery. The questions now in the reader's mind are: Who is this guy and will he find the rest he requires in this island paradise? A savvy reader already suspects the answer to the second part of the question is probably not.

Continuing narrative brings forward the old, one-way-wait-your-turn cement bridges, the deep ravines often appearing on the landward side of the road, the steep declines to the ocean on the water side, and some curves with hairpin turns. Our hero takes note: "If you go off the edge here, you'd best be able to fly."

Then, our protagonist comes to a halt.

It was at one of these quick turns reaching out towards the ocean where I saw flashing lights in the late afternoon. Traffic was backed up on our side and no cars were coming through from the other direction.

He gets out of his rental car, steadying his wounded left leg with an old-fashioned wooden cane, to take a look at the reason for the traffic holdup.

Looked to me like two tow trucks were trying to winch a wrecked car out of the foaming surf and drag it up the slope. Also looked like a slumping body was seat-belted behind the steering wheel. Evidently, some poor schlub had tried to take a straight line where the asphalt took a bend.

Here you have information about the first two manuscript pages of the story. The reader now has a description of the location and setting where the geography of the land plays an important part in the story, plus a sense of the protagonist and a suspicion of what he might be facing. A death has occurred just off the edge of the road. Was it accident or murder? Too soon yet to tell, but as the reader journeys along with our hero, the rest of the picture develops until both reader and hero have a clarifying moment.

Were the first two pages of this story effective? Well, you decide. I submitted the manuscript in 2018, editor Linda Landrigan bought it in 2019 and the story was published in the May/June 2021 issue of *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. Off to a good start. Then, on January 19, 2022, I was notified that "The Road to Hana" was nominated for an Edgar in the Short Story category. What an honor for a short story author.

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R.T. Lawton is a retired federal law enforcement agent, past member of the Mystery Writers of America board of directors and has over 150 published short stories, to include 48 sold to *Alfred Hitchcock Mystery Magazine*. He currently has six short story collections in both paperback and e-format on Amazon with three more collections to be published in 2022.