

▼▼▼ CHAPTER 1

The final huddle of shacks and shanties lay at least a mile behind them now, and from this height Elly caught glimpses of impossibly blue ocean. Even at five in the afternoon, it was beastly hot. When she inhaled, the heated air was rich with pine, salt, and an herb she couldn't identify, and all she longed for was a cold drink and some shade. But the island taxi had no air conditioning to speak of, only a humming creak that kept time with the driver's radio. Stately homes swung by, perched on the cliffs overlooking the sea, their sweeps of lawn and iron gates closed to casual visitors. The driver careened around another bend, and Elly gripped the seat back in front of her, squinting at the addresses.

"Eight twenty," she shouted at the driver, above the whine of the radio music. Then tapped his shoulder and gestured at a pink-stucco mansion on the left. He nodded and ground into a lower gear, pulling up in front of the huge gates.

Elly thumbed her screen, comparing Trevor Martin's address to the numbers. If times were normal, she'd have called Trevor, let him know she was on her way with the painting, ready to finish it—no need for her to return the deposit he'd emailed about just yesterday.

The driver turned down the music and pushed the button of a call box attached to the gate.

After a pause, a tinny voice said, "Yes?"

"Miss . . ." The driver glanced back at her.

"Sorensen." She craned forward. "Elly Sorensen to see Mr. Martin."

"One moment."

They waited. The ocean pounded somewhere far below; a bird sang, its note high pitched and monotonous. Sweat slid down the back of Elly's neck. DC had been cool all week, mid-October gloom with grumbling skies and colorful leaves. The island of Bonaire was bright, hot, and placid.

After a few minutes, a man's laconic voice with a strong British accent said, "Who did you say was calling?"

Elly leaned further out the window. "Is Trevor Martin there, please?"

"Trevor Martin," the man said, as if he tasted the name and found it funny. "Lucky us, we're the new owners here."

Odd. As she checked the address again, sinking back in her seat, an overheard conversation from her last visit to the island floated unhappily into memory. A glittery cocktail party for the small group of artists she'd traveled with, canapés on silver trays, and two gossipy women teasing Trevor. Backgammon tournaments were legion on the island, drawing gamblers from around the Caribbean. A fool might lose everything in an hour at those games, one of the women had said, and winked at him.

Elly shook off the memory, irritated at its placement in this moment of arrival. After the party, when she'd asked, Trevor talked of his gambling lightly, in fun. A hundred dollars, even a thousand, was spare change to a trust fund kid. And even after a few days, she knew Trevor was nobody's fool.

She leaned outside again, tried not to touch the burning metal of the doorframe with her bare arm, and made her voice as tight as the disembodied one coming through the little box. "Kindly be good enough to tell me where I can find him."

Now amusement rippled through the Brit's reply. "Certainly, madame," he said. "I suggest you try the Flamingo Resort."

The intercom buzzed and went silent. Her driver turned around in the seat, his face alive with sympathy. "Where you want me to drive you now?"

Elly took a deep breath of the hot still air pouring through the open window. This wasn't going to be as easy as she'd imagined. "The Flamingo Resort," she said at last. "You know where it is?"

He nodded, put the taxi in gear.

As they sped down the sharp curves to the sea, Elly steadied herself on the vinyl-covered seat back and cursed the insanity of this trip. Trevor's email gave her only a temporary escape, a few days' distance from the debris of her life in DC, then back to grave decisions that awaited: her failure of an art career, her lack of funds. Her brother, Charlie, had lent her just enough for a cheap flight with three layovers. She'd counted on free lodging, Trevor Martin offering the same luxury digs as her last visit—even if she'd declined his guest room then, she'd accept now. And the painting fee, which would pay her mortgage for another few months until she found another teaching job.

The island was small; he shouldn't be that hard to locate. She leaned her hot face into the air from the window. She'd book just one night, close her eyes to the outrageous price, shower and sleep, then resume her search in the morning. It never paid to look desperate.

When she glanced up, the taxi driver was staring at her in the rearview mirror. "Don't worry, miss," he shouted over the radio's whine. "We'll find your man."

THE FLAMINGO RESORT was sold out. Elly stood at the front desk, her sweat-damp hair lifting in the breeze from the ceiling fan, and listened to the desk clerk apologize. The buzz of sound ran across her skin like prickly heat. The place looked deserted, no one even lounged in the relative coolness of the tiny open-air lobby.

She was about to point this out when the telephone behind the desk jingled to life, a foreign noise Elly remembered from her last visit. The clerk gave her another apologetic smile and picked it up. An outraged female voice with a heavy French accent screeched through the receiver. "At this cost, I will not stay in bed with criminals!"

Elly took a step back.

“Madame,” the clerk soothed. But his practiced tones had no effect.

“I will leave *immediately*,” the voice rose a few decibels, “and you can be certain I will never return.” Silence, as if the woman scanned an airline schedule, and Elly remembered the sunlit terminal she’d just exited hours ago. She hefted her suitcase in one hand, wondered if the taxi was still outside.

The clerk held up one finger. “One moment,” he mouthed to Elly. Then, “Madame, we are so terribly sorry . . .”

Shrieks resumed. The clerk closed his eyes. At the next pause, he said quickly, “Yes, no question, a full refund, and I’d like to offer you a complimentary taxi to the airport . . .”

He hung up the phone and stood for a moment, staring down at his polished countertop. Then he looked up, and his smile was genuine now. “It seems,” he said, “we have an unexpected opening.”

SHE’D FORGOTTEN HOW intense the light was here, how it seared both skin and eyes. It was six now, almost dinnertime. Map of the resort in hand, she wandered outside to the seawall and a corner of shade. Lost in the pale blue of the waves that caught salmon streaks from the lowering sun, she almost didn’t hear the shout from inside the lobby. She stood quickly, but there was only a chatter of voices, so she sank back down. Nothing to do with her. She felt impossibly hot, glad for the room that would be ready soon.

Just then, the lobby door crashed open. A tall man walked out, his hand a vise on the shoulder of a teenage girl. The man, obviously her father, growled warnings in low tones as he led the girl across the patio. The girl fell against him, her candy red flip-flops catching on the pavement, but the man just caught her with his beefy hand and set her down firmly on a stone bench. Elly knew she stared. Uncanny, how much the girl resembled Lily, Elly’s younger sister. Elly couldn’t turn away from the play of light and shadow on the girl’s tanned arms

and snow-bright hair, but even more, the sharp eyes, full of hurt and pride, just as Lily's had often been.

The girl must've felt her scrutiny, even her longing. She suddenly turned to glare at Elly across the dim expanse. Elly gave a half smile of apology, shrugged off the vision, and gathered up her bag and map to go find the bar.

It was too late for sunbathers along the seawater pool, the empty chairs still hot from the late-afternoon heat. The water lay green and still, but the open-air bar hummed with customers, and several square tables with inlaid backgammon boards waited for evening.

Elly approached the bar stools, scanning their occupants' faces. Finding Trevor here before any games began was unlikely. He didn't drink, at least not six months ago when she last saw him. His face was unmistakable: an odd collection of features that never quite made a whole. Even the start of his portrait stumped her at first, how to paint a kind likeness. But then he'd smiled, his eyes lit from within, and all fell into a relative harmony. He'd worn his dark hair short then, his tall body tanned and well dressed, a wealthy man at ease with himself, and Elly couldn't imagine he would've changed that much.

When no one even faintly resembled him, she thought to ask the bartender, a tall blond with skin like a perfect latte. Then she turned away. She'd check the dive shop next. The Brit made it sound like Trevor lived here, but that was ridiculous.

THE DOOR TO the dive shop was propped open, and Elly heard someone whistle inside, low and off key. The red building was not much more than a shack, with racks of wetsuits like black ghosts under the eave of the small porch and three brightly painted benches lined up in the shade. The pier stretched long and empty except for the bobbing dive boat hooked alongside, resting after its afternoon run. The clerk had proudly advertised this week as a special benefit for the island's underwater marine preserve, attracting divers from all over the world. "Even from Australia." He shook his head as to why

Australians would travel to Bonaire, since they had their own reef, the best in the world.

Elly didn't call herself a scuba diver, but she'd loved her first taste of diving on her last visit. She hadn't imagined how silent it could be, deep in the ocean, just the sound of her own breathing through the regulator attached to her scuba tank. Trevor, who lived half the year on his boat and volunteered as a dive master, had taught Elly how to clear her mask, how to descend, how to swim in an elegant rhythm that reminded her of ballet. Painting him was hard, diving with him completely comfortable.

She slipped off her sandals and crossed the sand-crusting porch, almost enjoying the warm sting on her bare feet. In the open doorway, she peered in and let her eyes adjust to the dim interior. The whistle had stopped; the space was empty.

"Hello?" she called out. "Anyone here?"

"Just me." A man appeared from behind a beaded curtain, holding a broom.

Elly squinted at his backlit form, took in the longish dark hair tied into a pony, the tanned lanky arms. "I'm looking for someone," she began. "A dive master."

"I'm a dive master. What can I do for you?"

As the man turned slightly, light from the doorway caught his face.

It was Trevor.

▼▼▼ CHAPTER 2

Rosie stayed at least ten meters behind Mr. Quentin's lumbering form along the winding paths back to the cluster of bungalows. Crushed clam shells reflected the late-afternoon sunlight, hurting her eyes, so she found brief shade near a prickly bush while the man fumbled with the door. It was past five, siesta time almost over, but the resort was still asleep.

Rosie preferred nighttime for her scouting, and she preferred it when her dad picked guests who bragged too much, like the two loud Americans from Kansas who bested him too obviously in the games a few days ago. The next morning Rosie got the fatherly nod, pulled out her lock picks, and began her hunt to find out how rich they really were.

Most of the guests didn't even lock their doors, which made a break-in too easy. Last night, she'd slipped into the room of a thin, sallow woman from France and unearthed a hefty wad of folded bills in a side pocket of the woman's shabby suitcase—even though she bet miserly amounts at the backgammon table. Her dad won it all in that afternoon's games, and it didn't take a genius to know why the French woman would be gone by tomorrow.

The lock picks didn't work. She got Mr. Quentin's doorknob open but the dead bolt, not encountered on anyone else's door, was slammed. She worked it for a while in the hot silence, her fingers sure and practiced. Close by, on the beach, waves licked sand, and she heard a seabird cry. Different here than back home. Even the birds sounded alien.

When the tumblers still refused to shift, Rosie crept along the stone wall that circled to a patio. And found it: a tiny opening in the sliding glass door that Mr. Quentin forgot to close. Or maybe he was a fresh-air fiend, like Rosie's dad.

She saw the hump of Mr. Q's body under the sheets, heard his snores. After that, it was all too easy.

ROSIE ONLY HAD a margin of curiosity about the guests she scouted. Her ex-boyfriend Jerome would've enjoyed lifting the wad of bills on Mr. Quentin's dresser. Seventy-six this month, he'd told another guest, and this Caribbean trip was a birthday present. Although autumn wasn't an ideal time for an island vacation, one understood, he'd risked even the hurricanes. Everybody knew about the games on Bonaire, but not everyone had the money to lose big at them.

Mr. Quentin was a messy guest. In the dim light, the shutters drawn, Rosie almost stumbled over two enormous leather suitcases on the floor. Golf shoes and evening shoes lay piled alongside scuba equipment. Masses of sodden Kleenex on the floor near the bed made Rosie stop for a moment and pair up two trainers, striped blue and black, wonder if the man had allergies.

The snores were loud. In out, in out, almost enough to deafen. She left the money on the dresser and bent to inspect a suitcase for more. Silky shirts, boxer shorts, a pair of shiny black pants that probably went with the evening shoes. Caps and head covers. She swiveled, looking, and there it was, on the dresser. Mr. Quentin's hair. The man wore a wig. People lost their hair for all kinds of reasons. Her mother lost hers to cancer before she died, and Rosie still had a lock of it, blond and flat, pressed between pages of one of her journals from that summer she turned thirteen. She was sixteen now. And knew a lot more about life. And what you had to do to get by.

She reached for the silver wig and slid it over her short blond hair. It fit like a tight cap, smelled like talcum, and itched a little, but when she turned to the standing mirror, she looked older, twenty-five at

least. When her mother wore wigs, they just made her look more ill. She'd thrown them all in the rubbish after a few weeks.

Behind her, Mr. Quentin murmured in his sleep. Rosie carefully removed the hair and set it back on its plastic stand.

Then she saw in the mirror a horrifying sight: the man sat up in bed, his eyes wide open, and his mouth formed an O of surprise.

Rosie backed up fast.

But the man was faster. The bedside lamp went on. A raspy voice said, "Stop right there."

If Jerome were here, he'd have known what to do. Turn, race out the patio door—she knew enough to leave a door open, just in case; Jerome drilled that into her first thing. But instead, she froze. Maybe the voice reminded her of someone. Or the way she automatically obeyed a command. Cassie, her best friend back in Sydney, always teased Rosie about that.

Her legs wouldn't move.

"Turn around," barked Mr. Quentin. "Let me see you."

Rosie, cursing herself, turned. The man was out of bed now, even taller than he'd looked weaving down the crushed-shell pathway. And completely sober. "I should've known," he said. "I lost a hunk of cash to your father last night." Satisfaction filled his voice. "Wait til I tell him you were here."

ROSIE IMAGINED SHE'D get away once they were outside, but Mr. Quentin's iron lock on her forearm prevented any escape. He'd jammed the silver wig over his wispy grey hair and pulled on a towel-wrap, then spun her down the twisty pathways past rows of silent bungalows. Salt-scented wind stung her eyes and made her stumble, but every time, he yanked her back up. No talk, no noise, except their ragged breath.

The desk clerk was busy, the line long, but when Mr. Quentin shouted in his face, the other guests backed away fast. "Call her father," Mr. Quentin yelled. "Mr. Steven Ryan." He spelled it, and

Rosie tried to lock eyes with the clerk, roll them in joint disgust at this idiotic man, but the islander just straightened his khaki shirt and reached for the phone.

Within minutes her father arrived.

“Steven,” Mr. Quentin rumbled. “I believe I have something of yours.” He gave Rosie’s arm a short jerk. “Your daughter was shopping in my room.”

The waiting guests stared. Her father glared at Rosie, asked the desk clerk for pen and paper, and wrote an IOU to Mr. Quentin, paying back all he’d won the night before. Not until one big hand snatched the paper did the man release her. She stepped back fast, first towards her dad, instinctively, then thought better of it and fell onto a low bench by the lobby door to rub her arm. Her dad reached into the back pocket of his cargo shorts and drew out a wallet, picked out some bills, and handed them to the desk clerk.

“No harm done, I think.” Mr. Quentin gave Rosie’s father a little punch on the arm. “More fun at the tables tonight, eh, Steven?”

Rosie’s father narrowed his eyes. They all watched the man leave. As the huddle of guests resumed their line, Rosie’s dad turned to her. “You!” he growled. “Outside.”

ROSIE KNEW BETTER than to dash away from her dad when he looked like that. Anyway, where would she go? Bonaire was barely a pinpoint on any map, surrounded by choppy seas and a coral reef so fragile, divers had to avoid it. Cassie knew a guy on neighboring Aruba; she’d been ecstatic when Rosie told her about the trip. “Oh my God, you have to go see Geoff, he’s beyond gorgeous.” Few islanders, aside from the guard, smiled at her on her one excursion outside the resort gates. What would they make of an escaping teenager with a mongrel accent, part Aussie, part American? Laugh, probably.

Above them stretched the deep blue evening sky. Back home in Sydney, Rosie loved to slip out at dusk and lie on the warm stones of a dry creek near their house to watch the blue turn to black.

Her dad spun her around, keeping hold of her shoulder, and shook it a little. Then he let her go, so suddenly she almost fell. Almost two meters of steel muscle from hunting and diving and breaking horses, he towered above her, spreading his feet, one finger pointing at her. “Rosie Ryan, what the hell are you about, sneaking into an old man’s room?”

Rosie toed the sand, not meeting his eyes. “Thought he was asleep.”

“You steal?”

“No! I just tried on his wig.”

“I don’t tolerate carelessness,” her father barked.

“But I . . .”

He held up one hand. “You do this kind of foolishness, you’re sixteen and that’s your decision. But if you get caught, you involve me.”

“You’re just mad because you lost the money.”

“Damn right,” her father said. “Two hundred quid isn’t peanuts, chookie. You’re going to win it back for me too?”

A short silence. “You remember your promise, Rosie?” The soft tone was more threatening than his shouts. “Behave like a normal young woman, not a silly ankle-biter. Redeem yourself from that stupid fire incident, enjoy the ocean here, and let life settle down.”

She remembered. Outside their back door, standing in the dust, the sun setting, her clothes rank after a night in juvie. Jerome hunted her, swore she’d pay for the van she’d burned. Her sister, Agatha, gloated, taking Jerome’s side just because she was the one who slept with Jerome now. Rosie still felt that surge of satisfaction when she thought of the black shell of the burned-out van that glowed like a bonfire in the parking lot behind the bar where he played. The hulk of it was no great loss. Her father bailed her out, convinced the police that she was still upset about her mother’s death, used the benefit month on Bonaire—that “protect the world’s reefs” society he belonged to—as an excuse to flee. Agatha stayed home to take care of the horses. It would be just Dad and Rosie. And they’d let her go.

But even though he'd gotten her out of trouble with the law, there *was* the promise to her dad. Straighten up and fly right, or off to Bradey's boarding school, instead of the art institute.

"Your granny'll ship you off to Bradey's, sure as God made apples," her father sighed. "What will I tell her now?"

"You could not tell her anything."

"This is the world she circles in. Everyone who has a house on these islands knows each other. With our luck, Mr. Quentin is her friend. Your granny'll find out so easy, it'll make you head snap."

Her dad looked gloomy. He believed what he said, and fear shot through Rosie, tingling her skin in a different way. What if he decided not to protect her from her granny anymore? She imagined missing out on art school and suddenly couldn't bear it.

She took a deep breath. "And what if I changed Mr. Q's mind? Redeemed myself so he'd only have good things to say?"

Her dad smiled a little. "Have to work hard to redeem today, my girl. At least in your granny's eyes, if she finds out."

"If she finds out, well . . ." Rosie thought hard. She had to keep her dad on her side. She'd seen him talk Granny into spending twenty thousand on that thoroughbred horse. But she saw the new exhaustion in his eyes. "We might make a deal, in case she doesn't. Just you and me." She waited, letting it sink in, her father a gambler in all ways. They'd bet on stuff since she was able to talk. "A deal with you, on your terms, and if I win, I get the art school. If I lose, I'll go with Granny's choice. No arguments."

Her father's big mustache was ruddy-blond, but in the faded light it was white against his tan. He stroked the two scraggly handlebars that framed the sides of his mouth and made him look like an American gangster. "I name the terms?"

"You name them." The higher the bar, the better she jumped it, the prouder he was.

"I think you'd need," he paused, "to find gainful employment here on the island. To show your granny new character building and maturity."

Employment. Rosie hadn't expected that. It made her sick inside. A job meant no free time. No time to draw, no chance to finish the last assignment for her art school portfolio, the super-hard portrait she had to come up with. Not if she worked from dawn to dusk. And such a weird promise to ask—her dad, the suave criminal, so uneasy with gainful employment. But what could she do, anyway? Wait tables? Tend bar? Clean the pool? Clean toilets?

As if reading her expression, he shook his head. "Don't care what you do, as long as you don't hurt yourself or anyone else. You'd need a good report at the end of it, showing value by your employer, that you contributed."

As her father waited for her answer, Rosie mentally shuffled her options. A tiny resort, staff all islanders. There was the dive shop. Tiny too, run by one guy, but busy as a stampede during this special dive month. The dive master might need help. Especially with beginners. Rosie was more than qualified. She stared down the crushed-shell path that wound towards the red building by the pier. He was a looker too. A little odd in the face, but nice enough. Older than Jerome. Envy material for her friends back home.

She'd ask tomorrow, as soon as he opened, before the 10:00 dive. She'd make it work.

She held out her hand to her father, proud it didn't shake. Much. "Deal," she said.