

Somewhere
In
Between

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*To all those who felt they didn't
have a voice.*

Chapter 1



“May I have your attention, please? The captain has placed the seat belt signal on as we begin our descent into Kauai,” the flight attendant cheerfully said into the loudspeaker. What I really felt like she was saying was more along the lines of Ms. Frizzle from Magic School Bus, ‘Seat belts everyone!’ Ms. Frizzle always sounded like she was bursting with rays of sunshine. I only felt the pit of my stomach slowly making its way to the tip of my dry tongue.

I glanced out the oval window next to me and saw the cotton candy hues the sun made as it danced across the Hawaiian ocean. It was freeing. Anyone would have thought so—except me. Kauai felt like my own personal Alcatraz complete with palm trees, sandy beaches, and one main road around the

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entire island. I mean, come on, this was everyone's destination spot. A romantic getaway on Hawaii's most remote island with the wildest flowers and tallest waterfalls.

I felt a tight squeeze on my hand and glanced over to see my mom pinching her eyes shut. She hated flying more than anything, especially when it meant hours over a perpetual body of water, but Tom had changed her, for now at least.

My mom was on to husband number three, and I stopped counting what number boyfriend he was after her incident with the crazy stalker. My mom blew through guys as most girls blow through nail polish. She'd met my dad the summer before college and managed to get pregnant. By some miraculous twist of fate, she decided to keep me and began waitressing in order to keep the water running. Somewhere along the way, a chef had taken an interest in her and decided to teach her how to cook. Turned out she was pretty good at it. I grew up eating soufflé, lobster bisque, and every type of pasta you could imagine.

While my mom seemed to have forged a career, her personal life was anything but progressive. Her first husband was Kelly. He was an Australian who had journeyed over to America to become a movie star. Countless auditions later, and enough rejection letters to fill the basket next to your bathroom toilet, he realized it wasn't for him. Conveniently, he realized the same about my mom and me.

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After that, she was a ship lost at sea, and I was her compass. She drowned herself in her sheets and tears, countless watching *Sleepless in Seattle* and yelling at Meg Ryan for loving Tom Hanks. It wasn't even two months later that Phil came into her life. Maybe it was partially her rebounded state or that she couldn't pull herself together, but my mom married Phil three months after meeting him.

Phil was a jeweler. That sounds weird—a man being a jeweler—but the man knew what women wanted, and he was good at selling it to them. He'd been successful enough to make his own chain, Ryan's Jewelers, which was always in competition with the local chains. My mom was always covered in gems. It was almost as if this was his way of claiming her for his own.

Phil was odd, though. He was secretive in ways I didn't know men could be. When he blew up, it felt like the whole house might shatter into a million pieces. His head would become red with rage, and the tiny bits of hair that grew only on the sides near his ears would stick out. Six years and two miscarriages later, my mom caught Phil in bed with our neighbor Shelly. After that, we nearly lost everything in the divorce. Phil took all my mom's jewelry and flushed it down the garbage disposal; the sound of chains and gems struggling for air will never escape my mind.

My mom dated a contractor named Wesley after Phil. He didn't last long, and neither did Lane or Mark or even the

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crazy stalker. Then Tom swooped in. He dazzled my mom in ways I'd never seen her dazzled. She fell for Tom, and I couldn't blame her. I kind of did, too. That didn't mean I was on board with being uprooted from San Francisco to an island, but when Tom's position was relocated with a pay raise, he got down on one knee and we booked the flight an hour after their courthouse wedding.

The plane touched down suddenly, and I felt the captain force the brakes as the wheels squealed underneath the wings. I felt my mom's nails dig into the skin above my knuckles as the plane came to a stop. She released a sigh and smiled.

"Finally," she grinned. "Tom said the backyard is beautiful. The grass is perfectly cut and extends all the way to the sand."

"Awesome," I smiled mockingly. She didn't notice, of course. She was busy turning her phone off airplane mode to text Tom that we had landed safely, and by safely, I mean my mom didn't disturb the flight attendants from all her panic attacks due to the turbulence.

The walk to baggage claim wasn't that long, but there was Tom. He waited with a bouquet of flowers and a huge smile draped across his face. My mom ran up and threw her arms around him, nearly knocking him off his feet. I felt like I was crashing two honeymooners, but in reality, I was being uprooted from my San Francisco home to the eternal tourist destination of Kauai.

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“Hiya, Ames,” Tom said as I joined them. I don’t know why he resorted to taking that up as a nickname for me, but he’d been calling me Ames since the morning we bumped into each other in the kitchen getting coffee - me in my oversized pajamas and him in his striped boxers.

I gave him a half smile as we started walking toward the baggage claim. “These are for you,” he handed me the flowers, pink and white carnations draped in a plastic film. I gripped the flowers between my thumb and two forefingers. My mom gave me a stern look, signaling that I should say thank you.

“Thanks, Tom, they’re beautiful.” They felt weird between my fingers. I could feel some of the water from their plastic envelopment slowly dripping down my wrist. It just seemed like too much; forced maybe? Tom really was a nice guy, but this implied that we were closer than we were, or worse; that he wanted to be close and this was his way of bribing me.

Tom propped his arm around my mom’s shoulder, “How was the flight?” The question was directed to my mom, but he was looking at me. We both knew her flying tendencies. She’d once gotten us kicked off a flight right before takeoff because she was convinced the engine was shaking too much, whatever that meant. The plane had to turn around just to drop us off at the gate. I don’t think my cheeks have ever turned such a dark shade of red in my entire life, and for the sake of my blood pressure, I hope they never do again.

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“It was actually relatively smooth,” my mom replied, not realizing Tom had been talking to me. “There was a moment of a slight engine flutter, and I almost pressed the flight attendant call button, but I prodded myself to be calm. Maybe we went through a cloud, or maybe a bird flew into the jet stream...you never know with these things.”

I tried to suppress a smile, and Tom and I made eye contact because we both had the same thought. She had no idea what she was talking about, but we just let her run with it. Better to let her have her hair-brained idea than to convince her she was wrong. That would just result in an uproar that neither of us was equipped to deal with. It was hard enough convincing her to fly 10 hours over an ocean.

“Oh, Amy, I meant to tell you. I enrolled you in high school in Lihue. All your records have been transferred over and should be ready to go. I hear it’s a really tight-knit group of kids. They’re the Red Raiders, isn’t that such a great mascot? Since there are so many roosters and chickens that run around here all the time. It’s only about three minutes from the hotel, so if you need anything, you can just pop in anytime!” He smiled.

“Oh, that’s wonderful. Sweetie, isn’t that wonderful?” My mom cooed.

I smiled, hiding my lips.

We grabbed the bags and walked out to the front of the airport.

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“I thought we’d take a ride over to the hotel, walk around a bit, then maybe stop at the high school, and head home.”

We all piled into Tom’s bright blue Mustang as the engine kicked to life.

I watched as we left the airport and the island engulfed the empty space surrounding us. As much as I wanted to be the angsty teenager I knew I was trying to be, to sit and stew with my arms crossed in the back seat refusing to look at any of the trees and flowers that puckered around me, I couldn’t; it was all too breathtaking.

It was a simple beauty that was the most striking. The way that plants weren’t perfectly well kept but, rather, overgrown so that the red buds of each flower pushed against the other, fighting for the spotlight. How the road seemed to be in the way of the palm trees as opposed to San Francisco, where the palm trees were in the way of the road. How almost no matter where you were on the road, you could see the ocean, and it wasn’t that stew green that oceans often get, but, rather, that sparkling blue that shimmered and reminded you of a full glass of cold ice water.

People rode bikes everywhere, not even bothering to signal. Everything seemed to be unspoken, common knowledge. Chickens ran wild like stray geese on a never-ending golf course. Street vendors encased the road, selling anything from braided bracelets to coconuts that you could drink from with a

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yellow straw. I sat in the back of the Mustang, my head tilting every which way as if I were in a planetarium.

We pulled into the Marriott entrance, and the valet met us out front. Tom, of course, knew them all personally and tossed his keys to the thin boy with the blue pinstripe shirt before grabbing my mom's hand and allowing me to trail behind. He pointed out all the extravagant details of his hotel. The tour came to an end at the pool in the shape of a giant flower with bridges and sculpted lions that squirted water between their stone teeth. Tom set us down at the tiki bar, told us to order "whatever we like," and winked at the waitress.

My mom immediately ordered a martini and a cobb salad. I wasn't able to keep my teen angst up and ordered a burger and Coke. So much for feeling like a local. After we ate and Tom returned, we started heading back to the car. We'd nearly made it to the front lobby when a lean boy in his late twenties sidelined Tom.

Tom signaled for my mom and me to come over. "Kale, this is my wife, Stacy, and her daughter, Amy...Stacy, Amy, this is my good friend Kale," he said, slapping the young man on the shoulder. We both reached out and shook Kale's hand, which seemed a bit clammy. "He runs the local market downtown, but he comes in here a couple of days a week to sell to the tourists."

Kale smiled, shrugging his shoulders. "Tom tells me you folks are new to town. How are you liking it so far?"

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“Oh, Kale, they only just landed an hour or so ago.”

“Don’t be silly, Tom,” my mom pushed against his ribs. “We love it! It’s beautiful!” she gushed.

My stepfather laughed, placing his hands in his pockets. “Amy will be starting at the high school on Monday...Kale graduated a few years ago and took over the family business when his dad got Parkinson’s.”

Kale shrugged again, seemingly embarrassed by the statement. Tom didn’t seem to notice either way. “Say, Amy, I’ve been looking for an extra hand on the weekends. My little brother was helping, but he’s left for college now. What do ya think?”

My mom and Tom both looked at me, the answer to the question in their eyes before it had even formed on my tongue. How could I say no? The guy worked his family business for his dad who was sick and his brother who was off at school. No mention of the mom meant that she’d ditched or was non-existent. Either way, I knew the feeling all too well. Not to mention, it would be nice to have some financial freedom. “Yeah, sure, why not,” I faked my enthusiasm like a bubbly cheerleader whose spandex was just a tad too tight around her thighs.

“Awesome!” He exclaimed, his excitement radiating from his ears. “So I’ll see you Saturday then, 7 a.m. sharp. Tom will show you where the market is. And we’ll just go from there. Welcome aboard slick,” he said as he clapped me on the back.

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My mom and Tom beamed with joy. I could feel myself shrinking minute by minute as I realized my life in San Francisco was over, and something told me this place was going to be different. I just wasn't sure what that would mean yet.