

ANDY ADAMS

HAWAIIAN

SEA HUNT

MYSTERY

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Hawaiian Sea Hunt Mystery

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Andy Adams

Hawaiian Sea Hunt Mystery / A Biff Brewster Mystery Adventure

CHAPTER I

Peril in Paradise

In the tropical, jungle-like garden behind the hotel, a man stood absolutely motionless. The broad trunk of the coconut palm tree behind which he lurked protected him from being seen by anyone on the hotel's wide, sweeping porch.

The tense set of the man's features showed his growing impatience.

The broad porch ran around all four sides of the white, sprawling Royal Poinciana Hotel on Waikiki Beach, in Honolulu, Hawaii. The porch was called the "deck," and it had been designed to resemble the promenade deck of an ocean liner. It was an open porch, or deck, with brightly colored floral-patterned umbrellas spreading welcome shade. The deck was spotted with lounge and captain's chairs, and its teak-wood floor was marked off at regular intervals with shuffleboard courts.

The fore deck, that part of the porch running across the front of the hotel, overlooked the beautiful beach and its rolling, coiling breakers. Chairs and tables scattered on it were occupied by people waiting for the noon meal. On the rear deck, overlooking the carefully planned, luxuriant jungle-garden, only one couple could be seen.

"Will they never leave?" the man muttered to himself. He looked at his watch, then carefully peered around the tree, looking up at the deck jutting out from the hotel's second floor.

Just as he did so, the couple got up from their chairs and walked leisurely away, heading for the other side. The man waited until they rounded a corner and were out of sight. Then he moved swiftly.

His linen-clad figure was a white flash against broad green leaves as he dashed for the steps leading up to the now unoccupied porch. Once on the deck, he moved casually, as though he were just another tourist. He walked softly on crepe-soled shoes, making not a sound.

Nearing the center of the porch, the man pressed his back against the white-painted wall, almost blending into it except for his dark, swarthy face. Now he moved sidewise, crab-like, until he reached a partly opened latticed door. He stopped, pressing his head against the slight crack where the door was hinged.

Moments passed. Then he heard the sharp jangling sound of a telephone ringing from within the room beyond. Next he heard the soft pad of feet on thick piled carpet as the room's occupant crossed the floor to take the call.

Now the prowler abandoned his extreme caution. He looked through the partly opened door. He saw the back of a man sitting at a telephone table. The prowler carefully pulled the door open and slipped into the room. Its occupant had the phone's receiver to his ear.

"On your call to Mr. Thomas Brewster in Indianapolis, Indiana, sir," the operator was saying, "they are ringing that number now."

The prowler crept closer until he was within an arm's length of the seated man.

"Yes," the man said into the telephone. "I'll hold the line." With his free hand he pulled a well-used pipe from his jacket pocket and stuck it in his mouth. Then he patted the table for matches. He opened a drawer and felt in it.

The prowler watched his prey anxiously. He was an old man, with shaggy white hair hanging down almost to his collar.

Unable to find a match, the old man had just started to turn when the operator spoke again.

“This is Honolulu, Hawaii, calling Mr. Thomas Brewster,” she said. A few seconds passed. “Here’s your party, sir.”

The prowler stood there, arms raised, the fingers of his cupped hands spread like talons just over the old man’s shoulders.

CHAPTER II

A Disturbing Call

“I’ll get it! I’ll get it!”

It was the voice of eleven-year-old Monica Brewster.

“You always do,” grumbled her twin brother Ted. “I never do get to answer the telephone. Not when *you’re* in the house.”

Monica wasn’t listening. She was flying into the kitchen to answer the steady ring before her mother could lift the phone from its cradle. Mr. Brewster’s study was nearer, and there was a telephone in there, too. But Monica knew that her father was in the study, talking to her older brother Biff. She was sure the call was from her friend Betsy, because Betsy generally called her about five o’clock in the afternoon. Monica didn’t want her father interrupting her talk with Betsy. Daddy didn’t approve of long phone gabs.

Moments later, Monica came bursting through the living room. Her excitement was at a pitch as high as her voice.

“Daddy! Daddy! The call’s from Honolulu! Someone’s calling you from Honolulu!”

“Take it easy, sis, or you’ll explode.” Biff grinned as he saw the eagerness on his sister’s flushed face.

Thomas Brewster picked up the telephone. He listened briefly, then cupped his hand over the mouthpiece and spoke to his older son.

“Close the door, Biff. *Behind* your sister.”

Biff got up from his chair and gently ushered Monica, protesting, out of the study. When he turned back, he was startled to see that an expression of worry clouded his father’s face.

“Yes, Johann, I agree.” Mr. Brewster gave the name its Germanic pronunciation, “*Yohann*.”

Biff could only distinguish a mumble of words coming from nearly four thousand miles away.

“Well, Johann, don’t you take any chances yourself,” Mr. Brewster continued. “Wait until I get there... Danger? There’s always danger when the stakes are as high as those we’re playing for... What!” Thomas Brewster’s frown deepened. “Perez Soto? You say Perez Soto is there? I don’t like that one little bit. The letter, though, you have that safely hidden?”

Again the speaker at the other end took over the conversation. Biff could hear only a scramble of sounds coming from the telephone. He saw his father nod his head absently. His brows knitted into deeper thought.

“You think your room was searched?” he exclaimed. “Had you hidden the letter?”

Biff watched his father intently. Mr. Brewster listened attentively to a long reply. At last he said, “That’s bad, Johann. Very bad. We’ll have to make the best of it, though. All right, Johann... Yes, leaving here tomorrow ... Northwest Airlines... Take off from Seattle early the next morning, Wednesday, at five A.M. Be in Hawaii about eight o’clock your time... You’re stopping at the Royal Poinciana, aren’t you?... Hello ... hello ... Johann?” Thomas Brewster waited a few moments. “Hello...” Then he hung up and turned to Biff. “That’s funny. He didn’t answer. Maybe we were cut off.”

“Maybe the three minutes were up,” Biff suggested with a smile.

“That’s not as funny as you think, my boy,” his father chuckled. “Dr. Weber’s a peculiar man about some things having to do with money. A call from Honolulu to Indianapolis means nothing to him. But if the operator told him his three minutes were up, he’d hang up quickly. He obeys what he thinks are the rules.”

Biff laughed. “Isn’t Dr. Weber the famous scientist? I’m sure I’ve heard you speak of him.”

“That’s right, Biff. He’s a staff consultant for Ajax. I’ve worked with him before.”

Biff nodded his head. "I thought so."

Thomas Brewster was the chief field engineer for the Ajax Mining Company, headquarters Indianapolis, Indiana. His job took him all over the world, to many of the strangest and least known spots on the globe. Whenever it was possible, he took sixteen-year-old Biff along.

"One of my reasons for going to Hawaii is to meet Dr. Weber," Biff's father continued now.

"You mean the Engineers' Conference isn't the main reason?" Biff asked.

Thomas Brewster shook his head. "No. Oh, the meeting is important, all right. But I doubt if I would have gone out there for that alone. Dr. Weber wrote me over a month ago. Said he wanted to meet with me and Jim Huntington. He said it was very important. But he didn't go into details. I imagine he didn't want to put too much information on paper. Afraid it might be seen by eyes other than my own."

Biff was thinking. "It seems to me, Dad, that I've heard you mention this Mr. Huntington before, too. Am I right?"

"Probably. I hadn't heard from Huntington for a long, long time. But he did some work for me in the past."

"What's going on, Dad? And what was all that about a letter?"

Thomas Brewster sighed. "Oh, the letter. Forget you *ever* heard about it. Dr. Weber told me Jim Huntington was lost at sea sailing up to Hawaii from New Zealand. Got caught in a terrific storm, and his sloop sank. He was able to send a radio signal of his position, but Weber said a sea and air search has failed, so far, to discover any trace of Huntington or his sloop."

"Gee, that's really too bad. Do you know why he wanted to see you and Dr. Weber?" Biff asked.

"I have an idea. And if what I think is true, then Jim Huntington's loss is a very real one for the whole world."

"I heard you mention there might be danger – " Biff stopped. A spark of excitement flashed across his face. His blue eyes lighted up.

"Danger, Biff? Well, we've been in tight spots before. You, in China, and with me in Brazil." Tom Brewster paused, then said slowly, "There's always an element of danger in the work we do for Ajax."

Biff, his face serious, nodded his head. He was thinking of Hawaii, our fiftieth state. What danger could there be there?

The telephone operator at the Royal Poinciana Hotel on Waikiki Beach, Honolulu, looked up as her luncheon relief came into her small room.

"Hi. Am I ever glad to see you! I'm just about starved. I'm on a diet. Not for much longer, though. Hey, something funny's going on. That old gent in suite 210. Made a stateside call just now and didn't hang up when he finished. Imagine! He left the phone off the hook. I'll tell a bellboy to hop up there when I go out."

CHAPTER III

Worried Twins

Although he didn't want to show it, eleven-year-old Ted Brewster was just as excited as his sister over the call from Honolulu. He slipped quietly over to the door of the study. He wanted to know what the call was all about. He got there just in time to see Monica ushered firmly out as Biff closed the door behind her.

"Who was it, sis?" Ted demanded.

"Don't know." Monica shook her head. "It was just the operator saying she had a call from Honolulu for Mr. Thomas Brewster."

"You'd better go out and hang up the phone in the kitchen," Ted ordered.

Monica left the room and returned almost immediately.

"You didn't listen in?" Ted asked suspiciously.

"Course not! I have very excellent manners. No lady would listen in."

"Ha," Ted sneered. "*You*, a lady? A 'leven-year-old-lady!"

"I'm older than you," Monica replied.

"Ten minutes older. Call that older? I don't. And don't tell me you never listen in. How 'bout yesterday? When I was talking to Peteso? I suppose you didn't try to listen in then."

"That's different. You're only a kid."

"A kid!" This was too much. "And what about you? You think you're so grown up."

The twins glared at one another. Then, without any reason, glares suddenly turned to smiles, followed by unexplained, uncontrolled laughter. Neither one of the twins could stay angry very long. When their giggles died away, they strained their ears toward the study door.

"Sure is a long call," Ted said. "Hope nothing's gone wrong."

"Gone wrong? What could go wrong, Ted?" Monica's voice showed her concern.

"I don't know. But I sure hope that call doesn't mean we're not going to Hawaii."

Now Monica was really worried. "Golly, I just couldn't bear it. Not to go!"

"Me, too. Biff gets to go everywhere. When do I get to go anywhere?"

"Or me?"

The two sat in silence, thinking how cruel the world was to eleven-year-olds. The Brewsters' summer cottage on Vineyard Lake – that was nothing. Their speed boat and water skis, they seemed like nothing, too. And their Christmas trip to Florida, visiting their grandparents – what were all those things compared to going to Hawaii? They had been to many places in continental United States, but neither of the twins had ever been out of the country. Well, even if Hawaii was now part of the U.S., they preferred to think they were going to an exotic new land.

That was why, when their father had told them just a week before he was going to take the whole family with him to Hawaii, the twins' joy knew no limits.

They had known their father was going to Hawaii for a three weeks' stay. He was to attend an international conference of mining engineers. He was even going to deliver one of the most important speeches at the meeting.

Biff Brewster was the oldest of the three Brewster children. He had gone with his father on several of his explorations. But Biff was sixteen, an age Ted could hardly wait to reach. Biff even had his driver's license. To Ted, this was the highest goal anybody could hope to reach.

The Brewster family had been having a cookout in their backyard when Mr. Brewster made his wonderful announcement.

"One more week, and it's off to Hawaii," he said.

"Is Biff going?" Ted asked.

The children's father had smiled and turned to Mrs. Brewster. "Let's pack the small fry and take them along, too."

"What!" whooped Ted, his hot dog hitting the grass and his lemonade spilling all over his shorts as he leaped to his feet.

"And me? Me? I'm going, too!" Monica hurled herself at her father, her arms circling his neck.

"Easy there, princess. I'd rather have this food inside me, not on the outside."

Thomas Brewster put his daughter down. He looked into her eager, upturned face. Her hazel eyes sparkled. She had never looked prettier to him, and Mr. Brewster had always thought her the fairest princess of them all. Copper-colored hair framed her oval, pixie face. The summer sun had bronzed her clear skin. Keeping up with her brother Ted had given her a straight, sturdy figure. A nuisance at times, when her spirits shot higher than Pike's Peak, she was the darling of the family, and had to be squelched only three or four times a week.

"What about it, Ted?" Mr. Brewster said teasingly. "Think your sister ought to come along, too?"

"Sure, Dad. Sure." was the quick reply. Monica flashed a loving look at her brother.

"All right, if you say so. Okay by you, Mother? And you, Biff?"

"You mean we're all going?" A look of disbelief crossed Mrs. Brewster's face.

"That's right. Time we all had a vacation together. I won't be too busy at this meeting. And I'm sure we'd all like to visit our fiftieth state."

Biff followed his father's words without speaking. He surely felt good, though, about what his father was saying. Biff knew how envious his brother and sister were of the trips he had made. This time, they were going along, too. The whole family! They'd have a swell time. Dad was really tops.

A smile softened Biff's strong-featured face. His blue-gray eyes lighted up. He moved off the deck chair where he was sprawled and walked over to drape an arm over his mother's shoulders. He was taller than his mother, with broad, square shoulders. For a sixteen-year-old, Biff was big and husky. He had to be, to have come out of his many adventures unharmed.

"Won't it be swell, Mom!" he said. "Dad couldn't have done anything to make Ted and Monnie happier."

Now, looking at his father's worried face, Biff wondered if the call from Dr. Weber might mean a change in plans. He hoped not. Not only for his own sake, but for his brother's and sister's. It would be a wonderful rest and vacation for Mother, too. Biff wished he knew more about his father's real reason for the trip.

"Dad, will that call make any difference about your taking us on the trip with you?"

"I don't know," his father said slowly. "Dr. Weber's call puts the whole trip in a new light."

"Gosh, Dad, Ted's and Monica's hearts would be broken."

Tom Brewster stood up. He went to the door without replying. When he opened it, his two younger children swarmed all over him.

"That call from Honolulu? What was it about?" Ted asked.

"Tell us, tell us!" chirped Monica.

Mrs. Brewster had entered the room. She looked at her husband questioningly.

The twins looked at their father. He ruffled Ted's hair and patted Monica on the cheek.

"We're still going, aren't we?" Monica said in a small, hopeful voice.

"I guess... Yes, we sure are."

Squeals of delight filled the air. But Mrs. Brewster, reading the expression on her husband's face, knew that the trip was no longer just a pleasure jaunt for him.

CHAPTER IV

Aloha!

The blue waters of the Pacific Ocean, fourteen thousand feet below, sparkled under the slanting rays of the rising sun. Sleepy-eyed passengers aboard the Northwest airliner yawned, stretched, and brought their reclining seats to an upright position. Two stewardesses hurried back and forth along the aisle of the plane, carrying breakfast trays of chilled pineapple juice, slices of golden yellow papaya, and steaming coffee.

The younger members of the Brewster family, Biff and the twins, had been awake from the time of take-off, although their mother had insisted they try to rest. Mr. and Mrs. Brewster still lay stretched out with their chairs in a reclining position, but now they showed signs of coming out of their fitful sleep.

“How much longer, Biff? How long till we get there? You’ve been to Honolulu before,” Monica said.

“Only for a short stopover on my way to Burma,” Biff replied. He looked at his watch. “I’d say we ought to be there in an hour. Maybe a little longer.”

The Brewster family had boarded the plane at six o’clock that morning, their flight having been delayed on take-off for an hour by a low-hanging bank of fog. The big plane’s four jet engines and a favorable tailwind had pushed it through the sky at a speed of over 600 miles per hour.

Thomas Brewster leaned over the seat in front of him where Ted and Monica were fussing in low tones over whose turn it was to sit next to the window.

“Morning, children.”

“Morning, Dad.”

“My, you’re surely wide awake for such an early hour!” he said.

“Early? Gee, Dad, it’s after ten o’clock,” Ted replied, looking at his wrist watch.

Mr. Brewster laughed. “Guess Ted doesn’t know about setting his watch back. You set yours right, Biff?”

Biff nodded his head.

“What do you mean, set my watch back?” Ted demanded.

“Difference in time, Ted. With daylight-saving time further complicating matters, it’s three hours earlier in Hawaii than it is in Seattle. So, if your watch says ten, then it’s only seven o’clock in Honolulu. People are just getting up there.”

Ted, although still puzzled, turned his watch back three hours.

Biff came to the seat where Ted and Monica both had their noses pressed to the plane’s window.

“Scrunch over, small fry. We’ll be raising Diamond Head soon. Your big brother will point it out to you.”

The plane zoomed through the air, racing the sun to Alohaland. The “Fasten Seat Belts” sign flashed on.

“Won’t be long now,” Biff said. “Ought to see Diamond Head any minute. Look ... just over the right wing. See that sort of dark blur? That’s Oahu, the island Honolulu is on.”

Minutes later, Diamond Head rose majestically into view. The plane sped over the yawning crater of the extinct volcano, then bore to the left out over Honolulu Harbor. It turned back north, coming in low, and then settled gently down on Honolulu’s International Airport.

The plane rolled to a stop, doors opened, and landing ramps were wheeled into place. The twins, hardly able to contain their excitement, were first at the exit. Biff, his mother, and his father were right behind them.

Outside, a band played the familiar welcoming song, “Aloha.” Native girls, in hula skirts, with fragrant flowers in their hair and brightly colored necklaces of more flowers around their necks, swayed to the rhythm of the music.

Monica danced down the landing ramp. At its foot, a hula dancer stepped forward and placed a lei, a beautiful necklace woven of flowers – around the excited girl’s neck. Ted got the same treatment. More leis for Biff and Mr. and Mrs. Brewster, until the whole family wore fragrant chains of flowers up to their chins.

“Oh, Mother!” exclaimed Monica. “It’s everything I ever dreamed of! Just like I’ve read about and seen in pictures.”

It was a gay, exciting sight. The warm air, the gentle breeze, the music – a real Aloha, a real welcome. The spirit of Hawaii took over at once. Everywhere, happy people became happier. Gaiety filled the air. A soft scent of flowers cloaked the new arrivals.

The crowd milled about the gate leading to the terminal. It seemed there were hundreds of people all trying to pass through at once. The Brewster family clung together, Monica clutching her mother’s hand.

Thomas Brewster looked carefully over the crowd.

“I don’t see Dr. Weber,” he said to Biff. “I thought surely he’d meet us.”

“Maybe he’s just late, Dad.”

Ted came up and touched Biff’s sleeve. “Look, Biff, see that man over there?” He pointed.

Biff looked in the direction Ted indicated.

“See, Biff, he’s taking pictures. He took several of you and Dad. I was watching him.”

Biff’s eyes met those of the man with the camera. He was a swarthy man, short, wearing a rumpled white suit.

“Gee, I guess Dad must be some sort of a celebrity, taking his picture and all,” Ted said excitedly.

Biff didn’t think that was the reason. The man didn’t look like a newspaper photographer on an assignment. His eyes shifted as Biff stared at him. The man made no attempt to get “just one more shot,” as official cameramen are apt to do. Biff started toward him, determined to find out why the man seemed to be so interested in photographing Mr. Brewster.

Seeing Biff approach, the man drew back, fading into the crowd. By the time Biff had forced his way to where the man had been standing, the picture-taker had disappeared.

Biff frowned. He hadn’t liked the man’s appearance, and his slinking away made Biff even more suspicious. Why had he taken the pictures? How had he known which of the arriving visitors was Mr. Brewster? Biff shook his head. The answer to that question might have some connection with the call his father had received from Dr. Weber.

He had better tell his father about the incident, Biff decided. He rejoined the family and was about to speak when Mr. Brewster raised his voice.

“Over here! Over here, Mr. Mahenili!” He waved to an approaching man who in turn waved back, calling, “Aloha, my friend. Aloha!”

It was Hanale Mahenili, a native Hawaiian with whom the Brewster family was to stay during their visit to the islands. Mr. Mahenili was the Hawaiian representative of the Ajax Mining Company.

Introductions were made, and with the smiling Hawaiian leading the way, the party entered the airport terminal.

Passing a newsstand, Mr. Brewster halted quickly. He strode to the newsstand and snatched up a copy of the *Honolulu Star Bulletin*. Biff stepped to his father’s side and read the eight-column headline over his shoulder.

Dr. Weber, Famous Scientist, Missing

CHAPTER V

Detective Biff

Thomas Brewster read the startling story hurriedly. Biff read along with him. The story was sketchy. There were few details. Dr. Weber had been scheduled to open the first session of the mining engineers' conference the previous afternoon. The meeting had started, but Dr. Weber failed to appear. When the meeting ended, and Dr. Weber was still missing, the police were notified.

"Do you know anything about this, Hank?" Mr. Brewster asked Hanale Mahenili. "Hanale" was the Hawaiian form of the proper name, "Henry." Among his business associates, Mr. Mahenili liked to be called Hank. His Hawaiian friends called him Hanale.

"Yes, my friend, I do," Mr. Mahenili replied. "It is most sad, most frightening. In fact, I was the one who discovered his disappearance."

"When and how?" Mr. Brewster's voice showed his concern.

"Yesterday afternoon, at the opening of the conference."

Tom Brewster turned to his wife. "Martha, why don't you take Ted and Monica over to that bench and sit down? We'll only be a minute. Biff, you stay with me. I want you to know what's going on. Sorry, Hank, but I didn't want my wife alarmed. Please continue."

Biff felt highly pleased that his father wanted him in on whatever was happening.

"Well, Tom, when Johann failed to appear at his place at the speakers' table, I thought at first he might have been detained, perhaps held up by traffic. Or that he might have been napping after lunch, and had overslept. He's an old man, you know. And not too strong."

"Yes. I know. We've all been worried about him. He still tries to do too much for a man his age."

"I waited about fifteen minutes," Hanale Mahenili continued. "Then I left the head table to go to his hotel. He's been staying at the Royal Poinciana. On my way there, my fears that he had become ill increased."

Mr. Mahenili paused, as if ordering his thoughts.

"Yes, yes. Go on."

"At the hotel, I rang his room. There was no answer. I went to the desk, and they told me they believed the doctor was still in his room. He hadn't left his key at the desk, which was his habit every time he left the room."

"I'll bet you were really worried then," Biff said.

"I certainly was, young man. I called for the manager, and we went up to Johann's room. The manager had a pass key, and, after knocking, we entered his suite."

"And no Johann Weber," Mr. Brewster said.

"That's right, Tom. He has a two-room suite. He wasn't in either room."

"Was there any evidence that the room had been searched?"

Mr. Mahenili shook his head. "It was hard to tell. Papers on his desk were in a disordered mess. Two drawers in his bureau were pulled out, with clothing messed up, and a few things strewn on the door. But you know how careless Johann was. He was never one for neatness and order."

"But it could have been someone else who had searched the desk, and pulled out the drawers," Mr. Brewster said.

"Yes, it could. There was no way of telling definitely."

"Sir," Biff said. "Were you able to get any idea of when he had last been in his room?"

"No, Biff. We weren't. I was coming to that. We questioned the elevator operators and the desk clerks. Both night and day clerks. None of them could remember when they had last seen the doctor."

Biff's brows were knitted in questioning thought. "Sir, I'd like to make a suggestion, or, rather, ask you this. Do you know if Dr. Weber usually had his breakfast in his room?"

“Why, the idea never occurred to us.”

“Good thinking, son,” Mr. Brewster said.

“And were the maids asked if his bed had been slept in the night before?”

Henry Mahenili gave a shrug of helplessness. “I’m afraid, young man, that you’re a far better detective than I am. No, the maids weren’t questioned.”

“Well, then, Dad – ”

Thomas Brewster interrupted his son. “I’m right with you, Biff. Our first stop in Honolulu had better be the Royal Poinciana Hotel.”

“My car’s right outside. Your luggage should be off the plane by now,” Mr. Mahenili said. “The hotel’s on the beach – Waikiki Beach. I’m sure your family will enjoy seeing the most famous beach in the United States.”

“Gee, that’s great,” Biff said. “Ted and Monica will flip. And so will I. After all, we’re tourists.”

“All right, let’s go.”

Luggage and family were assembled and placed in Mr. Mahenili’s open convertible. The Brewsters were in for a thrilling ride.

Leaving the airport, Mr. Mahenili turned onto a dual thoroughfare called Ala Moana. They crossed the Ala Wai Canal nearing the famous Waikiki Beach section.

“On the right,” Mr. Mahenili pointed out, “is the Kapaiama Basin.”

Yachts of every color and description lay at anchor in the beautiful harbor. Some were moving out into the main harbor of Honolulu.

Everywhere the Brewster family looked, they saw flowers. One street would be lined with trees bearing white flowers. The next street would be one of red flowering trees, or yellow, or deep blue.

The car turned off Ala Moana onto Kalia Road. They saw the gleaming dome of the Hawaiian Village. To their right now, they could see the beautiful hotels standing like sentinels guarding the beach. Then Mr. Mahenili turned the car into the spacious Garden-of-Eden-like grounds of the Royal Poinciana Hotel. Mrs. Brewster and the twins walked down to the beach. Biff, his father, and their Hawaiian friend went into the hotel.

The manager of the Royal Poinciana received the two men and Biff in his office. Biff looked at his father.

“Go ahead, Biff. This was your idea.”

“Sir,” Biff said, addressing the manager, “I wonder if you could find out if Dr. Weber usually had his breakfast in his room since he’s been here?”

“Easily, young man. Won’t take a minute.” The manager picked up the telephone on his desk.

“And would you ask if he had breakfast there yesterday morning?”

The manager nodded his head and spoke into the phone. He asked both questions Biff had suggested, nodded his head, and replaced the phone on its cradle.

“No real help there. Sometimes he called for breakfast service; sometimes not. Yesterday morning, room service reports, there was no call from Suite 210-11 – that’s where Dr. Weber was staying.”

“Well, one more thing.” Biff continued his role of detective. “Would the same maids who were on duty yesterday be on duty this morning?”

“I’ll check that with the floor supervisor. I think I know what your question will be – had Dr. Weber’s bed been slept in?”

Biff smiled. “That’s right, sir.”

Again the manager placed his call and asked his questions.

“The floor supervisor will call back as soon as she’s checked. Only take a minute or two. While we wait, let me extend my welcome to Hawaii to you. I regret that this most unfortunate situation has come about. But I’m sure Dr. Weber will be found.”

“Thank you,” Thomas Brewster said. “I hope you are right.”

The telephone rang.

“Yes. Yes. I see. Thank you.” The manager replaced the phone. “The supervisor says the maid who takes care of that suite said Dr. Weber’s bed had not been slept in Monday night.”

Biff looked from his father to Mr. Mahenili. Nothing was said for a moment. Then Mr. Brewster spoke.

“Any more questions, Biff?”

“No, sir. Can’t think of anything else, Dad. Not now.”

“Well, we have established the fact that Dr. Weber must have disappeared sometime on Monday,” Mr. Brewster said.

“That was the day he telephoned you, wasn’t it, Dad?” Biff asked.

“Yes. I talked to him late in the afternoon. Here, that would have been around noon, Hawaii time. I know he was calling from this hotel. So, we can pinpoint his disappearance from sometime between noon Monday, to early Monday night. The doctor always retired early.”

“Thank you very much for your cooperation, Mr. Pierson,” Mr. Mahenili said. With Biff and his father, he arose and left the manager’s office.

They walked out into the bright sunlight and across a broad patio, hedged in by flame-colored flowers. The beach of Waikiki was right in front of them. As they walked toward it to find Mrs. Brewster and the twins, the swarthy man with the camera who had been at the airport earlier, stepped from behind a palm tree and watched them go.

CHAPTER VI

The Letter

Hanale Mahenili had driven only a short distance from the Royal Poinciana when Monica, in the rear seat of the convertible, let out a howl.

“Monica! Whatever in the world!” her mother said.

“My lei! My lei! I left it on the beach!” Monica wailed.

“Knew you would,” her brother Ted said, in his I-told-you-so voice.

Mr. Mahenili turned to Tom Brewster and smiled. “That’s easily taken care of. We can get them anywhere along here.”

He pulled the car over to the curb in front of a charming hotel constructed of red and white coral. Just to the left of the entrance to the hotel’s palm-studded grounds, sat an old woman surrounded by flowers of every color and species. The woman was seated in a high-backed chair, made of coconut fronds, with her feet in a tub filled with pink, red, and yellow buds. A flame-red hibiscus was stabbed in her topknot. She was a plump Hawaiian woman, dressed in a flowered *muumuu* the island adaptation of the mother-hubbard dress introduced many years ago by New England missionaries.

The old woman’s brown, deeply lined face cracked into a smile as the Brewsters got out of the car.

Mr. Mahenili spoke to her in the musical words of the native Hawaiian. The old woman’s deft hands grasped a long, slender lei needle, and her hands seemed to fly as she swiftly threaded at least a hundred flowers into a beautiful garland.

“This lei,” Mr. Mahenili explained, “is being made of the plumeria. You see,” he picked up one of the flowers, “it has five petals. Smell it.”

Mrs. Brewster took the flower. “My, that’s lovely! It seems to me I’ve been smelling this lovely scent ever since we’ve been here.”

“You have. This blossom is highly perfumed. It makes our island the sweetest smelling place in the world.”

The old woman had finished. She arose and draped the newly made lei around Monica’s neck. “For the *nani keiki*,” she said.

“That means for the ‘beautiful child.’”

Monica blushed, but her smile showed her pleasure.

“Thank you,” she said, dipping her head.

Mr. Mahenili handed the woman some money.

“*Mahalo, mahalo*,” she said.

“And now she’s saying, ‘Thank you,’ to us,” Hank Mahenili explained.

Half an hour later, following a thrilling ride up the twisting road running over the *pali*, the cliffs, of the Koolau Mountain range, they dropped swiftly down to sea level again on the north side of the island. A short run along broad, curving beaches, and they arrived at the Mahenilis’ beach-front home on Waimanalo Bay.

The warmth and gracious hospitality of the Mahenili family made the Brewsters feel at home immediately. The Mahenilis’ son, Likake, fifteen, and Biff were old friends within an hour of their meeting. Little Wikolia Mahenili was just Monica and Ted’s age, but quite a bit smaller. She considered the twins her personal property and showed them around with great pride.

There was only one cloud to mar the Brewsters’ sky-high happiness. Dr. Johann Weber was still missing.

Late in the second afternoon of the Brewsters’ stay in Honolulu, Biff and Likake were swimming when Biff saw his father come down to the beach and hail him.

“Let’s go, Li!” Biff called, and the boys rode a breaker back to the shore.

“Hi, Dad. You want me?” Water dripped off Biff’s tanned body. Likake, his round brown face with its usual eager expression, stood beside him.

“I want you to get dressed, now, son. I’d like you to come to the dinner and evening session of our meeting,” Mr. Brewster said.

“You bet, Dad. Wouldn’t miss it for anything. This is the night you speak, isn’t it?”

“Yes.” Tom Brewster smiled. “But that isn’t the main reason for my wanting you there. I’ll tell you about it later.”

“Okay, Dad. May Likake come along?”

“Surely. Mr. and Mrs. Mahenili are coming. The little ones will stay at home.”

Likake had gone on ahead.

“What’s it all about, Dad? Something to do with Dr. Weber?” Biff asked.

“Not exactly, Biff. But I think there’s going to be a man at the dinner tonight I want you to get a look at. There could be a connection between him and Dr. Weber’s disappearance.”

“Is it that man, Perez Something-or-other – the one you mentioned when you got that phone call at home?”

“He’s the man, Biff.”

Biff’s brows were knitted in thought.

“Dad, there’s something I’ve been wanting to do,” Biff interrupted. “Is it all right if I do a little snooping after you speak? You’ll be at the reception and dance. I’ve got an idea. And Likake said he’d help me.”

“Snooping, son? When trained detectives are on the job? This is a vacation, and I want you to enjoy it. But there’s no reason why you and Likake can’t nose about a bit. Don’t do anything foolish, though.”

The dinner was over. Biff had tried not to stare too hard nor too long at the husky, shifty-eyed man at the next table. Perez Soto! Biff sensed the sheer physical power of the man, and he shuddered involuntarily. This was no opponent to treat lightly. He couldn’t help thinking: Biff Brewster, take warning!

The chairman rapped for order. Guests at the head table were introduced, then the chairman turned to Thomas Brewster.

“We are very happy tonight,” the chairman said, “to have so distinguished a speaker with us. You all know him. You all know of the many contributions he has made in our field. I refer, of course, to the chief field engineer of the Ajax Mining Company, Mr. Thomas Brewster.”

Mrs. Brewster smiled proudly at her husband.

Tom Brewster arose. His talk was short, direct, and crisply delivered. He received an ovation when he concluded.

Biff looked at Likake and winked. The two boys slipped away from the table unnoticed.

Outside the hotel, Biff asked, “Which way?”

“The Poinciana’s just a short walk from here. We’ll go in the back way – through the garden.”

“You’re sure it’s all right? This bellboy is a good friend of yours?” Biff inquired.

“Sure. I know Hale real well. His brother, Kioni, and I go to Kamehameha School. That’s a school only for boys and girls of Hawaiian ancestry. We’re almost like blood brothers.”

The night was moonlit. Palm leaves rustled under a gentle breeze. The steady murmur of the surf was clear in the night air.

Biff and Likake reached the garden of the Royal Poinciana.

“Hale told me he would fix it so the deck door of Dr. Weber’s room would be open. Come on,” Li said.

The boys walked boldly through the hotel’s garden. Biff knew better than to try to hide their presence. To do so would attract attention, and that was just what he didn’t want to do.

They mounted the stairs to the hotel's second floor, and walked along the deck until they reached Dr. Weber's room.

Hale had done his job. The door was open. Biff entered the room. Likake, his heart pounding, was right on his heels.

The room was faintly lighted by the moonlight from outside. Biff paused in the middle of the room to allow his eyes to become accustomed to the dim light.

Then he started his search. Ever since the call to Indianapolis, Biff had wondered about the letter mentioned during the conversation. His father had said, "Forget it," but Biff hadn't been able to. The letter *had* to mean something. Where would a man like Dr. Weber hide a letter? Biff asked himself. He felt certain that Dr. Weber had been kidnaped, but he didn't think the abductors had the letter. If they did, then why were they holding the doctor?

"Course, I could be all wrong," Biff told himself. But he didn't think he was.

"Likake. Li. Come here," Biff whispered and was startled to hear Li's voice right back of him.

"I am here. Right with you." Li sounded scared, Biff thought.

"Okay. You take the bathroom. It's a letter we're looking for. I'll take the bedroom, then we'll both search this room."

The boys made a swift, but thorough search. Nothing in the bathroom. Nothing in the bedroom.

"Now where do we look?" Li asked.

"You take that side of the room. I'll start by the hall door."

Biff's search started at the telephone table. Nothing in the drawers. But there wouldn't be, Biff told himself. Too obvious a place. He started to leave the table, and, glancing down, saw that the table must have been left in the same condition it had been in on the day of the call. Crumbs of tobacco were scattered on the tabletop. Several burned matches were in an ash-tray. The doctor's tobacco pouch lay at the base of the lamp. Biff picked it up idly, looking about the room for the next spot to search.

Standing there, swinging the pouch by its draw-string, he thought he heard paper crackle. He stood motionless, halting the swing of the pouch. He strained his ears. Nothing. He tossed the pouch back on the table. Again he heard the slight sound of paper crinkling.

Biff snatched the pouch up again. He opened the pouch. His hand darted in it and dug deeply in the tobacco. Paper! His fingers weren't wrong. He withdrew the paper and held it close to his eyes. It was a letter, all right.

"Biff! Biff! Look out!" Li shouted.

Biff turned just in time to see a figure leap at him.

CHAPTER VII

An Important Find

Biff sidestepped quickly. His attacker's charge struck him a glancing blow, spinning him around. He stumbled backward, almost losing his footing.

In the dim light, Biff saw the man turn and crouch, ready to charge again. This time, Biff met charge with charge. The man came at him low. Biff hurled his body at the attacker even lower. He threw a bone-crushing football block at the man's knees. The attacker was upended, his head striking the floor, his legs flying upward as if he were diving.

Biff leaped to his feet.

"Come on, Biff!" Li called from the open doorway.

Biff sprang for the door, hurdling over his attacker lying on the floor. He felt sure he had cleared him when a hand snaked up and grabbed Biff by one ankle. Biff crashed to the floor, stretched out, his head pointing toward Li, who was standing in the doorway in dismay.

Rising on one knee, Biff tried to jerk his ankle free. The man held on with a viselike grip. Biff thought fast.

"Here, Li! Catch!" He tossed Dr. Weber's tobacco pouch to his friend. It fell at Li's feet. "Grab it, Li! Grab it, and scam. I'll be all right."

Li bent over and snatched up the tobacco pouch. He stood in the doorway, hesitating.

"Don't wait!" Biff called fiercely. "Get out of here fast."

Li, shocked by the sudden violence, was confused. He felt he should stay and help his friend. But Biff had ordered him out. Apparently the important thing was to escape with the tobacco pouch. He turned, shot through the door, and ran swiftly, silently, along the porch.

Biff now turned his full attention to freeing himself. He knew he would have to make his getaway fast. Someone in the hotel was certain to have heard the sounds of violence coming from the room. This was no time for an investigation. Biff knew that he was as much of a prowler as his attacker.

The attacker changed his tactics. Now he wanted to get free of Biff.

"Oh, no, you don't," Biff muttered, and threw his arms around the man's legs. He knew that Li was now the attacker's prey. Li and the tobacco pouch.

Biff held on. The man, struggling to remain upright, struck down savagely at the base of Biff's skull. Biff rolled, avoiding the paralyzing blow.

The attacker, freed of Biff's grasp, leaped for the door. Biff was on his feet, right behind him. Reaching the door, Biff saw the man dash for the steps. Instead of following immediately, Biff decided to wait a moment. Surely Li had gotten clear. Li knew the grounds of the hotel well. He'd be able to avoid capture, make a clean getaway with the pouch and its valuable letter.

When the attacker was out of sight, down the stairs, Biff stepped out onto the porch. He straightened his jacket. He wanted to look like a guest of the hotel if anyone stopped him. From behind he heard the sounds of someone banging on the corridor door.

"The time has come," he said to himself, "for me to make my departure from this charming hostelry." He walked unhurriedly toward the stairs. Once there, though, he dashed down them, taking three steps at a time. In moments, he was concealed behind a spreading poinciana shrub.

Biff stood silently. He strained his ears for any sound, the sound of either Li or his attacker. Only the soft rustling of palm fronds came to his ears. He decided to move out. Taking great care to remain in the cover of trees and shrubs – the moonlight was brilliant – Biff moved cautiously through the garden. He decided against returning the same way he and Li had come. He felt sure that his

attacker had followed them from the hotel where his father had spoken. The man might figure the boys would return to the hotel. He'd be waiting for them there, Biff reasoned.

"Sure hope Li figures it the way I have," Biff told himself.

Biff walked in the opposite direction. He came to the edge of the garden. The street was only a few feet away. A few feet, but those few feet were open space, no cover, unprotected from the view of others.

"I'll just have to chance it," Biff said softly. He planned to dash across the opening, run down the street, and hope to find a cruising taxicab.

Biff tensed. He thought he heard a noise behind him. It sounded like a small twig snapping. He turned his head slowly. He didn't want a second attack from behind that night. Now he felt positive that someone was moving in the shrubbery nearby.

Then he heard it, softly, barely audible above the noise of the rustling leaves and nearby surf.

"Biff!"

Biff let out his held breath in a deep sigh of relief.

"Right here, Li," he called.

His Hawaiian friend emerged from behind a tree and joined him.

"You all right, Biff? You hurt?" Li asked anxiously.

"Me? No. Not even shaken up. But how about you? And the tobacco pouch. You've still got it?"

Li nodded his head, extending a hand with the pouch in it.

"Swell, Li. Great. How did you get away? Did that guy try to follow you?"

"He tried to follow all right. But I fooled him. I kept just far enough ahead of him so he could hear me. I made little noises." Biff could see Li's grin in the moonlight. "So I could lead him away. I wanted to be sure you got away okay."

"Pretty smart, Li. But how did you finally shake him off?"

"I led him way to the rear of the garden. Then I quit making any noise. I moved like a cat, circled around, and headed for here. I sort of figured you wouldn't try to get back to the other hotel."

"Good figuring. You and I are going to make a great team. But I think we'd better get out of here fast before 'Nosy' figures the same way we did. Where would be the best place to get a cab?"

"Just follow me." Li turned, and instead of heading for the street, he plunged back into the garden. He led Biff along the edge of the garden, until they came to a low hedge fence, the rear boundary of the Poinciana's grounds. Li leaped over it, Biff following. Then the Hawaiian boy cut to his right, and in a few moments, they jumped another hedge into another formal garden.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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