

I would never admit this to Sadie, but by the time I'd set my feet on the pebbled beach on Saba, I'd already forgiven her. Had she royally messed up missing the flight? Definitely. But it's not like she could control the weather. Staying mad at Sadie always had been an exercise in futility anyway. Frothy waves lapped at my feet, soaking the bottom of my pants, washing away any irritation I felt. I bent down to roll them up to my knees.

On either side of me, rocky cliffs rose up, blue-gray speckled with lush green. Everything was in technicolor here. Even the breeze seemed to hold a full spectrum. Some birds I hadn't seen before, brightly colored with big wings, swooped overhead and disappeared into the trees.

"This way," Lucas called to me. He was dragging my suitcase along a wooden walkway toward a winding road that was barely visible through the brush. Over the gentle heartbeat rhythm of the waves, a car horn beeped twice. "Our ride," Lucas said.

I picked my heels up from where I'd dropped them on the pebbles and tossed them into my bag.

"Coming," I called and headed toward the walkway. It seemed an odd thing to have on a beach until I noticed that the sand quickly gave way to dark rocks. At the road line, palm trees bowed in the wind.

I managed to catch up with Lucas before we reached the road.

"I need to say thank you to you. It wasn't pretty, but I definitely wouldn't have made it here on my own."

He looked at me, but only gave a subtle nod. That was it. I'd planned on saying more, but given his response, I decided it wasn't necessary.

Lucas set my suitcase in the back of a forest green SUV and a man whom I recognized from one of the pictures on the boat closed the hatch. He gave me a small wave.

"You can sit up front," Lucas said.

I climbed into the car, pausing to brush off my feet.

"Don't worry about it," the man said, eyeing me. He was already in the driver's seat.

"Sand is a part of life here. It's unavoidable."

I reached for my seatbelt. I'd forgotten that I was still wearing Lucas's jacket, but it was too late now to take it off.

"I'm Ken. Whatever Lucas told you about me, it's not true."

"Marin Cole," I said. "He didn't mention you."

Ken glanced in the rearview mirror. "Harsh, buddy."

"We didn't have much of a chance to talk on the way over. I spent most of the ride below deck," I said. "There was a lot of rain." I plucked at the sleeve of Lucas's raincoat.

"It rained a little here, too. But on Saba the sun never stays covered for too long. It's one of many things to love about our unspoiled jewel." He eased the SUV off of the shoulder and accelerated around a curve. I grabbed onto the handle above the window. Sadie called them "oh shit handles", not that she ever needed one when I was driving, and I suddenly understood why. I also wished I was behind the wheel instead of Ken.

The windows were down and over the rush of the wind, he shouted, "So what do you think of our Saba, Marin?"

"It's unlike anything I've ever seen," I said.

"Marin's from Tennessee," Lucas piped in from the backseat. "She doesn't get out much."

Ken checked the rearview mirror. "And you've travelled the globe and probably would still admit that not much rivals Saba."

I liked this guy. He cast a glance my way and smiled. He was warmer than Lucas, with softer features, a round face and a big open smile. He would never wear sunglasses on a plane, I bet.

"How booked up are we this week?" Lucas asked.

"About 75%."

"Good. Anything else I should know?"

"The advertising firm is coming by in a few days to shoot some footage for the new campaign. Other than that, it's a quiet week, so you can relax and take some time for yourself, Lăobăn."

I looked over my shoulder at Lucas. He seemed fine, if not a bit obnoxious. He was definitely not the poster child of someone needing self-care. At the thought, I pulled out my phone to try Sadie again. After the sixth ring, I hung up.

"Still can't reach your sister?" Lucas asked.

"What's that?" Ken said.

"I was supposed to be here with my younger sister. Between her missing the flight and the weather, well, the trip's sort of turned into a disaster so far. I even picked up the wrong luggage and ended up with a newlywed's suitcase. Murphy's law, I guess."

"How so?"

"I finally take a vacation and it's more stressful than my job."

"Talk to me tomorrow," Ken said. "I doubt you'll be feeling stressed."

"You're that confident?"

"Yeah." He glanced at Lucas again. "It's virtually impossible to feel stressed at Paradise Resort."

"And you agree with this?" I asked Lucas.

"See for yourself," he said, turning his attention out his window