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ISBN 0-8423-3633-8, mass paper

Printed in the United States of America

11 10 09 08 07 06 05 04 03 02  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

## *Chapter One*

NOVEMBER 1848

“Help!” a frantic voice called out.

Abby Kendall stopped in her tracks. Dusk had descended on the port town of Lahaina, Maui, but streetlights were glowing at the Pioneer Inn that stood just 100 paces from the harbor.

“Did you hear that?” asked Luke Quiggley, her 15-year-old best friend. He combed a hand through his sun-bleached hair.

Abby nodded. “It came from that direction,” she said, pointing right, toward the dirt road that led out of town. The distant shout had almost been drowned out by the laughter of sailors and the tinkling of piano keys escaping the saloons on Front Street.

Abby scanned the area. *Who needs help?* She quickly took in the familiar scene—the green hill rising up behind the ancient Hawaiian city, the colonial-style inn, and Banyan Tree Square.

“Help me!” The high-pitched scream came through labored breaths. “Please!”

The desperate cry pierced Abby's soul. "There!" she exclaimed.

A girl, about Abby's own age of 14, raced across the open square. She flew like the wind, holding her long skirt up in one hand. Her black hair streamed behind her. Abby instantly saw the girl was heading toward the inn, where sailors sat on the front porch. Abby and Luke ran toward her as Sandy, Luke's blonde puppy, galloped alongside, barking playfully.

They reached the inn's walkway at the same time as the Hawaiian girl. She doubled over, trying to catch her breath from the run. But when she lifted her flushed face, pushing away her damp black hair, her chocolate-brown eyes widened in amazement. "Abby—it be you?"

"Nalani!" Abby suddenly recognized the friend she'd met a year earlier on Maui's shores. "What's wrong? How can we help?"

"Fire—it be burning!" Frantically, Nalani pointed back the way she'd come. To Abby's dismay, an orange light glowed in the distance against the deepening gloom. Trees hid the flames, but the smell of smoke now reached her.

"We need to make a bucket brigade!" Nalani urged.

The nearby sailors and Abby's family gathered around the Hawaiian girl, who quickly begged them to come help. As she turned and headed back down the road, everyone hurried after her.

Sandy barked and raced ahead, her white-tipped tail still visible in the growing darkness. Soon all the runners had outdistanced Abby and her mother, from whom she'd inherited her weak legs. *How I wish I could keep up!* Abby lamented. Even her little sister, Sarah, only nine years old, could run faster!

But Abby's thoughts changed to concern when dark plumes of smoke swirled past her in the offshore breeze. *Don't let anyone get hurt, God!* Though her side ached from running, she forced herself to hurry on.

As she and Ma rounded a tall stand of plumeria trees, Abby heard it first—the crackling roar of a gigantic blaze. Then she saw the dreadful sight: furious flames engulfed a wooden building that stood a little ways up from the sandy shore. Fire leapt from the windows and curled onto the roof.

One glance told her it wasn't anyone's home. "Oh no," Abby gasped, "that's Pastor Achilles' church!"

Luke strode toward her, his usually happy face tense. "Yep," he shouted over the fire's roar.

Abby clutched his arm. "He's not in there?" She turned back to the terrifying scene, noting how close the pastor's small hut was to the inferno.

"No," Luke yelled, motioning over the sand toward the shoreline. "He's filling buckets." Abby saw that Pa, Uncle Samuel, her new aunt, Lani, and Sarah were already near the pastor, who stood in the surf. The thin, middle-aged man bent and filled

a wooden bucket, then passed it up the bucket-brigade line that reached to the blaze. Ma hurried toward the water to help.

“Come on,” Luke said, pointing to a spot in the line next to Duncan, the Scottish captain of their trade ship. At this close range, the heat felt like a searing blast from an oven. Black choking smoke billowed from the roof of the church in an angry cloud.

Though Abby’s eyes smarted and her skin felt singed, she worked hard to try to save the kind pastor’s church. A heavy bucket was thrust into her hands, seawater slopping over its rim. She passed it on and watched it move up the line to two men who took turns tossing the water on the flames. But the roaring blaze only seemed to swallow the liquid and grow larger.

*It’s hopeless, God!* Abby raised her eyes heavenward in anxious prayer. Even as she did, a nearby palm tree bent and tossed above the inferno. It writhed wildly over the church, where the heat licked its paper-dry fronds.

To Abby’s horror, the tree burst into flame, whipping like a gigantic torch against the black sky.

Charred, burning leaves broke free and were swept up on the wind. Sparks trailed on the air. Abby watched as a red-hot stream of them landed on the nearby roof of Pastor Achilles’ living quarters. The thatch roof instantly ignited.

“Duncan,” Abby yelled over the thundering blaze, “the pastor’s home is about to go up in smoke!”