



ON THEIR OWN





The Lahaina Mysteries Series

by Barbara E. Sharp

THE LAST SMYTHE

THE THIRD SPY

THE RIGHT TIME

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THE FIFTH BOOK

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OUT OF SIGHT

THE SEAWALL





ON THEIR OWN

A LAHAINA MYSTERY

By
Barbara E. Sharp

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PROLOGUE
Three weeks ago in Lahaina:

As Helen and Ben sat quietly contemplating the strangeness of life, darkness settled in and soft moon shadows crept across the lanai. Just as Ben was about to break the peaceful stillness to say something profound, Helen heard the phone ringing. “Ben, I think the phone’s ringing.”

“Don’t we have a cell out here?”

Reluctantly Ben hefted himself out of his comfortable chair and went in the house to answer the call. “Ben Anderson here. - - - “Yes, I’ll wait.”

Helen slid the screen door open, tripped over Windy, recovered her balance and asked: “Who’s on the phone, Ben?”

“Oh. . . . Uh, it’s the president, I think.”

“The president of what?”

Ben came to attention. “Sir. - - - Yes, sir, I do. - - - Yes, we did. - - - England? - - - Do we have time to think about this?”

“England?” Helen parroted.

“I believe we know him as Shadow, sir. - - - Yes sir, he is. - - - - - - I see. I don’t see how we can refuse. - - - Yes, sir, I’ll be waiting for his call.”



Helen was way beyond curious. She very nearly shouted at Ben. “I repeat, the president of what? America?”

“Yes. He, well, he and Shadow, they want us to go on a mission.”

“Mission? Us?”

“You, me, Justin and Nacho. Shadow will contact us with the details.”

Helen stood there staring at Ben in disbelief. “Is there anymore wine?”







ON THEIR OWN







CHAPTER 1.

“Chad . . . I think I’ll name you Chad.”

The traffic light turned green. Helen patted Chad’s hand, hit the accelerator and neatly slid her silver Miata into the fast lane. She cranked up the volume on the CD player blasting *Journey’s* old favorite, *Don’t Stop Believing*, into the atmosphere. All was right with the world.

At the last big intersection before the open road to Lahaina, a huge tour bus pulled up alongside Helen’s car just as the light turned red, blocking her view of Haleakala. She turned and smiled at Chad, so involved in her music and her passenger that she failed to notice a row of faces looking down at her from the bus windows. One person was laughing and pointing but most of the faces looked shocked.



The light turned green. Helen blasted off like a rocket, turned onto the Honoapiilani Highway and sped towards home, leaving the tour bus and the shocked faces in the dust. Then, just a mile down the road near the Ocean Center, Helen heard the wail of a siren and noticed blue flashing lights in the rear view mirror. She pulled over onto the shoulder and stopped. *Good grief! Have I been speeding? No way, the speed control is set at legal 55.*

“Your driver’s license please.” Helen handed it to the officer and smiled. He did not smile back.

“Are you aware that your passenger is naked, Ms. Grant?”

“My passenger is a mannequin. His name is Chad.”

“He looks real, ma’am . . . nearly anatomically correct. We received a complaint from several bus passengers who reported a case of indecent exposure.”

“Bus passengers?”

“Yes ma’am. They looked down into your convertible and saw what they believed to be a naked man, sitting next to you. Two of them phoned 911. You *are* aware that sunglasses are the only thing he’s wearing?”

“Of course I am. He *was* wearing a baseball hat too, but it blew off. Am I under arrest?”

“No ma’am. But to prevent any further misunderstandings about the mannequin, you might cover him with some of your packages until you can get him a pair of pants – or better yet, put the top up.”

“Ben, I’m home!”

“HI Hon, have a successful trip to the otherside?”

“Indeed. Wait till you see Chad! He’s perfect.”

“Where *is* Chad?”

“He’s still in the car. I can’t lift him by myself.”

“Don’t worry, I’m sure I can handle it.”

Ben opened the Miata’s passenger door and gazed at the Scandinavian-looking hunk. “Chad, I presume. My, you *are* a handsome devil! Oh, I see your legs are permanently bent for a sitting position. Well, that’s awkward.”

Mambo and Windy stood on the driveway intently listening to Ben’s mumbling, and then they hopped into the car for a better look, sitting side by side on the driver’s seat, heads cocked, ears forward.

As Ben struggled to get Chad’s legs out through the door without banging his head on the windshield or catching his arm on the edge of the doorway, Justin eased his van into the driveway.

“What are you doing Ben?”

“Ah, Justin, you’re just in time. Grab Chad’s arm and pull.”

“Okay.” Justin pulled outward while Ben struggled to tilt the torso downward and grab a leg.

“Shit, this is not working.”

“His arm came off, Ben. Did you say his name is Chad? Oops, Chad’s sunglasses fell off, too.”

Ben growled as he slipped the sunglasses into his shirt pocket, while struggling to hold onto Chad’s head with his other hand.

Reva, from next-door, wandered up carrying a basket of oranges. “Who’s Chad?”

“He’s Helen’s new boyfriend.” Ben mumbled.

Reva surveyed the situation. “He seems to be stuck. You look a little sweaty, Ben. He’s a hunk! Helen’s got good taste, that’s for sure. “I brought some Big Island oranges for you guys. We got a whole crate of them from Akoni’s niece in Hilo.”

“Helen and I both love Big Island oranges, thanks, Reva. Helen’s in the kitchen, go on in.”

Turning his attention to Justin, Ben noticed that he had accepted Chad without comment . . . without making jokes . . . without even smiling. Ben removed Chad’s right leg and handed it to him. “Aren’t you curious about Chad?”

“How curious can you be about a dummy? I mean, after all the weird stuff that happens around here, Chad almost seems normal. At least he’s not dead.”

“Well, he’s not alive either. I think he’s in the category of an inanimate object.” Ben handed Justin the left leg, then removed the torso. Tucking it under his arm, he headed towards the house. Justin followed, toting both legs. They set Chad’s torso on a chair.

“Hi Helen, we finally got most of Chad out of the car. How did you ever get him in there?”

“Hi Justin. The guys at the post office lifted him over the back of the seat and slid him in while the top was down. Isn’t that how you got him out?”

“No. Ben tried to get him out in one piece through the door with the top up, but he sort of got stuck.”

Ben staggered in dragging both of Chad's arms and dropped them on the floor. "Justin and I do not care to talk about Chad. We got any cold beer?"

Followed by Mambo and Windy, Ben and Justin swiftly headed out the patio door, leaving Reva and Helen staring at the five pieces of Chad.

"Let's put him back together, Helen. He has a body like Adonis!"

"Good idea. He can sit in one of the big stuffed chairs in the living room. I'll start with a leg, you grab the arms."

Chad was back in one piece by the time Ben came in to get some taco chips and more beer. "How long are we going to have this naked man sitting in our living room?"

"Not for long." Helen replied, "He's going to be part of the new historical display in the Courthouse, remember?"

Helen's interest in Lahaina's history led to her current job as Research Director at the Research and Preservation Society, known as RAPS. Only a few days after her transplantation from Seattle to Lahaina, eight or so years ago, she began reading microfilms of old whaling logs and journals, and transcribed several of them. One thing led to another and soon she was doing genealogical searches, aiding researchers, writing articles and giving historical tours. Life was good – but it got even better when Ben, a former airline pilot from Denver, moved to Lahaina to start a new life as the Visitor Information Center's Regional Manager. Again, one thing led to another – friendship blossomed into romance - and



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currently Helen and Ben live together with their cats, Mambo and Windy, in a beach house just a mile south of town.





CHAPTER 2.

Beneath the Old Lahaina Courthouse is the old jail. It's been there since 1830 when the fort was built. When the old fort was torn down to make room for the new customs and courthouse in 1857, the jail remained. The location is barely above sea-level so it's slightly damp, as it was when prisoners were tossed in for drunkenness or disorderly conduct back in the whaling days. Now it's occupied by an art gallery whose owner graciously agreed to lend one of the remaining original cells to Helen for her historical display.

Helen stared into the empty cell trying to imagine how a young sailor from a whaling ship would be dressed. Should he be wearing shoes? Would he be dirty after being tossed onto the earthen floor? Maybe his shirt would be torn? As she pondered these questions, she tried to picture Chad sitting on a stool looking like an 1840's whaler with



a hangover, but this visual did not compute. He was such a major hunk, so clean and fresh-looking that, try as she might, she could only picture him wearing designer jeans and a pastel polo shirt.

“Hi Helen, what are you doing?”

“Hillary! Good to see you. Aren’t you in the wrong art gallery?”

“I’m here to pick up some 2009 posters. Have you seen them yet?”

“Yes I have, and I am so glad some artist finally did a painting of the courthouse. It’s lovely how she got the Banyan tree in, and even got a glimpse of the ocean.”

“Yeah, it identifies the location and, by the cast of the shadows, the time of day, too. I’m still curious, what are you doing here staring into an empty jail cell?”

Before Helen had a chance to explain, she and Hillary were interrupted by a sudden outburst of noise wafting down from the outside stairway, coming from the general direction of the pier.

“Come on Hillary, let’s see what all the commotion is about.”

The outside steps leading up from the Old Prison Art Gallery face the Pioneer Inn, located just across Hotel Street. Half way down Hotel Street, moving mauka towards Front Street, was a small parade consisting of donkeys accompanied by drums and cymbals and followed by a rather large crowd of people, mostly children. The whole kit and caboodle was going the wrong way on the one-way street, causing cars to backup and jam up traffic on Front Street.

“Good grief, what a racket! What are they doing? Are they celebrating or protesting?”

“Not sure, Hillary, but whatever their purpose they’ve gathered quite a crowd. Look, they have four donkeys and two small monkeys leading the way. One of the monkeys is heading our way.”

“He has a tin cup. Maybe he wants money?”

“He’s smiling . . . isn’t he?”

“Jeez, Helen, how would I know? The nearest I’ve ever been to a monkey is at the zoo. Maybe he’s grimacing, not smiling. He seems to be showing all his sharp little teeth. *Hi, little monkey.* Look, he’s holding his cup up to me.”

“Give him some money and maybe he’ll go away.”

Hillary was worried. “I left my purse in the gallery. Do you have any money?”

“No, my purse is in the jail cell. What will he do if we don’t give him something?”

“Helen, I am getting very nervous. What if he attacks us? What if he bites?”

“Uh, well let me see, what do I know about monkeys? I remember that in the *Raiders* movie there was an assassin monkey that looked just like this one. He ate poison dates and died.”

“Well, swell! I think I forgot to bring my poison dates!”

“Calm down Hillary, help is on the way - here comes Ben.”

As Ben approached, the monkey ran over to him and held up his cup. Ben dropped a quarter in it. The monkey began jumping up and down screaming. Digging out his

wallet, Ben offered the angry monkey a dollar bill. The monkey reached out and as fast as greased lightning, grabbed the wallet with his free hand. Removing the bills, he threw the wallet on the ground and took off running towards Library Park. The band, heading towards Front Street, turned right and marched out of sight.

Ben stood gaping. "Did you see that Helen? That monkey-thief stole all my cash! Are there any cops around? What's going on here?"

Hillary answered the second question before Helen had a chance to speak. "We heard this loud commotion and came up to see what it was, and would you believe it was a parade marching up the street with four donkeys and a monkey collecting money?"

"As for cops," Helen continued, "there are never any around when you need them. How much money did devil-monkey get?"

"There must have been fifty or sixty dollars in there!"

"Well, at least he left the wallet behind."

"Yes he did, and it contains my credit cards. So ladies, how about we go somewhere out of the sun where we can get a drink, some food, and make a phone call."

They decided on the nearest place, the Pioneer Inn. Settled in the corner table with iced tea for the ladies and a beer for Ben, Helen dialed 911. "Yes, this is Helen Grant. I'm phoning to report a robbery. - - - Right next to the Old Lahaina Courthouse on Hotel Street - - - We're in the Pioneer Inn restaurant, corner table."

"So?" Ben asked.

“So, they’re sending an officer over to talk to us.”

Ten minutes later Officer Jannola joined Helen, Ben and Hillary at the Pioneer Inn. He tipped his hat. “Good to see you Mrs. Grant and Mr. Anderson. You reported a robbery. Please tell me about it.”

Ben spoke up. “I was the victim. Nearly sixty dollars was taken from my wallet, right before my eyes.”

“Then you have a description of the thief?”

”Sure do! The little devil grabbed my wallet out of my hand, then took out the bills, tossed the wallet aside, did a back flip and ran down the street. He was very small, had darkish hair, probably an Asian type.”

“A ninja? You refer to him as a *little devil*. Could you estimate his height?”

“Foot and a half, give or take . . .”

At this point, Helen interrupted. “Ben has left out one important detail, Officer Jannola. I’m not sure if leaving it out was an oversight or a flagrant display of his humor. The thief was a monkey, a brown Capuchin monkey.”



CHAPTER 3.

Two days later, neither Ben's money nor the thieving monkey had been found. "It says here in the morning paper that the leader of the marching band claims it was not his monkey and he had nothing to do with him, or the theft. He seems to have just disappeared off the face of earth!" Helen exclaimed.

"Who, the parade leader?"

"No, Ben, the monkey that stole your money. Really, how could such an exotic animal *not* be noticed by someone? How could he just walk down the street like he was invisible? What did he do with your money?"

"Night out on the town?"

"Very funny. I'm going to phone Nacho, he'll know where the little thief is."



Ben got up from his computer desk in the corner of the bedroom, briefly glanced out at the ocean and then followed Helen to the kitchen. “Better to phone Justin, he’s the one who hears all the gossip.”

“Okay, but better yet, let’s go see him in person . . . face to face. I have the feeling that he, along with most of the town, does not believe the monkey story. After that let’s drop by the old jail and see how Chad looks.”

On their stroll into town, wading barefoot in the surf, Ben and Helen passed an old beach house set back in a grove of shade trees. They didn’t bother to give it a glance, after all, they walk this way almost everyday and the dark old house really isn’t very interesting. The only time it ever came up in conversation was one time when Helen commented that it was certainly odd to have such a rundown place like that on prime beach property. Then, like most everyone else in town, they just sort of blanked it out.

If Helen and Ben had been a little more observant as they strolled by, they might have noticed a small furry face peeking over the porch railing, watching them with rapt attention and undeniable curiosity.

“Do you feel like we’re being watched?”

Ben glanced around. “Yeah, I do, but there’s no one else walking the beach this morning, we’re alone.”

Nacho, an African American Nam vet from Philly, works as a physical therapist at the local gym. Several years ago he made the decision to stay permanently in

Lahaina, a decision based solely on his new friends, Justin, Ben, and Helen – his new family.

Justin Takamura’s great grandfather came from Japan to work the cane fields, as did his grandfather a generation later. In the 1940’s Justin’s father started a successful fish market on Front Street, and a few years later he opened Pineapples restaurant. Justin manages the place which is popular with local residents and visitor’s alike. It is the best place in town to order a box of Maui onions or fresh pineapples to send back home.

These four friends, Nacho, Justin, Helen and Ben somehow manage to get themselves involved in solving crimes. They work well together in an unorthodox way and have, on occasion, been quite successful.

Pineapple’s was nearly deserted when they arrived. Justin was sitting at a table reading the Maui News, Nacho sitting across from him enjoying a mug of coffee. They both looked up as Ben and Helen approached.

“Hi guys. Want a cup of coffee?”

“Sounds great, Justin.”

“What brings you out this early in the morning? Monkey business, perhaps?”

Three blocks south of Pineapples, near 505 Front Street, a short, tubby woman wearing a fifty’s-style muumuu shifted her heavy tote bag from her left shoulder to her right. She waddled – an uneven gait caused by one short leg. She was born with the defect, and even though it

was quite noticeable to others, she hardly gave it a second thought. It took her just ten more minutes to reach the old beach house. Stepping into the gloomy residence, she shouted: “Gimby my love, where are you? Are you hungry?”

Gimby, a Capuchin monkey no bigger than a cat, opened the screen door to the ocean-side porch, came inside and slammed it shut. He headed straight to the kitchen. One easy hop and he was on the kitchen counter peering into the tote bag. His agile little hands grabbed a bunch of grapes. Quickly he scampered across the kitchen table to the windowsill, where he sat munching them down.

“Slow down, boy, you’ll get a tummy ache.”

After putting the groceries away, the old lady waddled out to the front porch and sat in a lounge chair to enjoy the view. Gimby grabbed two cookies out of the cookie jar and joined her.

“So, Justin, you’ve heard about the thieving monkey? What do you know about him?”

“Not much, Helen. I’ve asked around, but no one has seen him or knows anything about who owns him. Some people don’t believe the story. But I did hear something interesting on Tuesday when I took my bike in for repairs. The owner of the bike shop asked me if I’d mind waiting for a few minutes while he searched the back room. While I waited I decided to look at all the amazing cycling equipment. Did you know there are bike gloves, bike shirts and shorts, bike hats and even bike sox that match?”

They're in matching colors and have the same logo on the . . .”

“Jeez, my man, where are you going with this?”

Justin continued as though Nacho had never said a word. “For ten minutes I surveyed the gear, trying to decide if I wanted matching sox and gloves, then finally the bike guy came back into the store scratching his head. He told me that earlier when he came into the store after doing some work outside near the air pump, his cash drawer was open and all his money was gone. When I arrived, he had determined that no one was hiding in the store, so he was heading to search the back room.”

Ben pondered this a moment. “So you're thinking the thief could have been the monkey?”

“Well, why not? The bike guy didn't see anyone. The air pump is only a few feet from the building, so if a human had entered he would have seen him. However, a monkey could easily slip in, take the bills and then hide in a small dark place.”

Nacho interrupted: “One would assume so, but what if a human thief had been lurking inside all along? Or what if he snuck in the back door? Or climbed in a window? Or what if the theft happened earlier? Or . . .”

“Wow! I'm amazed, Nacho.” Justin said. “You, who are always accusing *me* of rambling, just did the prize ramble of all time!”

Helen stepped in to smooth things out. “I believe Nacho was thinking out loud, sort of surmising, sort of trying to pull things together.”

“Maybe you're right.” Justin agreed. “That's what we do, isn't it? Surmise and deduce, I mean. I'll concede

that Nacho may have a point here – someone could have already been lurking inside the bike shop.”

“Guys, could we get back to the point. Where is the thieving little bast . . . monkey? Where do monkeys hide when they’re on the lamb?”

No one seemed to know much about the habits of small monkeys, where they would sleep, what they would eat - except bananas - only that they liked to swing in trees.

“Oh, that’s just great, there are only about a thousand trees in Lahaina.” Justin observed.

“Maybe we could set a trap to catch him.”

Ben seemed to be suppressing a smile. “You mean like tempting him with a twenty dollar bill sitting on top of a banana . . . under a tree?”

Nacho slowly shook his head. “You don’t deter me my man, with your pathetic wit. I’m sure I will eventually come up with the perfect plan to trap that little shit monkey.”

“Okay,” Helen said as she slid back her chair, “you think about traps while we go to the jail to see how Chad is doing. Come on, Ben.”



CHAPTER 4.

Two weeks ago, on the Island of Crete in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, in the back garden of a small hotel near Iraklion, a young man was picking lettuce and green beans for dinner. Only two couples were registered at his small hotel but tips could be good, they were after all, Americans. They were the Youngbloods from California, and the Tuckers from New Orleans.

Gino, the young lettuce picker/busboy/waiter and chef, liked to have big tipping Americans at the *St. Helena*. True, the small hotel was out of the way and certainly not in the same class as the posh upscale hotels on the other side of Crete, but sometimes people just wanted, or *needed*, to get away from the crowds. Gino picked up



his basket, heavily laden with fresh produce and headed for the kitchen.

Lorrin Tucker and his wife Lucinda, formerly of New Orleans, were indeed escaping crowds. They had to get away from Lorrin's drawn-out and scandal-ridden expulsion from the Louisiana Supreme Court. The fallout was fodder for the media; they ridiculed him and demeaned his 20 year career on the bench. As the weeks passed, Lorrin was shunned by his fellow judges and his so-called friends. Even when dining with Lucinda in the familiar surrounding of his Club, he met icy stares and turned backs. He felt like a non-person.

Lorrin felt he was wrongly accused, felt that he had only been guilty of paying his debts to those who had gotten him appointed. He owed favors. Unfortunately some of his favors were a little worse than shady, they were illegal. For example, the unusually light sentencing of the son of Louisiana's newly elected Congressman, for drug possession. When the case came to the attention of the press they gathered like sharks, digging for more scandals. Lorrin's beautiful blonde wife, his third, was being dragged into the mess, and as much as Lorrin wanted to protect her, he could not.

As he sat on the patio of the St. Helena Hotel with a glass of scotch, thinking of home and his son, Mikie, his heart sank. The disgrace had affected Mikie's life, too. The best thing he could do for him was to disappear for a while. Greece was just a temporary choice, of course, only a distraction, a place to unwind, but not a place to settle. The place to settle and remain comfortable and

relatively invisible was Maui, where the key to his future awaited him at his mother's home in Lahiana.

On the other side of the world from Crete, Mabel Tucker sat on her lanai reminiscing about her life as a mother; about her son who had brought so much fulfillment and joy. In one week Lorrin and his wife, Lucinda, would be coming to live in Lahaina, his disgrace would be left behind in Louisiana. With so many miles between the Deep South and Maui maybe she, Lorrin and Lucinda could find comfort in being together.

Gathering up her strength, she hefted herself out of the patio chair and limped over to the porch railing. "Gimby, let's clean up the place, Uncle Lorrin's coming. I wonder how he feels about monkeys."

Gimby was no help when it came to house cleaning, he was much more talented in destroying the place. As soon as Mabel dusted or polished a table, he'd jump up and down on it dislodging traces of dirt and monkey hair. Clean windows or a freshly wiped kitchen counter were an invitation for him to grab a sticky date or a piece of juicy fresh fruit, leaving dozens of gooey monkey handprints. Even though he constantly sabotaged her housework, Mabel Tucker dearly loved Gimby, and she worried about him. Sometimes he would disappear for hours at a time. Where did he go?



CHAPTER 5.

“Amy’s plane arrives in two hours. Are you excited about her visit, my dear? Maybe a little nervous?”

“Yes, I am excited about seeing her again, but nervous? No. Amy’s nothing like the rest of that family.”

“I agree, and I know the reason. She, like you, was raised by a loving supportive family. You two were the lucky ones - the ones who got adopted.”

“You said it Ben, no one could have had better parents than my mom and Harlan. He was so sweet to arrange for Amy to come here last Christmas for the family gathering. I talked to dad this morning and he’s thinking of coming back over this fall.”

“Cool! I can’t wait to get Harlan back out on the boat for a fishing trip. Mambo can’t wait to do some serious

