

# Island in the Sun: Escape to a tropical paradise in this epic story of hidden pasts and family secrets

Pages: 365

Publisher: Thornhill Print (January 4, 2019)

Format: pdf, epub

Language: English

---

[ **DOWNLOAD FULL EBOOK PDF** ]

---

Â

Â

Â

**Island in the Sun**

Â

## **About the Author**

**Janice Horton, also affectionately known as the backpacking housewife, writes romantic fiction with a dash of humour and a sense of adventure.** Once her three children had grown up, Janice and her backpacking husband sold their empty nest in Scotland UK along with almost everything they owned and set off to travel the world. Since then they have been travelling full-time and have explored over 50 countries, living out of an apartment, a hut, or wherever they happen to find themselves.

**Twitter: @JaniceHorton**

**Facebook: TheBackpackingHousewife**

**Instagram: janicehortonwriter**

**Pinterest: TheBackpackingHousewife**

**Website: <https://thebackpackinghousewife.com>**

Â

Â

Â

### **What the Readers say:**

'Who doesn't love an adventure? Especially when it's set in the Caribbean!' *Linn B Halton*

'Who doesn't dream about a vacation in the Caribbean?' *R is for Reviews*

'The author's words will transport you to the beautifully sunny and warm Caribbean.' *Kate's Book Spot*

'The author's obvious knowledge and love of the Caribbean shines through.' *Best Chick Lit.com*

'You feel like you are living the story.' *Netgalley Reviewer.*

'Janice's descriptive passages capture the very essence of the Caribbean.' *Carol E Wyer*

'I really enjoy Janice's writing style.' *Mandy Baggot*

Â

### **Also by Janice Horton**

Â

#### **Romantic Adventure Novels**

The Backpacking Housewife

Castaway in the Caribbean

Reaching for the Stars

Bagpipes and Bullshot

## **Novellas**

Voodoo Romance Boxed Set

How Do You Voodoo

Voodoo Wedding

Voodoo Child

## **Non-Fiction**

How To Party Online

## **Romantic Comedy**

### **Writing as Janey Travis**

I Need A Doctor

## **Out of Print**

Beneath Apricot Skies

When We First Love

## **Copyright Â© Janice Horton 2019**

Janice Horton asserts the moral right to be identified as the author of this work.

This work is entirely a work of fiction. The names characters and incidents portrayed in it are the work of the authors imagination. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events or localities is entirely coincidental.

All rights reserved under International Copyright Conventions.

By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive right to access and read the text of this ebook on screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, down-loaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or any information storage or retrieval system, in any form or in any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or herein invented, without the express permission of Janice Horton.

Â

### **Dedication:**

For my bestie, Dina

Â

### **Island in the Sun**

#### ***Prologue***

*A small group of people are gathered on the side of a hill. The church behind them is painted white in colonial style and has a tall spire pointing into a cloudless blue sky. There is a balmy breeze blowing in from the east, whipping up the minister's white outer cassock, and causing the petals of the more delicate tropical flowers on the funeral casket to rise up and flutter about like fragrant butterflies.*

*The mourners have their heads lowered in prayer. Beneath their wide brimmed hats, their shaded eyes are firmly closed, yet the view from this lofty vantage point is stunning; a sparkling blue-green sea for a full three hundred and sixty degrees around, and below, a white-sand palm-fringed beach is shimmering in the mid-morning heat. A mound of freshly dug earth is piled neatly to one side of the grave. As the casket of their beloved matriarch Katherine Rocha is lowered into the ground some of those gathered, like her loyal housekeeper and friend Grace, are now openly weeping.*

*With a final farewell, Grace wipes away her tears and takes solace in remembering the good times, when Miss Kate had first arrived on this laid-back little island in the Caribbean Sea with her handsome husband Mr Ernest Rocha, and their sophisticated glamour and pizzazz. When they had taken on an army of workers from the village to fix up the old owner's house and even put in a tennis court and a swimming pool and how everyone, from fisherman to fisherwife, had wanted to work for the rich and fabulous new*

owners of Pearl Island.

*When Miss Kate had let it be known that she was looking for a cook and a housekeeper, Grace had proudly secured both positions and some of her favourite memories were of cooking for the Rocha's and their friends and visitors from America who had come over to stay on the island at one time or another. On these occasions, she would prepare elaborate dinners while Mr Ernest, dressed to the nines in his dapper style, served aperitifs on the porch and Miss Kate looked the belle of the ball in the latest chic designer gowns and fabulous jewellery. In those halcyon days, in the kitchen below the porch, Grace would sway her hips to the music wafting in through the open windows with the smoke from Mr Ernest's Cuban cigars and the lively conversation, laughter, and heady perfume.*

*Grace sighed. Those were the days before Mr Ernest was missing, his body never recovered. The days before poor Miss Kate was left bereft and grieving. The days before salvation came to the island in the form of Miss Kate's little orphaned niece. Tears welled up once more in Grace's eyes as she remembered her great affection for Isla.*

*Isla – a name that means island – came to live on Pearl Island as a six-year-old after the death of her own parents in England. With her sweet heart-shaped face and her white blonde hair and bright blue eyes, Isla had grown up a happy and carefree island child, bringing joy and laughter to a deathly-quiet house and a heartbroken Miss Kate back from the brink of her terrible grief.*

*But just a decade later, heartbreak had returned, when at sixteen-years-old, a rebellious and devilishly headstrong Isla, made the mistake of falling in love with Leo Fernandez, the son of notorious islander Jack Fernandez. She had been warned off seeing the sea-gypsy boy by her anxious aunt but Isla had steadfastly refused to listen and just as her aunt predicted and feared, a terrible incident led to eighteen-year-old Leo being arrested and Isla being despatched by her angry Aunt to a boarding school in the UK.*

*Since that day, Miss Kate had refused to mention the girl's name. However, a photograph of Isla, taken on her sixteenth birthday, has remained on Miss Kate's bedside table to this very day. Now that Miss Kate was no longer here, Grace could only pray that what happened a decade ago, although serious enough to break her employer's heart, had not given enough cause for Miss Kate to ever remove her niece, her only surviving relative, from her last Will and Testament and that Isla could return to Pearl Island to claim what was rightfully hers.*

Â

## Chapter One

*Isla – Present Day*

Isla hauled her suitcase up the path to her front door and noticed a dark-coloured car parked on the opposite side of the street. There was a man inside it and he was quite obviously watching her. Did she know him? No, she didn't think so, because she didn't know anyone in Edinburgh who drove a Bentley.

Her pace quickened while her hand searched inside her jacket pocket for her key. What was he doing there? What did he want? In alarm, she wondered if burglars or people-traffickers, even rapists, were using expensive cars these days as some kind of decoy for their evil intentions. If so, then luckily she wasn't easily fooled nor impressed.

From across the street she heard the car door click open and then clunk heavily shut. She gripped the key in her hand and readied it to use as a weapon should she need to defend herself, although she doubted she had the energy for a fight. It had been a long day, her flight had been delayed, and she just wanted to come home to a hot bath and a glass of wine.

Then she heard the man call out her name.

'Isla Ashton?' He used a tone of inflection, as if not actually calling her name but asking if it was her name.

She turned on her heels to see him walking towards her. She quickly noticed he was smartly dressed and looked more like a private detective than an assailant.

'Who are you?' she demanded.

'My name is Mark King. My legal office in Edinburgh has been charged with the task of informing you of the recent death of your aunt, Mrs Katherine Rocha.'

*Auntie Kate was dead?*

At the news, Isla wavered on her feet.

Mark King, reaching out to her with his business card, caught her arm.

'I'm really sorry, Miss Ashton. I can see this has come as something of a shock. Perhaps we should discuss this matter inside?' He motioned towards the front door of her town house.

Isla glanced over his card to note his name was embossed in gold lettering. She nodded as her throat felt too tight to speak and she attempted to open the door with a trembling hand. On her third attempt, Mark King offered to help. She handed over the key to him and he rattled it in the lock for a fraction of a second before pushing open the door. It was then she noticed that he was carrying something tucked under his arm, a parcel, wrapped in brown paper and tied up with string.

He stood aside and she slid past him. Flicking on the hallway light, Isla looked around her.

'Sorry about the mess,' she said, and scooped up five days of post from the floor and rushed to clear magazines from the sofa so that he could sit down. But he was already in her kitchen, filling the kettle from the tap.

While sipping tea, Mark King told her that her aunt had died of cancer. 'Diagnosed two years ago, apparently, but she refused treatment.'

Isla sighed. 'I guess she wouldn't leave the island.'

'I couldn't find a private number for you,' he explained apologetically. 'But I did leave messages at the number listed on your company website and I also sent an email. I'm sorry, but it has been a little difficult to track you down, Miss Ashton.'

'I've been away on business and I gave my PA some time off. When is the funeral?'

Mark King looked even more uncomfortable as he told her, 'It is today. On the island.' He retrieved the parcel he had been carrying and placed it on the coffee table in front of her.

Isla stared at it. 'What is that?'

'Your aunt's executors in Grand Cayman understand that it belongs to you. It's not listed as part of her estate and she left specific instructions it be returned to you in the event of her death.'

She put down her tea and pulled the wrapping off the parcel. She recognised the box beneath immediately and pressed her hands to her mouth to cover the smile that had begun to play on her lips.

It was Aunt Kate's jewellery box.

Isla was suddenly struck with some of her happiest memories. Sneaking barefoot across the painted wooden porch into her aunt's bedroom through doors left open to encourage a cooling breeze to blow in from the sea, to dance around in her aunt's colourful batik sarongs.

In her mind's eye, she saw an ethereal image of herself as a small girl, draped in those wonderfully light gossamer fabrics, sitting at her aunt's dressing table and playing dress-up with her vast collection of rubies and emeralds and diamonds and pearls.

She also tried to hide her surprise that her aunt would have actually wanted her to have her jewellery after what had happened although, of course, it made perfect sense that she wouldn't have wanted it all in the hands of the taxman or her lawyers.

Her aunt's jewellery would be worth an absolute fortune. Not that there had ever been any record of its worth or even its existence. It had never been valued or insured and there were certainly no receipts because none of it had ever actually been purchased. The pearls – perfectly formed and natural – had mostly been found a long time ago off the very island that Isla had once called home. The diamonds and other precious stones in the collection had without a doubt been either won or hustled by Isla's infamous late Uncle Ernest Rocha, at high-stakes poker games during the 1970s, which is exactly how he had come to own a whole Caribbean island in the first place.

'Yes, it came to me through my late parents and has been in the safekeeping of my aunt,' Isla lied. Lying came surprisingly easy to her, probably because she herself had been lied to so convincingly.

Mark King nodded and seemed satisfied.

Isla allowed her fingers to reach out and wander over the familiar shimmering mother-of-pearl mosaic of starfish and seahorses and shells that decorated the box. It was beautiful. Just as beautiful as she remembered it.

'Although, there doesn't appear to be a key,' Mark King pointed out.

Isla raised an eyebrow. She recalled a cleverly hidden compartment that held a key beneath the beautifully carved façade. She stood up, offering him her hand for shaking, now that their business was concluded. 'Thank you, Mr King. I appreciate you coming out here to deliver this box to me personally.'

He took an envelope from the inside pocket of his jacket. 'Your aunt's Last Will and Testament will be read in a few days' time and as per her wishes you are required to attend.' He placed the envelope straight into her hand. 'This is a first-class air ticket. Your flight leaves tomorrow.'

Isla vehemently shook her head. 'No, I can't possibly. Anyway, there's little point. You see, my Aunt

Kate and I had a big falling out, a long time ago, and we haven't been in contact since. I really have no interest in going back there.'

Mark King's dark eyebrows rose up and disappeared under his thatch of dark hair.

'But, Miss Ashton, I don't think you fully understand. Estranged or not, I have been advised that you are about to inherit her estate in its entirety, and by that, I mean the island in the Caribbean Sea known as *Isla de las Perlas* and all the properties and the businesses thereon. You are absolutely required to go and attend the reading. I'm afraid it's an obligation.'

Â

## Chapter Two

*Isla de las Perlas*, or Pearl Island, is situated in the eastern Caribbean Sea, an equal distance between the Cayman Islands and mainland Honduras. It is just two miles long and one and a half miles wide at its widest point. In days of old, around the time of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, this then unnamed and mostly uninhabited island had functioned as a safe harbour for passing ships caught in bad weather or hurricanes while sailing into Port Royal on Roatan. It then became a tactical stronghold for pirates launching daring assaults on treasure-laden ships sailing from the mainland.

Also around this time, it was rumoured that the infamous buccaneer, Captain Henry Morgan, had buried two hundred thousand pieces of eight on the island while being pursued by the Spanish fleet after sacking Porto Bello in what is now modern-day Panama. But by the end of the eighteenth century, abandoned and ignored by the rest of the world, someone searching for Captain Morgan's treasure happened to discover natural pearls off its waters and the island immediately became a hub for pearl divers.

The waters off Pearl Island were then plundered and pillaged over several decades, until it had been stripped of all its natural oyster beds and only one stoic pearl diver remained, an American prospector named Vernon Jones. With his hoard of perfect pearls, Mr Jones cleverly negotiated with the then government of Honduras to purchase the island for himself in 1934.

He died in 1938, drowned by a rip tide while still searching for more pearls.

His only son, who lived in Arizona USA at the time with his mother, later inherited Pearl Island, but he loathed to travel outside the US and didn't even own a passport. In 1975, Vernon Jones Junior gambled away the deeds to Pearl Island in a poker game in Las Vegas.

Even to this day, Pearl Island is excluded from many maps and has been described by *Lonely Planet* not just as the undiscovered Caribbean but the undiscoverable. From the UK, for example, one had to first fly to the USA and from there head across the Caribbean Sea to the Cayman Islands, from where one had to brave either a short flight in a small charter plane or a long boat trip on an often choppy sea.

Isla had travelled the boat route once before, and could loosely recall the experience of being tossed about on a swirling sea, even though she had only been six years old at the time. Her Aunt Kate, her mum's only sister, had come to the UK to collect her when her parents had been killed in

a car accident. Isla could remember arriving on the island too. Her memories though, were like snippets of old video mixed with feelings of fledgling excitement and anxiety.

She recalled tipping back her head to gaze up at the strangest of trees; all tall and skinny and waving their green fronds into the highest and bluest of skies. She remembered her eyes being dazzled and her face being scorched by hot yellow sunshine. She remembered spinning around in a warm breeze scented with flowers and sea salt, and kicking off her best shoes to put her toes in powder-soft white sand and to run barefoot with other children on the island, which brought her thoughts back to Leo.

Leo Fernandez was the most beautiful boy she had ever seen. He had golden skin and pale green almond shaped eyes and long golden hair, the longest she'd ever seen on a boy, and it grew out from his head in thick coils. Leo taught her to climb rocks and trees and to swim in the sea and to fish with a hand reel. Over the years, they had become inseparable friends.

When Leo was sixteen and she was fourteen, he'd given her a necklace that he'd made himself out of fine fishing twine, into which he'd set two very tiny but perfectly round white pearls. He said he'd swam down and found them inside oyster shells on the reef. He'd slipped the necklace around her neck and asked her to be his girlfriend.

She'd loved the gift and she loved the boy but didn't fully understand what he expected of her.

When he'd explained it involved kissing, she'd been both horrified and embarrassed.

A year or so later, however, her interest in him had shifted considerably.

She didn't see him every day anymore because he worked for his uncle on his fishing boat but she thought about him all the time. At school she daydreamed about him and after class, when she was supposed to be doing her homework, she would stare out to sea from her bedroom window and wonder what he was doing right at that moment.

When she did see him, she couldn't help but to notice how he was looking so much taller and that his previously skinny body and long thin arms had filled out with hard-toned muscle. He'd had both his arms tattooed with symbols of the sea. A portrait of Neptune, the mighty god of the seas, could be seen carrying his trident and riding his mythical half-horse half-fish creature across Leo's biceps. He had facial hair now too – a neatly shaped moustache above his top lip and a small goatee beard on his chin – the same naturally golden tone as his dreadlocked hair.

Like Isla, with her paler skin and her blonde hair, Leo looked very different to all the other boys and girls on the island. Grace, her aunt's housekeeper, had said that Leo had been abandoned on the beach as a baby by sea-gypsies, the nomadic people of the sea, and had been taken in by Jack Fernandez, who had raised him as his own.

Sea-gypsies are generally feared by islanders, as they are thought to be thieves, raiders, and pirates. Some even think sea-gypsies have mystical powers and are able to conjure up curses and even hurricanes. Of course, no one really knew the circumstances under which Leo's mother had chosen to give him up, but Isla could only imagine that she must have been quite desperate in leaving her flotilla to abandon her baby on a beach, in the hope he would be adopted by someone who might give him a better life than she could.

As Isla had been orphaned, she sympathised with Leo's past, and it had cemented their special friendship. At that time on the island there had been lots of children growing up there, and Isla knew she wasn't the only girl to have noticed how Leo had grown from a beautiful boy into a

handsome young man.

Other girls, whose bodies were curvier than hers, would openly flirt with him while they kicked a ball around with him at the beach. When she'd overheard one of these girls, saying to another, what she'd like to do with Leo given half a chance, Isla had felt sick with jealousy.

*Leo belonged to her. Didn't he?*

Finally, unable to bear the agony of her secret crush on him any longer, while reel-fishing off the end of a narrow wooden dock jutting out into the bay with Leo one sultry evening, she finally plucked up the courage to tell him how she felt.

He'd stopped baiting his hook to look at her while she'd stood in front of him and stammered something about being ready to be his girlfriend and how she would quite like to kiss him, that is of course, if he would still like to kiss her?

In one swift move he'd swept her into his arms and he was kissing her for what seemed to Isla like forever. His lips were warm and soft and tasted slightly salty, and she could feel the heat of his body and the beat of his heart right next to hers.

When they eventually stopped kissing, Leo continued to hold her in his arms as the sun went down on Pearl Island. They sat together and closely entwined on the old boards of the dock and watched the world around them change from blue to pink to red and then to gold and he stroked her hair with his fingers and told her she was the only girl for him in the whole world.

She had never been so happy.

It was a small island, however, and soon someone reported seeing Isla, the island's princess kissing Leo the sea-gypsy, and they were in trouble because of the stupid feud that existed between his Uncle Jack and her Aunt Kate.

Isla had always wondered what it was that had sparked the hostility between these two battling adults but she'd never been brave enough to broach the subject. Leo said he didn't understand it either. All he knew, he said, was that the mere mention of Miss Kate's name sent his uncle into a rage of cussing and cursing and slamming things around.

So, having been warned off seeing each other, they soon began meeting in secret. Isla would watch out for a small seashell left on the porch railing outside her bedroom window, a signal that he was waiting for her at the hidden patch of sand between the huge boulders at the end of the beach. Then checking carefully that the coast was clear, she'd sneak out of the window and across the porch to scale the railing and drop down into the tropical fauna that would help to disguise her escape.

On the night of her sixteenth birthday, at their secret place, he'd given her a ring that he'd fashioned himself out of fine fishing twine into which he'd set one single large white pearl.

Slipping it onto her finger, he had asked her to marry him.

But he was a bad boy. Her aunt had always said so. Her aunt had been proved right.

She wondered if Leo would have served his time by now?

## Chapter Three

Unlike the last time that she had made this arduous journey, flying across to Pearl Island from the Caymans was now an option because sometime between then and now Pearl Island had acquired an airstrip. But after meeting her tanned and smiling pilot, who'd escorted her and her bags over to what looked like the smallest and most beaten-up looking charter plane in the airport, possibly the world, she had pretty much decided she was taking the boat.

She'd noticed this tiny old plane from the window of the big new jetliner she had arrived in and had thought: 'pity the poor soul who has to fly in that old thing,' not realising that the poor soul might actually be her.

'The boat takes four hours and the flight takes half an hour,' she was told by the pilot, as if such a time-saving was reason enough to risk your life in an air crash. Then, noting her pale and exhausted looking face, he had smiled at her in a way that suggested he'd had to deal with many poor souls before her. 'You don't need to be scared. It's a sturdy little plane and I'm a very good pilot. You can trust me to get you there safely and I promise there'll be a bird's-eye view of the island to make it all worth it when we get there.'

She decided she liked his smile and that she would trust him. He was right about the view because when they approached the island, she caught her breath and saw that Pearl Island was even more beautiful from the sky. It looked like a tear-shaped pearl as it shimmered below her in the sunshine. As they got closer, she pressed her forehead against the small window to look down and make out the familiar landmarks beneath.

They were flying over the narrower part of the island, over shimmering dense mangrove swamp, until the gradient of the land swept gently upward to the highest point, with its white church and tall spire. Then suddenly below them was the rocky peninsula of Mango Cay, where Leo had lived with his Uncle Jack, in a house accessed via a natural bridge that had been carved out by the sea over many thousands of years.

She remembered Leo telling her that when the sea had finally worn away the last part of the bridge, then he too would own his own island, referring of course to the day when Pearl Island might become hers. She had replied quoting John Donne, one of the English poets that her aunt had had a passion for reading aloud. 'No man is an island,' she'd told him and he had laughed.

The peninsular led to the grassy headland and down to a sandy path to the village and the harbour with its plethora of shacks on stilts and boatsheds built out over the water.

As the plane dipped and made a sharp turn, Isla's heart missed a beat when she spotted the long stretch of white sand along the western coastline with its huge worn-smooth limestone boulders that dominated the end of the beach. Tears pricked her eyes and she quickly blinked them away.

They flew low over tin-roofed houses and lots of swaying palm trees until there it was – her aunt's beautiful colonial-style house with its wrap-around porch and manicured tropical grounds that stood in direct contrast to the untamed beauty of the island surrounding it. Trembling a little, she pulled her seat belt tighter over her lap and composed herself for the moment when the wheels of the plane touched down onto what looked like a precariously short landing strip some way ahead of them.

The Cessna taxied over to a wooden hut, where a smartly dressed airport attendant, in khaki shorts and a white short-sleeved shirt bearing the logo of Pearl Island Air, acknowledged the pilot and glanced over the weary looking female passenger.

Isla climbed out of the hot cramped space where she'd been wedged between her suitcase and her hand luggage. Then with both feet on the ground, she shaded her eyes with her hand and peered through dazzling sunlight to see the silhouetted shape of someone wearing a large brimmed hat standing next to a golf cart at the edge of the airstrip.

'Grace!' she squealed and rushed towards her long-lost friend.

'Welcome home, Miss Isla!' Grace waved a small bouquet of pink bougainvillea in the air.

Isla threw herself into the arms of the woman who had been such a support to her while she'd been growing up. Her Aunt Kate might have been her legal guardian, a rather too-strict one in Isla's opinion, but Grace had always been the mother-figure. Loyal and kind, she never took sides, but when Isla had been angry or upset she had always gently intervened in an attempt to help Isla see her aunt's often turgid point of view.

During Isla's difficult last year on the island, she'd called her 'Saving Grace'.

Together, they climbed aboard the golf cart while the airport attendant loaded Isla's luggage onto the back seat. Isla noticed the smartly dressed man cast a lustful eye over the older woman.

'*Eso es un sombrero muy bonito, señorita,*' he said, remarking on Grace's pretty hat.

Isla giggled but Grace was incensed and immediately reprimanded her ardent admirer.

'I'll take none of that flirtin' from you, Carlos. How dare you go embarrassin' me like that in front of Miss Isla. Now I suggest you get out of my way before I run you down with my cart!'

The poor man looked squashed on both counts and as he slunk away, Isla wondered if she knew him. He looked vaguely familiar, so she tried to imagine him ten years younger but still struggled to place him.

Soon they were off, hurtling downhill from the airstrip at quite a pace. Isla gripped the rattling framework of the cart with both hands as they sped along the bumpy sandy track road. There had been no motorised vehicles on the island at all when she'd left; people got around by either bicycle or pony, with or without a buggy or, as the island was comparatively small, by walking everywhere.

'Gosh, when did you learn to drive, Grace?' she asked, holding on tightly.

Grace replied that she hadn't and the sound of their combined laughter rang through the swaying palm trees as though ten long years hadn't ever gone by.

When they reached the gates of the big house though, their mood became sombre and the pace up the driveway had reduced to a gentle roll. The old place looked just as Isla remembered it: a clapboard house in traditional Creole style, raised up off the ground on stilts and painted white with yellow accents around the window frames.

She could hardly believe she was here again. It all felt so surreal.

As she approached the first step up to the porch, she stopped for a moment and, for the first time since she'd heard of her Aunt Kate's passing, she felt a tinge of sadness in her heart rather than the usual aching bitterness.

Grace saw her hesitate and went ahead of her up the steps. 'I'm going to make us an afternoon tea while you settle into your room, Miss Isla.'

A warm fragrance blew across Isla's face and she turned towards the garden and tilted her face up to the sun. Closing her eyes against the sharp yellow light, she inhaled the musky sweetness of the tropical garden around her where palm trees with ripening coconuts under their fronds swayed and bananas and star-fruits hung heavy and ripe on the trees. She saw that the lime trees she had helped to plant were now big and full of green limes ready for picking. It was the time of year for limeade and, for her Aunt Kate, who'd liked to sip cocktails on the porch at sundown, a time for Margaritas.

Isla smiled at the memory.

She entered the house tentatively and immediately appreciated a welcome coolness to the air and to her skin. In the reception hall there was a dresser upon which sat a bowl full of floating frangipani flowers. The bowl was surrounded by an arrangement of handmade condolence cards.

Isla inhaled the plumeria scent of the flowers and browsed each card in turn.

Some had been carefully cross-stitched in silk threads and some were decorated with pressed flowers. One had a picture of the church made from tiny seashells. Another featured a holy cross made from a palm frond. All expressed words of sympathy and were signed off with family names she recognised. One card featured a boat with a sail made entirely from tiny slithers of mother-of-pearl. Isla opened it to read the message written inside.

It read *Rest in Peace Miss Kate* and it was signed *Leo*.

Isla had to hold onto the dresser to steady herself.

Then she closed her eyes and took a deep breath.

*Leo is here.*

Â

## Chapter Four

Isla took her luggage up the stairs and headed along the second-floor hallway to what had once been her bedroom. She flung the door open, stepped inside the much smaller than remembered room and immediately felt that she had stepped through a portal in time.

It was eerie seeing her things exactly as if she'd only walked out of this room ten minutes ago and not ten years. She took cautious steps over to her dressing table where her eyes rested on a coconut shell dish containing dozens of tiny seashells. Swallowing hard, she then gazed at the

faded Polaroid photographs around the mirror of her teenage self and her island friends at the beach or at various island events and birthday parties. She stared at one photo in particular.

When it was all too much she groaned under her breath.

'Oh my God, this is way too creepy.'

Then she turned away to see Grace standing in the doorway.

Grace shrugged on overhearing Isla's blasphemy. 'It was your aunt's instruction to leave the room just as you left it,' she explained. 'I was told to clean but do no more. It wasn't my place to ask why.'

Isla couldn't understand it. She had been erased from her aunt's life and her address book, so why keep her room intact? It was confusing and weird. She picked up her suitcase.

'Well, I can't sleep here. I'll take my aunt's room.'

'Sure, but it's only fair to warn you that your aunt died in her bed,' Grace imparted.

Grace had always been a great believer in the afterlife and ghosts and spirits.

'But you have changed the sheets, right?' Isla quipped.

Grace practically choked on her own intake of air. 'Well, of course, Miss Isla!'

Her aunt's room was far more spacious as it took up almost the entire length of the back of the house. There were two sets of French windows along one wall that opened out onto the wooden deck of the first-floor porch. The room faced west towards the afternoon sun and inside it was oppressively hot and stuffy. Grace immediately threw open both windows to let in a cooling sea breeze. She pulled back the heavy silk curtains but drew together the long light calico drapes that were now billowing out like ship's sails and shading the room from the heat and brightness flooding into it.

Isla drank in the boudoir scene around her. Her aunt's oversized double bed covered with silk sheets and with a mosquito net hanging above it that made it look something like an elaborate Arabian tent. Two bedside tables each displayed faded photographs in mother of pearl frames and ornate lamps shaped like rearing seahorses with pale green silk shades. A row of sliding wardrobe doors along the opposite wall were broken up by the presence of a huge bookcase housing some of her aunt's favourite classic novels, her collections of poetry, as well as an enormous leather-bound Holy Bible; her aunt had been almost manically religious.

On the far wall, nearest to the door, hung her aunt's incredibly life like portrait.

The painting, by the famous artist Ranaldini Salva, had captured her in her finest years.

Katherine Rocha had been a classically beautiful woman and in her portrait she wore an amused expression and her golden hair scooped up into a neat chignon. But when Isla's eyes connected to the unblinking eyes of her late Aunt, she experienced a wave of emotion that she hadn't actually expected or prepared herself to feel. A rush of love and hate and anger and regret swept over her and, despite her best intentions to stay composed and business-like throughout her obligatory time back on the island, seeing her aunt's face again had released so many thoughts and echoes from her past, that she felt almost overwhelmed.

All the anger and trauma and stress that she'd worked so hard over the past ten years to dispel, now felt far too close for comfort again and were rising unstopably to the surface of her mind like effervescent bubbles through deep dark waters.

Isla realised she was shaking.

'Shall we have our tea here where we can sit out on the porch?' Grace said gently, taking note of Isla's trembling lips and how her pale face appeared even paler. 'After which I'm quite sure you'd like to take an afternoon nap, Miss Isla.'

Isla offered her thanks as Grace went off to fetch their tea and after giving herself a good virtual shake, she immediately set about finding the key to the jewellery box that she had hauled all the way back here in her hand luggage. How very clever and manipulative of her aunt, she considered, to send her the only bait that could have absolutely guaranteed to lure her back here – the jewellery box without the key.

Her aunt would have known she would remember how to slide open the concealed section of the box, because she'd been allowed to do it so many times as a girl, and that she would never have risked damaging it by forcing it open when she realised that the key was missing.

She had been nervous of bringing the box through airport security systems, not only because it was heavy and she had no way of opening it, but because she thought it might attract attention when it went through the X-ray baggage scanners. But thankfully, despite her fraught nerves, she'd been ushered through without any problems.

She went straight to the right-hand drawer of the dressing table and pulled it out to reveal another hidden drawer beneath. Her aunt had always been one for secrets.

Luckily, Isla had been privy to many of them.

This was the drawer her aunt had used as a personal safe. Inside, she found a large bundle of cash dollars and her aunt's British passport together with two keys. One of them was the key she had expected to find – a small silver one, beautifully made and intricately fashioned with a single pearl set into the bow. The other key wasn't so familiar or so well-crafted and had a simple paper tag attached to it with *Ask Grace* written in her aunt's swirly handwriting.

She set aside this mystery key because she was more than impatient to open the jewellery box and feast her eyes once again over the rubies and emeralds, diamonds and pearls that had meant so much to her while she had been growing up. Taking the box from her hand luggage, she paused with the key in her hand for a moment to again gaze bravely up at her aunt's portrait on the wall.

In the portrait, she was dressed to impress in an off-the-shoulder red Oscar de la Renta dress together with her stunning ruby suite. Now, as a jewellery designer, Isla's expert eyes knew that the necklace was a suspended series of exquisite bezel-set and cushion-cut rubies, each of them weighing approximately from two to five carats. Her aunt wore the necklace together with a matching set of earrings and an exquisite cuff bracelet.

Stunningly beautiful, as had been her aunt.

She turned back to the box. The diamond and ruby and emerald suites where probably the most valuable items, rivalling anything in Elizabeth Taylor's famous collection, but it was the pearls that she most wanted to see and touch again. The many strings of single and double necklaces and

chokers, the bracelets and rings that she had coveted over the years and had so faithfully tried to replicate from memory over the last decade.

With a steady hand she inserted the key and sprung the lock.

But just at that moment, there was a light tap of the bedroom door and Grace entered with a tray.

Isla slid the box back into her hand luggage.

Grace swept through one of the open French doors that led outside and set down the tray of tea, sandwiches and drizzle cake onto a table in a shaded part of the porch. Isla followed and sat on a chair while tea was poured, then she held out the cryptic key with the *Ask Grace* tag.

'Grace, do you know what this is all about?'

Grace studied it for a moment and then handed Isla a cup and saucer. 'Yes, I do. You remember how terribly secretive your aunt was, don't you?'

'Yes, and also how terribly stubborn,' Isla added with a wry smile. 'And the key opens what exactly?'

Grace lowered her voice, unnecessarily because there was no one around to overhear. 'It opens a safe. Your aunt entrusted me to tell you that she wanted you and you alone to have all her jewellery.'

Isla stared at her in open-mouthed confusion. 'Really? But what about...?'

'The Will? Oh no, her jewellery is not mentioned in it. Not the good stuff anyway. You see, a few weeks before she died your aunt told me that when you came back here to the island, you would go looking for the hidden key to the box that she sent you, and that when you found it, you would also find the key to the safe that no one else must know about.'

Isla continued to listen to this convoluted tale while looking increasingly confused.

'Come on, I'll show you,' Grace enthused.

They went back inside the bedroom where Grace paused briefly to cross herself and mutter a prayer under Kate's portrait and then she pointed to the bookcase.

'It's behind the big bible.'

Isla removed the hefty tome to expose a secure metal box hidden in the wall. She opened it with the key and reached inside to remove a heavy roll of blue velvet cloth, which she carried over to the bed. Grace took a step forward as Isla unrolled the cloth and then they both gazed down at the glittering mass of diamonds, rubies and emeralds, strings of pearls, numerous bracelets and dozens of ornate rings that spilled out onto the bedspread.

Here in front of them was easily over a million dollars' worth of jewellery.

Isla reached out to touch the ruby set that Kate was wearing in her portrait. Then she touched the emeralds that she remembered seeing her aunt wearing on the porch that last fateful night when she'd crept out of her room and escaped to the harbour to be with Leo. The very last time she saw

him.

She cast her eyes over the flawless diamond suite that to her knowledge, Kate had only ever worn on the occasions of her birthdays or her wedding anniversaries. It was all here. Her love of jewellery immortalised. Her memories all laid out before her.

'It's all yours now, Miss Isla.' Grace sighed, as if relieved to be unburdened of her responsibility.

Isla was both perplexed and bewildered because if all her aunt's jewellery could be accounted for here on the bed then what could possibly be in the box that she had taken such great pains to carry all the way back here?

They rewrapped the jewellery in the velvet cloth and put it back in the safe as they'd found it for safekeeping. Isla told Grace that she was going to take a nap for an hour or two, but as soon as she was alone again, despite being truthfully exhausted, she slipped the mother-of-pearl mosaic box back out from her bag and turned the small silver and pearl key in the lock.

As she opened the lid, the scent of stale French perfume and old ink rose up to assault her nose before being dissipated around the room on nausea inducing wafts of hot air from the ceiling fan. To her astonishment, inside was a pile of old notebooks. Some of them were ancient school jotters in danger of falling apart. Others were retro-looking journalist's pads and beneath those were reams of collated and bound manuscript papers. She flicked carefully through some of the earlier fragile pages of swirly neat handwriting, stopping to read snippets of her aunt's childhood reflections. Aunt Kate had clearly hated those early years spent in 1950's North Yorkshire.

Her words, some of them capitalised for emphasis, all seemed rather dark and depressing.

Isla felt her head spin. She knew she was exhausted and jet-lagged, so she put the journals back in the box and wondered what she was supposed to do with them all? Find a publisher?

She lay spread out on the bed under the whirling ceiling fan and the quivering mosquito net and felt her body pulsating to the same rhythm of the tree frogs croaking in unison outside. Perspiration ran from her every pore. Outside, she could see the light of day was already fading and the golden glow of dusk was starting to creep across the porch. She had already closed the doors and was now sorely tempted to throw them open again to bring in a breeze from the sea, but knowing that if she did so at this time of the evening, she'd also be inviting in swarms of hungry mosquitoes.

There were so many things that she remembered about this island – happiness and sadness, joy and excitement and certainly angst and frustration – but strangely, how intensely hot and unbearably humid it was here had somehow escaped her. How could she have forgotten that in August, here in the eastern Caribbean, it was surely hotter than hell itself?

She took a cooling shower and then lay on the bed again to try to think more clearly. Her mission here, she reminded herself, had already been accomplished because she now had the jewellery that had always meant so much to her. Tomorrow, she would pay her respects to her aunt by laying flowers at her grave, she would go and say hello to Minister John, her aunt's best friend, for old time's sake, and then after the reading of the Will, she would go and face Leo.

While she was here, on the same tiny rock as him, she knew she had to see him or she'd never be able to put their past to rest. Having been forced to come back here by her aunt's death, all she had to do was to say hello and then goodbye, which was something they'd been denied the last time they had parted.

It was suddenly quite dark outside and she remembered how the sun sank quickly over the horizon in this part of the world. With heavy eyes, she checked her watch and adjusted it to Eastern Caribbean time. It was now exactly six pm. The day after tomorrow she would be boarding a plane and heading back to the UK. She would be able to move on with her life at last because she would finally have what her therapist called closure. She would leave Pearl Island and be richer in every way possible.

All she had to do was to get through the next forty-eight hours.

When Isla woke, sweating and gasping for breath in the dark, for a moment she didn't know where she was. She was reeling from a nightmare. It was one she'd had so many times before. In the terrible dream, she was trying to escape from the arms of a man, but no matter how hard she tried to kick and scream, he had her in his strong grip and she was unable to move or make a sound. All she ever saw of this man were fleeting shadows and all she ever heard was the roar of the sea.

She felt for the lamp switch. When the light came on, her aunt's portrait was staring down at her from the opposite wall, looking bemused, and she suddenly remembered where she was.

How long had she been asleep?

She checked her watch. It was six o'clock. *Really?*

She had either been asleep for only a few seconds or she'd just slept for twelve hours straight. From her parched mouth, she suspected the latter. Her eyes then focussed on the photograph of her much younger self in a gilt frame next to her watch on the bedside table. It had been taken on her sixteenth birthday. She sighed and vividly remembered how desperately she'd wanted to be somewhere else while that photograph was being taken.

Â

## Chapter Five

*Isla – Ten Years Earlier*

It was dark outside, but inside the house it was glowing with light from the crystal chandelier in the drawing room and from the sixteen candles burning on her birthday cake. Isla blew her candles out to a raucous chorus of 'Happy Birthday to You' and then cringed for a slightly wobbly rendition of 'Sweet Sixteen' from Minister John, the unconventional looking preacher man, whom she suspected of having too many glasses of whatever concoction the adults were drinking.

Over the last couple of hours, she'd posed for a birthday photograph and greeted each of her guests personally as they'd arrived bearing her birthday gifts. Now she was cutting her cake and gritting her teeth, because all she could think about was Leo, who would be waiting for her on the beach and perhaps thinking that she wasn't coming after all.

She glanced around the room. Grace was offering up slices of the cake to guests who were now

beginning to move into little groups in various corners of the room. She watched her Aunt Kate being sucked into a conversation with her church choir ladies. Isla checked the vintage ladies Rolex on her wrist for the hundredth time, knowing that if anyone had happened to notice they might just assume she was admiring her aunt's generous gift.

It was just after seven pm. It was now or never.

She made a casual move towards the porch, picking up a glass of fruit juice on the way. Once out of sight, she promptly abandoned the drink on the handrail and hopped over it into the garden. She moved quickly through the shrubbery, breathing in the heavy vanilla-candy fragrance of 'lady of the night', a tropical plant that her aunt had planted profusely around the porches. Then she hitched her long, pale blue dress up to her knees to aid her pace and to try to prevent it from getting dirty or snagged.

A waning moon and a star-filled sky guided her down the steep path to the beach. She'd arranged to meet Leo an hour ago. He was the most important person in the world to her and yet to her frustration he was the only one of her friends not invited to her birthday party.

Despite her insistence that she didn't want a birthday party if all her friends were not invited, her aunt had made it quite clear to her that 'the gypsy boy' was not permitted anywhere near her or the house.

The thought of Leo's exclusion made her blood boil and the blatant discrimination against him left a sour taste in her mouth. All the anger and bitterness and feelings of hatred in her heart were directed wholly at her aunt, because of her stupid and pathetic rules.

When she reached the beach, she kicked off her ballet flats and ran along a line of palm trees. Running on sand, she pushed on to the sound of her own breathing, the pounding of her heart and the waves crashing against the shore until she finally reached the place they called their own, and fell straight into his arms.

'I'm sorry I'm so late. It was so hard to get away. I can't stay too long or I'll be missed.' She held onto him tightly, inhaling the smell of sea salt and coconut oil on his warm body.

He planted a trail of kisses on her hot face and then with one finger he lifted her chin until her lips met with his.

'Oh, Leo, I love you,' she uttered softly.

He lifted her and carried her over to the bed of soft palm fronds that he'd laid out for them on the sand. He lay her down gently and then he stretched out beside her to kiss her again. But Isla moved quickly, smiling coquettishly, as she straddled him and teased him by rolling down each of the fine shoulder straps on her silk dress in turn.

Entranced and enraptured, he watched her, his handsome face lit with starlight and lust. His hands reached out to gently stroke her face and to lovingly touch her hair. Then he bucked his hips, tipping her forward, so he could kiss her again and relieve her of the dress in one movement. He groaned from the effort of controlling himself as they tumbled together. He cupped her small pale breasts in the palms of his hands, his thumbs rubbing her nipples and making her gasp with pleasure. She kissed the top of his head as his mouth slid down her body and she smiled up at the stars that were shining above them like tiny birthday candle flames. Tonight they were not going to stop at foreplay. Now that she was sixteen, there was nothing she wanted more than for them to be together as lovers. She believed that once they had been joined together, nothing could ever

come between them, not even the threats and disapproval of their guardians.

Making love with Leo was everything and more than she ever imagined, and she had fantasised about being intimate with him for a very long time. He used a condom, of course, and she tried not to giggle when he cursed it and struggled to open the small foil packet. Seeing how nervous and how careful he was assured her it wasn't something he might have ever done before.

'I love you, Isla. I've always loved you and I will always love you. Only you,' he whispered into her ear as he lay on her, supporting his weight with his elbows so he didn't crush her.

When he pushed himself inside her, she cried out with joy. She'd expected it to hurt, but it hadn't. He'd been so gentle and caring and she'd been the impatient one. So excited by him, she raked her fingers down the muscles of his broad back and squeezed his taut naked buttocks in her hands as he ebbed and flowed over her, like the movement of waves on the shore.

Afterwards, as they lay together in the warmth of each other's arms on that balmy love-filled and starry night, there was no doubt in Isla's mind that she and Leo Fernandez were meant to be together forever and that he was the love of her life; her one and only true love.

'I wish I didn't have to go,' Isla told him, feeling miserable about having to go back to her birthday party without him.

'Not yet. You can't leave before I've given you your birthday gift.'

'Oh, Leo, us being together for my birthday is all I needed from you.'

'It's something I made for you. Close your eyes,' he said, his voice a soft whisper.

She did as he asked, but then couldn't help but to cheat and peek to find Leo searching for her gift through the pockets of his discarded shorts.

'No peeping!' he insisted. 'Now hold out your hand.'

She caught her breath as she felt him slipping a ring onto her third finger.

'You can open your eyes now.'

Her eyes sprung open and she stared down at the fishing twine ring and perfect pearl sitting on it.

'Oh, Leo, it's beautiful. I love it. Did you find this for me on the reef?' She wriggled her finger and noticed how translucent the pearl looked in the starlight.

'Yes, but one day soon I'll have it set in gold and flanked with diamonds for you.'

'But your love is enough for me. I don't need gold and diamonds.'

'I might not have much right now, Isla, but I want you to know that I won't always be a poor man.' His tone was serious. 'I have plans. I have a business arrangement with my uncle and very soon I'll be in a position to build us our own house here on the island.'

She studied the shadows of his face and the excitement in his sea green eyes.

'You are planning to build us a house?'

'Yes, where we can live happily together?'

Hot tears welled up in her eyes. 'Are you proposing to me, Leo?'

'Yes, I am. I love you. Say you'll marry me, Isla?'

'Yes. I love you too. But I doubt Minister John will marry us as my aunt would intervene.'

Leo was unfazed. 'No matter. We'll elope to the mainland and get married there. Why don't you start making our secret wedding plans while I attend to my secret business plans?'

---

&#x2018;Who doesn't love an adventure? Especially when it's set in the Caribbean!&#x2019; Linn B Halton

&#x2018;Who doesn't dream about a vacation in the Caribbean?&#x2019; R is for Reviews

&#x2018;The author&#x2019;s words will transport you to the beautifully sunny and warm Caribbean.&#x2019; Kate&#x2019;s Book Spot

&#x2018;The author&#x2019;s obvious knowledge and love of the Caribbean shines through.&#x2019; Best Chick Lit.com

&#x2018;You feel like you are living the story.&#x2019; Netgalley Reviewer

&#x2018;Janice&#x2019;s descriptive passages capture the very essence of the Caribbean.&#x2019; Carol E Wyer

&#x2018;I really enjoy Janice's writing style.&#x2019; Mandy Baggot

ISLAND IN THE SUN: When successful jewellery designer Isla Ashton unexpectedly inherits her eccentric Aunt Kate&#x2019;s Caribbean island, she is obligated to return to the place she associates with heartache and regret. To where she grew up and fell in love with her childhood friend, Leo Fernandez. Fully intent on selling the island and finally putting the past behind her, Isla is soon compelled to put together the pieces of what really happened on a fateful night ten-years before. She begins to believe that in going to prison, Leo hadn&#x2019;t only been shielding her from the same fate. She also starts to suspect that her late Aunt hadn&#x2019;t been entirely honest in sending her away under the guise of recriminations. Who had they both been protecting and why?

ABOUT THE AUTHOR: Janice Horton, also affectionately known as the backpacking housewife, writes contemporary romantic fiction with a dash of humour and a sense of adventure. Once her three children had grown up, Janice and her backpacking husband sold their empty nest in Scotland UK along with almost everything they owned and set off to travel the world. Since then they have been travelling full-time and have explored over 50 countries, living out of an apartment, a hut, or wherever they happen to find themselves.

Janice keeps in touch with her readers on social media and from her website at: <https://thebackpackinghousewife.com/>

---

Your Partner for Quality Television - DW - No Place Like it On Earth The Georgians and other Caucasians - UNESCO Digital Library - Travel 23 things to do in Krabi for every wanderlusting adventurer - Krabi is known for its epic views, gorgeous beaches, and island Perfect beachside resort for couples & families “ Holiday Inn Resort When I'm travelling, I always make sure to book a comfy stay at a. Photo Via Oriental-Escape. to enjoy an unobstructed 360 degree view of this tropical paradise. australia & new zealand - Trafalgar - dwelling Acoma; the stories of northern lakeside.. American was also the first American book to be. at Rhode Island that would welcome persons of. I have a large family of my own, and my doors.. America as an agrarian paradise “ a vision.. our painful secret... the discovery of a hidden aristocratic past. But. - Free Audiobooks - Audio codes - Audio giveaways - Moving into the rock island further through a swampy mud flat and into the The best part is knowing its hidden, protected and will remain a secret only for those. Oby Roland is the newest member of the Paddling Palau family and she.. accuracy to spend the winter in our Micronesian tropical paradise. Italy Wedding Venues: The Top 37 villas in 2019 - Travel 80 THINGS TO DO ON OAHU - THE BUCKET LIST - Journey - 6 - Apr. 21, 2020 on an epic 105-day Crystal Full World Cruise“spanning the globe from the USA to the Americas to the South Pacific, Southeast Asia and the Australia holidays: The 26 most wonderful places to visit - United States - Vacation Rentals & Places to Stay Sunshine Coast Accommodation - Mirage Alex Resort - Choices: Stories You I'm hopeless at being helpless - Lincolnwood Public Library Blog - MYVLF - Wanderlust

---

## Relevant Books

---

[ [DOWNLOAD](#) ] - Pdf, Epub The Silver Blade: A short story of suspense and twisted romance. free epub

---

[ [DOWNLOAD](#) ] - Download ebook Knight Shift

---

[ [DOWNLOAD](#) ] - Ebook Function Dysfunction: A Modern Love Story epub, pdf

---

[ [DOWNLOAD](#) ] - Memory of a Miner: A True-life Story from Harlan County's Heyday free online

---

[ [DOWNLOAD](#) ] - Read American Legends: The Life of F. Scott Fitzgerald

