

Hawaiian Who-dun-it

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Chapter 1

A bright, full moon hovered low over the calm, shimmering waters off Waikiki Beach. Stars were just beginning to twinkle in the darkened sky. Ukulele players strumming and singing traditional Hawaiian melodies were grouped under the green, leafy boughs of a huge banyan tree centered in the Aloha Hotel's picturesque courtyard fronting the ocean. Nearby, after-dinner guests were clustered in comfortable white rockers on the hotel's side veranda enjoying the spectacular view as they quietly conversed and listened to the sounds of the pleasant island ballads.

But a women's piercing shriek quickly ended this idyllic scene. Emanating through an open window a few stories above the courtyard, the scream drew the attention of all below. Conversation, laughter, music, the clinking of china and glasses abruptly ceased. Then the simple but prophetic words, "help, help, someone please help", resounded from above.

Wicker chairs creaked and were knocked over as guests hastily turned to one another searching for someone to lead a response. Despite the chaos, and to their credit, hotel staff quickly rushed to the scene above. Soon a police squad galloped up.

Rumors began to circulate; after all, Mrs. Stanton and her entourage were known to be staying in that part of the hotel. A price one pays, even in the early 20th century, for being married to a former governor and senator of one of the largest states in the union.

The year was 1905 and the handsome 4-story hotel was the first of many deluxe hotels which would come to line the sugar white sand beach of one of the most beautiful bays in the Hawaiian Islands.

Only three weeks prior Mrs. Stanton had left the gray, dreary winter climate of California to enjoy the warmth of an extended Hawaiian island vacation. Was this where it was all to end?

On the day of her departure from the mainland, rain was falling steadily as her horse-drawn carriage pulled into San Francisco Bay's dock area. Her continuous coughing coupled with the cold weather had made a trip to Hawaii seem imperative. Mary Beth, her long-time assistant, and Abby, a household maid, were to accompany her on the 5-day Pacific voyage needed to reach the island paradise some 2500 miles away.

Ensnconced in their 1st class accommodations aboard the 200 passenger steamer, SS Sandwich Isles, Mrs. Stanton and her entourage easily traversed the rough, January seas that separated San Francisco and Honolulu, even then Hawaii's largest city. After all, she was no stranger to

rugged, long distance travel. Europe, Australia, the Far East, Egypt—all had been journeys she previously enjoyed.

For the first few days, she dined alone in her cabin with only her assistant and maid for company. But as the elderly widow regained her strength, she gained her sea legs, venturing out on deck to mingle with some of the other passengers: a minister and his family, a businessman and his wife, a wealthy spinster from Chicago. As people do when traveling, they shared stories of previous adventures: sailing across the Nile in a felucca from Luxor to the Valley of the Kings; exploring Australia's outback with a climb to the top of Ayres Rock; admiring the beauty of India's temples; game hunting in Africa; viewing the spectacular collections at London's British Museum, Paris's Louvre, and Florence's Uffizi Gallery. Clearly, all were well-traveled.

No mention was made by Mrs. Stanton of the death in Italy of her 15-year old son, her only child, 20 years earlier. Those passengers who recognized her name knew of the university with a growing reputation that she and her husband had founded to honor the memory of the young man whose life was so tragically ended by typhoid.

In her thoughts, but never voiced was the recognition that one of the reasons she was fleeing San Francisco was her poisoning by nux vomica—naturally occurring strychnine. The poisoning had occurred only a few weeks before. The police had been notified and the suspected poisoning product tested. But no answers to the how and why had materialized. That's not to say a private detective agent hadn't been hired.

To her credit, she was satisfied to put the event behind her; to look forward to a full recuperation; to possible further travel beyond Hawaii to Japan. But first, she just wanted rest and recuperation under the warm tropical sun.

The ship's arrival was timed for the early morning hours. A cheer went up from the passengers gathered at the bow as spectacular Diamond Head Mountain came into view majestically towering over the Honolulu plateau. A pod of wintering whales swimming alongside the ship escorted them into the harbor.

The Royal Hawaiian Band performing island songs of welcome greeted their ship as it pulled into the dock. But the scene on the pier was bedlam. Thank goodness the American Consulate had arranged in advance for a carriage and driver with an assistant to meet Mrs. Stanton and her aides. Disembarking passengers were scrambling to hail porters for help with their baggage; trying to negotiate carriage transportation to their island destination; and the many waiting horses were nervously neighing and whinnying over the din.

For Mrs. Stanton, the journey from the dock to the Aloha Hotel was easily accomplished in a half hour. En route, her carriage passed by the handsome white stone Iolani Palace, which had been the home of several generations of native Hawaiian royalty; then crossed over an inland canal to the newly developing beach resort of Waikiki.

Familiar toots from a trolley's horn—not unlike the sounds near her San Francisco home--occurred as her carriage pulled up to the hotel's grand portico.

Bellmen resplendent in native dress of rustling grass rushed to drape welcome leis of purple and white orchids around the necks of Mrs. Stanton and her two assistants. A chorus of "alohas" rang out.

She could feel all of her cares and anxieties disappearing as she entered the handsome wood paneled lobby.

Her room on the 4th floor was comfortably furnished in handsome red wood furniture, made from the local native koa tree, complimented by matching drapes and bedspread in a blue green paisley fabric. The white, shuttered windows were open providing a pleasant salt water laden breeze. She was still rocking side to side after her long ocean voyage, but over all her cold symptoms had lessened and her spirits were certainly lifted.

Mary Beth and Abby were sharing a room across from Mrs. Stanton and appeared immediately when one of her steamer trunks was delivered. Thus, began the task of unpacking dresses, hats, gloves, parasols, shoes, and bags, appropriate for wearing in the tropics, as well as cosmetics and her necessary travel medications. Her other trunk containing clothing appropriate for traveling in Japan was stored in a room off the hotel's lobby.

It wasn't long before she and her assistant Mary Beth, armed with a book, were ready to venture downstairs. The elevator whisked them to the lobby where she learned the hotel featured tea on its ocean-view veranda each afternoon. "Heavenly", they would have some relaxing time to start a book by Mark Twain that she'd been saving for a reread. A collection of stories about the Hawaiian Islands, or Sandwich Islands as they were known, Twain had presented it to her years ago while he was living and working in California.

Mary Beth was such a wonderful companion—intelligent, sensitive to her needs, and an excellent reader. What more could be asked for as they relaxed with the sound of thunderous winter waves breaking as they rolled in over the gleaming aqua blue water. Had Mary Beth really been in her employ for 20 years? They had been through so much together—good and bad. They were on the book's second chapter when the tea bell sounded. Vacating their comfortable rockers, they moved around the porch's corner to where tea was being graciously poured accompanied by berry scones, petite cupcakes, and cookies. Dinner would be late that night.

A handsomely attired woman in a golden pineapple-colored dress played pleasant tunes on a baby grand piano in an adjacent salon. Fellow guests stopped at their table to introduce themselves. Dr. Biegelow from New York was one of the first. A pleasant enough man of about 40, he noted the Twain book resting on their table and commented that he'd had the pleasure of meeting Twain only last year and that the book Mrs. Stanton was reading was one he hadn't read

yet. Of course, other nearby guests chimed in their opinions. With one of them expressing his wish that Twain would “write a mystery novel.”

Mrs. Stanton felt relaxed and at home with her fellow hotel guests. She was particularly pleased to hear their positive comments on sightseeing forays arranged by the hotel staff.

Before long, Mary Beth was urging, “time for your afternoon rest, Mrs. Stanton.” This would allow ample enough quiet time before dinner at 8pm.

They were no sooner settled in their rooms when a knock sounded on the door. “Madame, sorry to disturb you,” the voice called out, “but I have a special invitation to deliver to you.” Queen Lily Uiolani herself had handwritten a note to Mrs. Stanton inviting her to lunch at the Palace in one week’s time to honor her visit to the Islands.

“So nice of her to remember me,” thought Mrs. Stanton. “So many years since we last met and how circumstances have changed for her.” Mrs. Stanton was, of course, referring to the United States dominance of the Hawaiian Islands and the non-violent, but forced removal of the island’s sovereignty. She and the Queen had met once before when Mrs. Stanton and her husband first visited the Islands in 1867. Circumstances were now different for both of them. Of course, “she would be honored to attend the lunch,” she told the messenger.

The hotel’s Luau that night was wonderful, but a little overwhelming for the widow. Roast pig, fresh pineapple, cocoanut carving, hula, ukulele playing, all setting the tone for her island vacation. With relief and regret, she retired to her room around 10 o’clock that evening. All the while being well looked after by Mary Beth and Abby.

She promptly fell asleep visualizing what tomorrow’s adventures might be.