

TOP SECRET

The Story behind the Story

BONUS CHAPTER OF

BANANA SPLIT

A CULINARY MYSTERY BY

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WARNING: This is a spoiler for the plot of *Banana Split*, book 7 in the Sadie Hoffmiller Culinary Mystery series.

NOELANI



Are you going to come see my tree house?" Charlie asked as Noelani brought Kiki's car to a stop in front of Charlie's foster home.

Noelani looked up at the yellow house with a butterfly mounted near the door and kept the smile on her face even though she wanted to make a face at the suggestion. Not because she wasn't interested in the tree house, but because it hurt so much to see her son's new life up close. Charlie was in foster care because she couldn't take care of him, because she'd chosen drugs and men over him too many times. There were other factors, other people who had failed him, but all those mistakes came back to her as well. When she was in treatment, she'd finally learned to accept her responsibility, but it was a heavy burden to haul around.

She longed for the day when she could make things right, and yet that day terrified her. What if she failed him again? How many chances did she have left? She'd had a very hard week, and the cravings at times seemed impossible to ignore. She longed for the escape, for the freedom from stress and fear she knew drugs could give her. Only Charlie and God had kept her from it so far, but she feared her

strength would run out. And then what would happen to her? What would happen to Charlie?

"It's so cool, Mom," Charlie said, breaking into her thoughts and looking at her with those big, beautiful brown eyes she loved so much. "Please come?"

Charlie was her son, but she wasn't necessarily welcome here. Why should she be? Another woman filled the role Noelani couldn't fill herself. She and CeeCee weren't competitors, but they weren't really partners either. CeeCee—or Mrs. Kahuali as Noelani was careful to call her in person so as not to appear overly assuming—loved Charlie. Noelani was grateful for that, but jealous too. It was painful and humiliating to be usurped in her role, even if she deserved it.

"Let me make sure it's okay with CeeCee," Noelani said, turning off the car and trying to hide her discomfort.

"It is," Charlie said, bouncing in his seat. He pulled open the door. "Come on!"

Noelani let herself out of the car and closed the door of Kiki's green Pontiac. "You go ahead. I'll just make sure CeeCee knows you're back."

"Kay," Charlie said, running around the corner of the house.

Noelani took a breath and went up the front steps. It wasn't fancy, just a modest, well-kept home, and yet Noelani wondered if she would ever have a home like this. She looked back at Kiki's car she'd borrowed for the day—it wasn't fancy either—and questioned whether she would ever have a car of her own again, let alone one where all the panels were the same color. She hoped it didn't count as coveting to wish she could have such things one day. She took a breath and knocked on the door, trying to steel her nerves while she waited for CeeCee to answer.

The years most people spent in college or in legitimate employment, Noelani had spent taking off her clothes for money to buy drugs. The thought disgusted her now. She'd wasted so much time and, at the age of twenty-eight, she had nothing—not even the son who had been the only reason she hadn't died of an overdose years ago. Charlie had been the one reason she hadn't completely turned herself over to the monster of the streets—but he'd paid an awfully high price for his role. He'd keep paying it for the rest of his life, she knew that, and although she was determined to be different and give him a better life, she was uncomfortable with being too hopeful. She was a housekeeper at a cheap motel, and even though Jim was letting her work the desk now, he *wanted* her cleaning toilets and changing sheets. He liked having her on the bottom rung. It made him feel powerful, as though he were putting Darryl in his place by keeping her low. If only she could make him understand that she didn't want Darryl—not like that.

For perhaps the first time in her life, Noelani hadn't fallen in love with someone just because he was nice to her. Her need for Pastor Darryl and his counsel was on a much higher plane than that. Jim would never understand her need to be reminded of God's love, though; he had no faith in anything or anyone any more. For Noelani, God was the only source of power and comfort left. He was her new drug, and He came with healing instead of taking her step by step closer to hell. And yet, it was hard to have faith in Him sometimes. His hope was so big, and she felt so very, very small.

The front door of the house opened and the speed with which the expression on CeeCee's face changed from eager to polite stung a little. They had never talked much, and Noelani couldn't help but feel judged by the woman who had her act together enough to not only raise her own children, but other people's too.

“Hi, Mrs. Kahuali,” Noelani said. “I just dropped Charlie off and he wanted to show me his tree house.” She pointed toward the dirt driveway on the side of the house. “I wanted to make sure that was okay with you.”

CeeCee’s expression softened a little. “Sure,” she said with a nod. “Thanks for checking with me. Will you let Charlie know I’ve got dinner ready when he’s finished? It’s his favorite, curried shrimp.”

Noelani instantly regretted the shave ice she’d bought him on the way home. She hadn’t even thought about it being dinnertime. Since when was curried shrimp Charlie’s favorite? How could she be the mother he needed her to be if she didn’t even know what his favorite dinner was?

“Sure,” she said, turning and heading down the steps. She could feel CeeCee watching her for a few seconds, but the door clicked shut when Noelani reached the bottom stair.

She walked down the path that ran alongside the house. It opened to a backyard, some of it grass, but most of it was covered with the natural vegetation of the islands. She scanned the tree line that stood about twenty yards from the large cooking porch she knew CeeCee used for her catering business.

She was a good fifteen feet into the trees when she saw Charlie waving at her from ten feet up a mango tree. Pieces of two-by-fours had been nailed into the trunk of the tree to make a ladder, and Noelani was halfway up the tree when her head poked through a hole in the floor of the tree house. It was a wide, flat deck with a railing around the edges. There was a small pile of rocks in one corner, and a few empty soda cans were scattered on the floor. Noelani had expected to find a few boards resting on tree branches, not such a solid construction. She finished climbing up. She’d have loved something like this when she was a child. It was impossible not to

wonder if she could ever give Charlie these types of childhood treasures, but she hurried to chase the thought away.

“Who helped you build this?” Noelani asked, glancing back toward the house, though it was completely hidden from view.

“Nat.”

“CeeCee’s son?” Noelani asked, sitting down. Charlie talked about him sometimes, and he seemed to think Nat was pretty cool.

“Yeah. We’re going to put a roof on it when school gets out.”

“It’s totally awesome.” Noelani tipped her head back to look at the tiny pieces of sky shining through the canopy of leaves. It was so quiet here, so peaceful. It would be a great meditation spot. “Does Nat come over a lot?”

“He lives here now,” Charlie said.

“He does?” Noelani asked, surprised. She’d talked to Mr. Olie a few days ago, and he hadn’t mentioned that. Granted, it had been a really bad day for Noelani, and maybe Charlie’s caseworker had been planning to tell her, but she hadn’t given him the chance. Regardless, she didn’t like knowing that some stranger was living here with her son. Her faith in the foster care system was almost as shaky as her faith in herself. She owed Mr. Olie an apology and explanation about that last conversation they’d shared; when she talked to him again, she’d be sure to ask him about Nat too.

She and Charlie sat in silence for a minute, enjoying their last few minutes together. A man’s voice drifted up through the leaves, causing Noelani’s eyes to snap open.

“Street value of 19K, at least. . . . Just smoke this time—fresh.”

Charlie’s face lit up, and he opened his mouth to speak, but Noelani put her finger to her lips. The man’s voice paused, but his footsteps continued beneath the tree house. He spoke again, but Noelani couldn’t hear it. However, she’d heard enough to know she

needed to hear more, and she gestured for Charlie to stay quiet and lay on his stomach, which she did as well.

"What are we doing?" Charlie whispered once they were both on their bellies.

"Playing spy," Noelani whispered back, counting on the sounds of the wind in the trees and the man's own footsteps to keep them from being overheard. "We have to be quiet so the, ah, Russians don't know we're listening." She smiled wide, assuring him it was a fun game, and then slid toward the edge of the tree house, slow and silent. She was nearly to the far side of the tree house before she could make out what was being said again.

"If you can't make a two-week turn-around, the deal's off. . . . Yeah . . . good. . . . I'm launching from Ho'oka at midnight. I'll have the bags out of the water by two. . . . Right, grid seven. . . . I expect confirmation by four A.M., brah. . . . Right . . . right . . ." The voice trailed off in the direction of the house, but Noelani stayed where she was until she could hear nothing.

She turned to look at Charlie, still keeping the fake smile on her face. "You're a great spy," she said in a normal voice. "Do you know who was talking?"

"The Russians!" Charlie said with a grin.

"Who was it really, though?" she asked.

"Nat."

Noelani processed that, and then distracted Charlie by complimenting him on the tree house again.

Charlie rolled onto his back and folded his arms under his head, smiling at her. "I want to put a refrigerator up here so I can have lots of cold soda all the time, and a TV."

Noelani tried to focus on the dream-building conversation, but she kept thinking about the words she'd overheard. Nat had been

talking about drugs, there was no doubt about that—smoke was a street name for marijuana. She should have felt relieved that it wasn't something stronger, but marijuana was the first drug she'd used all those years ago. It was still a drug. Still illegal. And Nat was involved with it somehow. The thought made her absolutely sick.

CeeCee called Charlie for dinner, and they both left the tree house reluctantly. Noelani thanked CeeCee for letting her stay, then hugged her boy tightly before she left, CeeCee standing behind him on the porch.

Once she got into Kiki's car, Noelani glanced at the clock and saw that she was running late for work. "Perfect," she muttered.

Noelani was still distracted when she got to Kiki's apartment and rang the doorbell. Kiki was on the phone and waved Noelani back to the car. Noelani got into the passenger side this time and looked out the window while repeating to herself what she'd overheard again and again. Kiki got in and started to drive. She laughed with whomever she was talking to; it sounded as though they were planning a baby shower. Her belly was getting big, and Noelani glanced at it for a moment as Kiki pulled up to the motel. Back when Noelani was pregnant with Charlie, it had all seemed so easy. She'd be a good mom, she'd get a good job, and eventually she'd meet a man better than the man who'd gotten her pregnant. How had she gotten from there to here? How had she become such a statistic? And now it appeared that her son was no longer as safe as she thought. What was she supposed to do?

Kiki ended her phone call after shifting into park. Noelani opened the passenger door and handed Kiki a twenty-dollar bill. "I didn't have time to fill her up," she said. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay," Kiki said, smiling as she tucked the money in her pocket. "I guess I'll see you in the morning, yeah?"

“Right,” Noelani said, trying to get her head back where it belonged as she stepped out of the car.

“Don’t worry about brewing the coffee in the morning—we’re out. I’ll pick some up on my way in.”

“Okay,” Noelani said, distracted as she shut the door. She still had laundry from this morning to fold and a shower to take and, apparently, some decisions to make. What should she do?

It was not an easy question to answer. She hurried to get ready for work and finish up her housekeeping duties from that morning. Once she took over from Court, she dove into her work, printing off the contracts for that night’s reservations and running the customers their keys. She took some extra pillows to room eleven and checked the e-mail account, but in the back of her mind she kept going over the phone call she’d overheard. *Nat*. Why was he living there? What was his history? Could he have been talking about anything other than drugs? Was she overreacting? What if something horrible happened and she had to live with the fact that she’d done nothing about what she’d heard?

Charlie seemed to like Nat, but he’d liked a lot of Noelani’s druggie friends in the past. He didn’t know them well enough to know any better. Nineteen thousand dollars street value was an awful lot of weed. Was Nat growing it or was he a middleman? She thought about Mount Wai’ale’ale that rose up behind CeeCee’s house. The perfect place for a farm. Then another thought struck her: was CeeCee a part of it? *Oh, no*, she thought, closing her eyes and taking a deep breath. *What if she was?*

The door opened and she smiled automatically, though it fell a little when she realized it was just Jim. He lived above the expedition office next door, but always checked in at least once a shift. He

headed toward his office, but dropped off a list of side work written on lined paper.

“Did the new towels come in?” he asked, not breaking his stride.

“I don’t know. No one told me if they did,” Noelani replied, looking over the list. It wasn’t too bad, she’d have it done by one—
an hour after Nat left Ho’oka—with a shipment of weed. He’d said he was launching from Ho’oka; where was that? was it a marina? She’d heard of boat drops before; they were a quick way to transfer drugs between the islands—one boat would drop off waterproof bags and another would pick them up. Leaving the bags in the water for hours before the pickup took place was risky, but there was a great deal of anonymity and a low chance of being caught.

After Nat picked up the bags, he’d head back to the house where Charlie slept—where Charlie thought he was safe. But if Nat was dealing, Charlie would never be safe. The memories of the dangers Noelani had put Charlie in were still fresh in her mind, weighing her down with guilt and shame.

Jim pattered around his office for about ten minutes. Noelani checked in the final reservation of the night. Jim left. Noelani knocked two items off the side work list but couldn’t stop thinking about what Nat had said. The minute hand ticked on the clock. She wondered what she should do.

She could call the police, but she knew they’d investigate *her* if she did. They had questioned her when a guy she’d turned in at rehab tried to put his deal on her shoulders, and her history on Oahu had made her someone the police couldn’t ignore. They’d searched Darryl and Bets’s house—where she’d been staying at the time—questioned her for hours, and then finally told her to be careful. She told them she had been, but the whole situation had reminded her that she’d never be free of who she’d been. Calling the police about

this would put her back in the spotlight, and she was so close to getting Charlie back.

She finally Googled “Ho’oka Kaua’i” on the computer but so much information came up that it was hard to sort through it all. She sighed in frustration. Darryl would know. He’d lived here forever. She took care of another item on the list before she called Darryl’s cell phone. With each ring, her anxiety increased. Who else could she call? Gordon from rehab, maybe. There was a click on the line and then Darryl’s voice instructed her to leave a message. Just in case he was screening his calls, she started explaining that she needed to know where Ho’oka was.

“Hello?”

A voice talking back to her caught her off guard. It took another moment for her to realize it was Bets. They hadn’t talked since Bets had accused Noelani of flirting with Darryl.

“Hello?” Bets said again. “Is this Noelani?”

“Yes.”

“Darryl’s at a meeting in Kapa’a. Can I help you?”

Noelani paused, but Bets had lived here a long time too. “I need to go to Ho’oka Beach, and I thought . . . I thought Darryl probably knew where it was.”

“Why are you going to Ho’oka?”

Noelani didn’t have time for this. “I have to meet someone,” she said, unable to keep the tension out of her voice. “You know where it is, don’t you?”

Bets was quiet.

“Come on, Bets, can we move on already? I need to get to Ho’oka and I need to go now. Just tell me how to get there and I’ll leave you alone.”

Bets paused another moment, but then rattled off directions,

which Noelani quickly wrote down. “Thank you,” she said when Bets had finished. She hung up and looked at the words on the paper. She took a deep breath. Was she really going to do this?

It was ten thirty when she called Kiki, apologizing profusely for what she was asking. “Please,” she pleaded when Kiki said how tired she was. “If it weren’t for Charlie, I wouldn’t ask you to do this.”

“Charlie? What’s going on with Charlie?”

Noelani paused. “I’m not sure, and I don’t want to say anything in case I’m wrong, but I need to check something out. Tonight. Now.”

She heard Kiki draw in a deep, tired breath, then let it out. “Okay,” she said in surrender.

“Thank you,” Noelani said. “I owe you one.”

Noelani checked in a walk-in and finished another side work item before Kiki arrived. Noelani thanked her profusely and headed toward the door before she remembered she didn’t have a car. She closed her eyes, feeling awful as she turned back and asked if she could borrow Kiki’s car.

“I haven’t had a chance to fill it up since you took it out this afternoon,” Kiki said, obviously annoyed.

“I’ll fill it up,” Noelani promised automatically. “And I’ll pick up coffee for the morning.” Even as she said it, she knew she didn’t have even five dollars to put gas in the car—she’d given her last twenty to Kiki that afternoon. She grabbed a ten-dollar bill out of petty cash for the coffee and was tempted to take some for gas as well, but she knew that would be the first step on another slippery slope. *Thou shalt not steal*. Payday wasn’t until next Friday, but she’d have to figure that out later. She’d made her decision and had to go now before her chance to figure out what was going on was lost entirely.

Kiki handed her the keys. Noelani apologized again, and then

hurried to the car. She stopped at the first convenience store she saw on the way out of town and bought some coffee for the motel to make sure she kept her word to Kiki. By the time she got back to Kiki's car, it was almost eleven. She made only one wrong turn on the way to the beach, and when she pulled into the empty gravel parking lot, it was about twenty minutes to midnight. She parked in a far corner of the lot, turned off the car, and waited, hoping no one would come, hoping that she was wasting her time. She rolled down the window of the car and listened to the water lapping against the rocky shore, black as ink. There was no moon tonight; the only light was one orange streetlight near the boat dock.

At 11:55 a small truck pulled into the lot. Noelani slunk down in her seat and watched as the truck parked near the dock. A large man stepped out. Noelani realized that she'd never actually seen Nat before—was this him? He paused when he saw her car, but turned away as the white hull of a boat came into view from the ocean. Noelani watched as the boat pulled up to the dock. The man from the truck walked down the dock and climbed aboard the boat. He handed something to the other man, who was small and thin. Noelani saw the flicker of a flame, and a minute later the unmistakable smell of marijuana floated to her on the breeze, igniting a hunger that still haunted her.

All the years of needing drugs more than food, of doing the most deplorable things to make sure she got her fix, came back to her. A dealer had once told her she could never go sober, that she'd created a hunger that would kill her if she didn't feed it. Yet that hunger had almost killed her when she fed it too. All those years gone. All that time with Charlie lost. With the memories came rage—rage she'd only begun to deal with once the drugs wore off in jail. Rage she had continued to process through treatment. At the heart of her rage

was one thought: Charlie was supposed to be safe with CeeCee—not put back into the drug scene again. The state was making her jump through hoop after hoop, and Nat was probably dealing out of the foster home that was supposed to be Charlie’s sanctuary.

The smaller of the two men disappeared below deck, and Noelani let herself out of the car, almost shaking with anger as she took long strides to the dock. She was trying to figure out what to say when the large man from the truck saw her.

“Who are you?” he snapped.

“Charlie’s mother,” she hissed.

“Ah, man, you on crack or something, chica. I don’t know who you’re talking about. You better go—now.”

She heard footsteps and looked up as the small, thin man appeared on deck again. She saw him recognize her—probably from the pictures Charlie had in his room. He looked scared.

“You’re Nat?” she practically spat out. “You’re the man my son thinks is helping take care of him?” She put her hands on her hips and glared. “Charlie thinks you’re some kind of hero.”

Nat quickly dropped the joint he’d been smoking over the side of the boat. “What are you doing here?”

“I can’t believe this,” she said as tears filled her eyes. “I can’t believe I thought Charlie would be safe at CeeCee’s house.”

Nat stepped ahead of the other man who was still glaring at her. “You need to go,” he said to Noelani. “This has nothing to do with Charlie and—”

“Yeah, I used to say that too,” she spat out. “I was a liar and so are you. I’m calling the cops.” She turned on her heel and headed for her car, her head buzzing. One of the men yelled at her to stop. She flipped him off.

“Just hold on,” she heard from behind her, but this time she knew it was Nat talking.

“I’m through with this,” she said, crying now as she thought of the danger that surrounded her son. Would her life—Charlie’s life—ever be drug free? And then she heard someone running. She looked over her shoulder for just an instant before the larger man grabbed her hair and pulled her backward. She lost her balance, screamed, and fell hard, the impact reverberating through her skull. She screamed and kicked. He told her to shut up, but she kept screaming, kept fighting. But then there were two of them. Someone grabbed her head and slammed it into the ground a second time.

Everything seemed to shift around her, like the ripples on water when a stone was thrown in. For a moment she didn’t know where she was or what was happening. With her head turned toward the road that led to the parking lot, she thought she saw someone in the distance. She glimpsed part of a face before darkness swam across her eyes.

“Help!” she yelled, but it came out garbled and weak. Nat wrenched her hands up, and she stumbled to her feet, but the world was spinning and she fell forward. He let go of her hands. She couldn’t get them out in front of her, the gravel was coming fast and the impact crashed through her, not just her head this time, but her whole body. Every bone in her body shuddered, then went still. Her eyes were open, but she couldn’t move. She stared at the water lapping at the dock several yards away. She couldn’t hear or speak. Was someone talking to her? Was someone moving her? She didn’t know and could only see what her eyes focused on automatically.

And then suddenly she didn’t hurt anymore. In front of her was the face of her boy, her little Charlie. She touched his face somehow; she kissed his forehead and told him she loved him so much. His

face brightened to a smile, then brightened more and more and more until it was brighter than anything she'd ever seen. She was warm, so warm, and she felt something she hadn't felt for a very long time. Despite all that had just happened, she felt safe.

"Charlie," she whispered, feeling the word on her lips. She'd been in so much pain moments ago, and yet now it was gone. From the depths of her soul, she recognized a peace and a comfort that Pastor Darryl had introduced her to. She'd come to know her Savior these last months, learned to trust Him, and as His warmth enveloped her, she knew that everything would be right. People would be put in place to give Charlie what he needed, and she'd never have to leave him—never again. A voice then whispered, "He'll be all right. Your job is done."



Once the body was in the boat, Nat stepped back, his head buzzing and his hands shaking. What had happened? What had he done?

Blaze said he'd stay with the truck and then, when Nat came back, he'd take care of the car. Blaze leaned up against the truck, lit a cigarette and fished his phone out of his pocket. When Nat hesitated, Blaze gestured for him to get going.

Nat untied the boat, which began drifting from the dock. He looked at the crumpled body by his feet, a thin trail of blood winding toward the drain. What was Noelani doing here?

He put his hands in his hair and tried to calm himself as he stepped past her, trying to think, trying to plan, but knowing he didn't have much time. He pulled back the throttle and roared out into the open sea. The night was pitch-black, but he could see the

lights from a few other boats on the water. He kept his own lights off; he didn't want anyone to see him.

He followed the GPS and within thirty minutes he was at the pickup location. He went to the cabin for the halogen flashlight and carefully scanned the water until he found the black waterproof bags floating in the water. He slowly motored as close as he could, not wanting to create waves that might push the bags farther away. Once he was within a few feet of the bags, he used the handle of an oar to catch the strap of the closest bag. They were all lashed together and he pulled them close to the boat and over the side. When he turned around, he startled to see the body still in the boat. He'd almost forgotten it was there; seeing it made his stomach roll. There was a lot of blood now.

Once the bags were safely stored, he opened up the motor and went another mile before stopping the boat and looking at the body of the woman again. He told himself he didn't know what to do, but that wasn't true. He knew what he *had* to do. He had no choice.

He dug the anchor out of the small cabin and tied it to her leg as quickly as he could, wanting nothing more than to be rid of her. She'd said she was going to the cops. That would have ruined everything. And hadn't he heard CeeCee sobbing when she'd learned Charlie would be going back to his birth mom? Hadn't CeeCee always taken care of Nat and his brothers? For an instant, his heart clenched for Charlie; the kid was so excited to go back to his mother, but he didn't understand what she really was. A stripper. A junkie. A whore. She'd probably go back to the drug scene again anyway, and this time, she'd take Charlie with her. The kid didn't need that. He deserved better.

Nat moved around to her head; she was in an awkward position and it was all he could do to reach down and pick her up under her

arms. Her head was covered in blood and lolled to the side. Bile rose in his throat, and he dropped her before stepping away and taking deep gulping breaths in order to not get sick. He closed his eyes until he had control of himself. Blaze was waiting, and he had no other choice. She was already dead. He couldn't save her even if he wanted to. He leaned down and lifted her legs up, trying to look anywhere but at her body.

After dragging her to the back of the boat, he pulled with all his strength and grabbed the body around the waist. With a grunt and a push, she went over the side and disappeared. He stared at the spot in the water, his heart hammering. He'd just dumped a body in the ocean. What kind of a person was he? He looked at his hands and his shirt that were now covered with blood and then went to the side of boat and threw up. He stripped off his shirt, using it to clean up as much of the blood as possible, and then threw it into the ocean, still trying to catch his breath.

You're a monster.

But he didn't dwell on the self-recriminating thoughts. Instead he went back to the helm and pushed up the throttle, leaving everything he'd done tonight behind him and trying not to notice the shaking of his hands.

He'd make it up to Charlie by being the best big brother a kid could want. He'd stop ferrying drugs and leave that scene entirely. CeeCee would take such great care of Charlie that he'd forget all about his mother. Nat's mother had never gotten her act together, and CeeCee had given him a good life. Nat would do everything he could to make sure Charlie could say the same thing someday. That's how Nat would make it right. It would be okay. He'd make sure of it.

CeeCee's Curried Shrimp

1 cup sliced carrots
1 small onion, diced or sliced
2 cloves garlic, diced or pressed
1 cup chicken broth
2 tablespoons butter
1 tablespoon flour
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cumin
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cinnamon
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon ground ginger
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon paprika
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon cayenne pepper
 $\frac{1}{2}$ teaspoon salt
1 tablespoon curry powder
1 to 2 pounds uncooked shrimp, peeled and deveined (any size works, but medium is best)
 $\frac{1}{2}$ cup sour cream
 $\frac{1}{4}$ teaspoon Worcestershire sauce
4 cups hot cooked rice

In a small saucepan, combine carrots, onions, garlic, and chicken broth. (Add additional chicken broth if necessary to cover the vegetables.) Bring to a boil. Cover and simmer 15 minutes or until carrots are softened. When vegetables are done, set pan aside.

In a frying pan, melt butter. Add flour and stir until smooth. Add all spices and stir. Cook about 1 minute to combine flavors. (Add a few tablespoons of chicken broth if mixture is too dry.) Add vegetables and broth. Stir together until well incorporated and sauce is formed. Add shrimp. Cook 10 minutes, or until shrimp are pink and cooked through. Add sour cream and Worcestershire sauce. Stir until well combined. Serve over rice.

Serves 6.

Note: Charlie likes toasted coconut sprinkled on top, and CeeCee likes extra cayenne.