

MOON OVER
MAALAEA
BAY

H. L. Wegley

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MOON OVER MAALAEA BAY

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my cousin, Mary, who remained joyful and encouraged others despite a long, crippling disease. She knew that her Lord is Elohim-Yachal, the God of Hope, the One she could trust. Shortly before this book was contracted, Mary graduated to heaven where she now runs free like the young girl I remember as a child.

Pure Genius Series

Hide and Seek, Book 1

On the Pineapple Express, Book 2

Moon Over Maalaea Bay, Book 3

Triple Threat, Book 4 (coming soon)

Praise for H.L. Wegley

Hide and Seek

“The author has done a great job of weaving a very exciting, well written story together that I could not put down until I finished it in one reading. I had to find out what happened.” ~ Thomas H. Hinke, IT/Computing Security

“Mr. Wegley—let’s see more of Jennifer & Lee. Either write faster, or get your publisher to publish faster. I’m waiting!” ~ Kate Hinke, Writer & Editor

“...the story really comes alive and pulls you along for a heart-stopping ride. *Hide and Seek* by H.L. Wegley is a definite keeper if you love suspense with a touch of romance. “ ~ Ginger Solomon

1

In light of recent events, she should be dead. Jennifer Akihara should no longer exist.

And now she doesn't.

The thought brought a smile to her lips.

Nearly nine hours ago, in another world three thousand miles away, Jennifer Akihara became Mrs. Lee Brandt. "Jennifer Brandt," she whispered. It sounded right. It *was* right. And the dangers that nearly prevented her from taking Lee's name were gone, either locked away in a federal prison or dead.

Spending her wedding night with Lee in a tropical paradise would be the perfect start to their life as man and wife. But the perfect start had been delayed.

In the fading twilight, under a purple sky, Jennifer glanced up at Lee's brilliant, blue eyes as he walked beside her in his cargo shorts and muscle shirt, looking—she hated clichés, but there was simply no other word for him—hot. Tonight, on this island, extremely hot. And the warm, humid trade winds, which caressed her skin and ruffled Lee's hair, cooled nothing.

Lee seemed unusually quiet. Maybe he was disappointed about their room not being ready.

She moved close to him, gently brushing against his side with each step as they strolled through the menagerie of colorful Kihei shops. The fragrance of pineapple, mango, and coconut mingled with those of

cloves and cinnamon near the kiosks selling soaps, candles, and lotions.

She looked up at him, wondering what was on his mind. It was time to probe. "If someone hadn't broken into our room just before we arrived, right now we would be—"

"We'd be watching the moon over Maalaea Bay out that big window. I know."

"If *someone* hadn't insisted on *that* room, maybe we could've gotten *another* room, and we could be—"

"I know, sweetheart. But when you see the sunset from our room tomorrow evening, you'll understand. That room is special. We can eat dinner here at the shops, and by 7:30 our room door will be fixed and the electronics that were stolen will all be replaced, just like the manager promised. And...we get a free night for our inconvenience."

"Inconvenience? That's hardly the word for what I feel." She met his gaze with love and longing in her eyes.

Thoughts of being alone with him filled her mind. She touched her face. Like Lee, it was hot.

He smiled at her. "You should see your cheeks, Jenn."

Her hand jerked back to her face.

"Didn't you overdo the blush a little?" He looked down at her and grinned.

His grin told her he was back from wherever his mind had wandered, and he knew exactly what she was thinking. Lee was an expert at reading her mind, and he loved to tease her, especially when the teasing turned her permanently tan cheeks a rosy red.

"In this climate a woman doesn't need makeup to—" Her cell phone filled the tropical night with the

spirited sounds of “The Texas Aggie War Hymn.”

“Lee!” She stared into his laughing eyes, vacillating between jabbing him in the ribs and kissing his smiling lips. “I can’t believe you talked me into loading that ring tone on my phone.”

“Too bad I only get to hear it when the caller ID’s blocked. Bet it’s Peterson. Calls from his FBI phone are always blocked. Aren’t you going to answer it?”

“Only *this* call. Then I’m turning this insidious little device, with your alma mater’s fight song on it, *off*.” She stopped, flipped her cell open, and raised it to her ear. “This is Jennifer Aki—I mean Jennifer Brandt...No, we’re fine. Don’t concern yourself, and please stop calling.” Her voice rose, but the heat of her anger quickly dropped in temperature to an icy chill.

She snapped the phone shut and stood staring across the shops into the dark parking lot beyond. Who was he? Was she being stalked again? No. It couldn’t—

“What was that about? We’re on our honeymoon. It’s our wedding night. Peterson wouldn’t actually—”

“It wasn’t Peterson.” She shivered. The warm, Maui evening had grown cold. The trade winds became an arctic blast. She put her arms around Lee and pressed her cheek into his chest. The two phone calls and the incident with the room were upsetting. “It was the same man who called while we were at SeaTac. Still asking questions. Still claiming to be Peterson’s assistant, but—”

“But Peterson hasn’t had an assistant since Bastian washed out of the bureau.”

She looked up at him.

He studied her face, and his winning smile returned. “Don’t let it upset you, sweetheart. You’re still a celebrity in Seattle, especially after rescuing Katie

and the other girls from the traffickers. The media can't get enough of you. They're probably trying to spy on you during our honeymoon. You've got paparazzi problems." He scanned her slowly, systematically. "I can't say that I blame them, especially when you hit the beach in your swimsuit tomorrow." He slipped his arms around her. "We'll keep a low profile on the island. I won't let them bother us."

After hearing his voice, his reassuring words, and now feeling his arms around her, Jennifer's chill warmed to a more comfortable temperature. "You're probably right." She pressed the power button on her cell. It played its farewell tune as she dropped it into her shorts pocket. "Well, they can't call anymore." She sighed and clasped her hands behind Lee's neck, letting the love in his eyes pull her to a place she wanted to remain forever. "Now where were we?"

He pulled her close.

She didn't resist. There was no reason to resist. Not now. Not ever again. As she had vowed a few hours ago, from this day forward she was his completely. When their lips met, the night grew warm again. But Lee's kiss was several degrees hotter than warm, promising much, much more.

"Where we were, was on our way to dinner. Then back to our room."

"What time is it?"

"It's almost 7:00."

She cupped his cheek with her hand. "I've got a proposition for you, Mr. Brandt. Our room is almost ready, so let's skip dinner, get a couple of iced lattes, and drink them on the way back to our room. We only stood on the balcony for a few minutes, but I know that right now, waves are splashing just underneath the

bedroom window. Look." She pointed into the western sky. "The moon's nearly full over Maalaea Bay. It'll be shining in through the big window and—"

He pressed a finger against her lips. "Shhh. It's a deal. You can be very persuasive when you want to be. Maybe you should've gone to law school instead of taking the research position with NSA." He gave her his coy smile. "Then again, making a proposal like that in a courtroom could get you disbarred."

She sought a witty reply, but her eyes caught a familiar image shining golden yellow inside the glass counter behind Lee. "Look. Gold whales tails. I lost mine the night of my master's ceremony." She refocused her gaze on Lee's eyes. "You could really ingratiate yourself with your bride by replacing it for her on her wedding night."

He rested his strong hands on her bare shoulders. At his touch, the night grew even warmer.

She stepped closer, pressing her cheek into his chest and listening to the rhythm of his heartbeat, her soul's favorite music.

"How grateful would Mrs. Brandt be?" He kissed her forehead.

She looked up and met his gaze. "More grateful than she's ever been. But first you need to walk to the espresso stand by the street and buy her an iced latte while she picks out a necklace."

"OK. Find your necklace." Lee's index finger traced a circle around her neck, then traced a path up to her chin, continuing until it touched the tip of her nose. "I'll be right back with our coffee." He strode away towards the espresso stand.

Jennifer's gaze returned to the jewelry counter where she searched for a whale-tail necklace like the

one she had lost more than a year ago. Her search was soon forgotten when she became lost in anticipation of their time alone together and warm thoughts of her love for the man who had saved her life so many times in so many ways—the man who had introduced her to the one true God Who had saved her soul for eternity.

Lee walked down a long aisle between shops. Nearly halfway to the street, he stopped and turned to look at Jennifer.

Her hands rested lightly on the glass counter and her brown, almond-shaped eyes roved over the array of jewelry behind the glass. The trade winds blew gently through the shopping area animating the gentle waves in her dark hair, while the permanent tan from her Japanese-Hawaiian heritage created a stunning contrast to her white shorts and red tank top.

In his thirty years on the planet, Lee had never seen anyone as beautiful as Jennifer, a beauty that went deep, all the way to her heart.

Nine months ago he had given up searching for someone to spend his life with. He'd given up on his job. He had just given up, a man simply going through the motions of living. Then God used his mentor Howie and a terrorist conspiracy to bring them together. When God did things, He did them right.

Was it a match made in heaven? Yes. But due to the terrorists, it had started out in...well, the other place. Since that day, his life hadn't been the same. How could it be? He had fallen in love with a twenty-six-year-old Miss Universe who had an IQ rivaling Einstein's?

You fool. It's your wedding night. Stop gawking at her from forty feet away. Get the coffee, buy the necklace, and take her home. The moon isn't going to hang over Maalaea Bay forever.

He took one more longing look, mustered the strength to pull his gaze away from Jennifer's shapely form, and hurried towards the espresso stand.

Unlike the nearly deserted back row of shops where Jennifer waited for him, the sidewalk along South Kihei Road was filled with tourists enjoying the warm evening. The aroma of freshly ground Kona coffee could almost create a caffeine buzz simply by inhaling it.

Lee ordered two iced lattes. While he waited, he looked westward, above the gently swaying palm trees lining the beach. The moon was full, a bright silver disk in the western sky. Unlike the light pollution of Seattle, the lights of Kihei did little to dim the twinkling stars sprinkled generously across a field of dark-purple.

By the time the barista handed him the two icy drinks, he felt an ache deep inside. Lee smiled, realizing he already missed Jennifer. This was the longest time they'd been apart since they left for SeaTac Airport after their wedding ceremony. What would it be like if they ever had to endure a long separation?

He hurried down the aisle between the shops towards the back row where Jennifer hopefully had found her necklace.

Lee didn't see her as he approached the jewelry shop. She must have moved to the opposite counter.

A brightly clad Hawaiian lady now stood behind the counter, straightening her wares on the shelf above.

Good. They could purchase the necklace and then—he stopped. Jennifer wasn't at the opposite counter. Apprehension began incubating in his heart. He stepped to the display counter and tried to shut off the incubator. "Excuse me, ma'am. Did my wife find a necklace here?"

"Your wife? Since I returned from my break I haven't seen anyone." She shrugged and shook her head.

His apprehension now transcended incubation. "She was just here. About five foot two, long, dark hair, very beautiful."

The lady gave a frown. "No, I haven't seen—"

A commotion three shops away interrupted their conversation. A wide-eyed woman scurried towards the street, clutching her cell phone.

When he didn't see Jennifer there, he turned his attention back to the shopkeeper. "If she returns, tell her to wait for me. I'll be back in a minute."

"Check the ladies' room. When women disappear, nine times out of ten that's where they are."

"Thanks. I'll keep that in mind." He turned to search another row of shops, realizing his heart had shifted into a higher gear.

Lee wove back and forth through several adjacent rows, then looked down several perpendicular rows of shops. A nagging worry again tried to intrude. He squelched it.

He would check the ladies' room next. *Until I've done that, I'm not going to worry.*

He noticed a sign directing shoppers to the restrooms. He followed it.

A middle-aged lady with a pleasant smile approached.

He pulled out his wallet. "Excuse me, ma'am."

"Yes?"

"I seem to have misplaced my wife. While you're inside, would you mind checking to see if she's there? Her name is Jennifer." He slipped their engagement picture from his wallet and held it out for her to see. "Here's her picture."

The woman's eyes immediately focused on his ring, then her gaze went to the picture. A wise woman. "Sure, I'll see if—my, she's a real beauty. I'll let you know when I leave, or I'll send Jennifer out to you."

"Thanks, ma'am."

As the lady entered the building, the wail of a distant siren grew louder. It was joined by several other sirens. The knot forming in his stomach tightened. When the sirens converged on the side of the shops bordering South Kihei Road, he felt a strong urge to run towards the flashing red and blue lights. But he needed to wait for the lady. He might be worried about nothing.

What's taking her so long?

The door opened, and the lady walked towards him, now frowning. "Your wife isn't in there, and no one inside remembers seeing her."

"Ma'am, are you absolutely sure?"

"Yes. I'm sorry, but she's not there."

"Thanks."

A sinking sensation sent his stomach into a nauseating freefall. His rising panic drummed in his chest. Lee whirled towards the flashing lights along the street and trotted in that direction.

Three police cars had parked hurriedly in disarray near the curb. A small crowd of people gathered near them. The buzz of their conversation was too far away

to understand any of it.

While Lee jogged towards the street, he passed an open-air sports bar, where a large, flat-screen TV flashed a bright red message. People crowded around it, excitement mixed with concern on their faces.

Lee stopped when he saw the two large words, "Amber Alert." Another message scrolled across the screen. He maneuvered between two taller men to read it. "Teenage girl abducted from Kihei shops at 7:00 PM. Description Asian, five foot one to five foot three, sixteen or seventeen years old, last seen wearing a red tank top and white shorts.

It was Jennifer's description on the screen. Being petite, she could have easily been mistaken for a younger person. He glanced at his watch. 7:15 PM. She had disappeared at 7:00 PM. With his heart pounding out the tempo of terror, Lee sprinted towards the ominous lights of the police cars.

2

Lee ran towards two policemen engaged in conversation beside the nearest patrol car. As he approached, they spun to him, their hands simultaneously reaching for their guns.

He stopped, shoved his palms towards them, and yelled between breaths. "The kidnapped girl!"

The tall officer had drawn his weapon, but kept it pointing downward.

The shorter policeman met his gaze and studied his face. "Do you have some information about her?"

"Yeah. She's not a girl. She's my wife, Jennifer Akihara, now Jennifer Brandt. We're here on our honeymoon. One second she was here, then she was gone."

"And you are?" The taller officer said, holstering his gun.

"Lee Brandt." His trembling fingers struggled to pull out his wallet. He took one agonizing look at the photo then handed them the wallet-sized, engagement picture. "Here's a picture of her."

The two officers studied it for a moment.

"Matches the description we got," the shorter one said.

"I'll say it does, but not many women can match her." The taller officer pursed his lips as he turned towards Lee. "Let me give you some advice. It's not a good idea to run up to officers here like you're going to

attack them. There's Maile Amber Alert; we're in the process of locking down this entire area." He paused. "Now, can you tell us anything else about her disappearance?"

What had been circulating on the periphery of Lee's conscious mind suddenly became an intuitive conclusion. Whatever the consequences, he decided to go with it. "Officer, this isn't a random abduction. And she's an adult. She's twenty-six."

The shorter officer flashed him a glance. There was sympathy in it. The first encouraging thing he had noticed in the last half hour.

"I'm Officer Yagi, Mr. Brandt." He stuck out a thumb at the taller guy beside him. "This is Officer Kaai. What makes you think this was a targeted attack?"

Lee took a calming breath. How should he tell them this story? He just needed to state the bare facts. "Jennifer and I recently amputated one arm of an international sex-trafficking ring—a fifty-million-dollar-a-year arm. Somebody's unhappy about what—"

"Yagi, it's that babe, uh, lady from Seattle. This story broke a few weeks ago."

"I remember her. Who could forget?" Yagi looked at Lee and pointed to his patrol car. "We'll need you to come to the station with us. This case is going to get elevated in a hurry. I'll call in what you've told us and send the picture ahead while we're on the way. We will need to get the FBI invol—"

"Call the Seattle Field Office." Lee interrupted. "Agent Peterson there has been on the trafficking case from the beginning."

"I'll pass that on. But there are official channels we

need to use for notifying other agencies." Yagi opened the back door of the patrol car and gestured towards it.

"Fine." *I'll use my own channel.* Lee pulled out his cell and climbed into the back seat, a cage that felt like a prison. Being locked into the confined space was getting to him. He needed air and used his call to keep his mind off the rising panic.

With Kaai driving, Yagi's words flowed in a long, steady stream as he passed information to the local police.

Lee hit Peterson's FBI cell number on his speed dial, placing a call the agent would answer if at all possible. There was a long delay while the call went through to the mainland. The delay was followed by several rings.

Come on, Peterson, answer.

"Agent Peterson here."

Lee looked out the window and up into the night sky. *Thanks.*

"Peterson, Lee Brandt. Someone abducted Jennifer here on Maui and—"

"What!" Peterson boomed out, followed by a rare expletive. "You two are on your honeymoon. Who would..."

"It's got to be an international component of the trafficking ring. I think they're trying to make Jennifer an example. But someone here thought she was a teenager, so there's an Amber Alert out for her."

"That's a good thing. Using the alert, I can lock down the whole island. All of the islands if I have to. Where are you now, Lee."

"In a patrol car on the way to the police station in Wailuku."

"Good. Tell them everything you know and even