

PROLOGUE

England, April 1996

The baby did not cry. This was strange because she knew that babies cried as soon as they are born, unless...She listened intently, willing the child to make a sound, any sound, but nothing happened. The night was cold and she wanted desperately to close her eyes, to let the darkness take over; but something stronger than the pull of unconsciousness was forcing her to stay awake. She *needed* to hear her baby cry; she needed a sign that these four hours of painful labor were not in vain. Most importantly, she needed to know that she would have someone to call her own... if only the baby would cry....

She wondered whether the baby was a boy or girl. The room was quiet except for the rustle of fabric as the nurses moved about on their rubber-soled shoes and the steady tick-tock of the clock on the wall. She felt someone's palm on her forehead but far from comforting, the hand was hard and cold. Then a voice broke the strange silence:

“She’s losing too much blood.”

Another voice, more urgent now said:

“Her blood pressure is dropping rapidly.”

It took all of her will-power to stay awake, shutting out everything else and listening for the sound of her baby crying. Suddenly, she could hold on no longer, and as she succumbed to the fierce pull of the blackness, from somewhere faraway she thought she heard her baby begin to cry....

CHAPTER 1

Montserrat, August, 2015

Was she doing the right thing? How was this move going to change her life? What if he wasn't there, or worst, what if he was there but wanted nothing to do with her? After all, it had been twenty years. The dull ache in the pit of her stomach intensified as she looked out the window of the small Twin Otter aircraft and saw the mountain peaks of Montserrat below. Montserrat, her beloved Montserrat, one of the Leeward Islands in the Eastern Caribbean chain of islands lying serenely 27 miles to the South-West of Antigua and 64 miles to the North-West of Guadeloupe. Montserrat approximately 40.5 square miles in size, with its volcanic and mountainous topography was a sight to behold, showing off its dramatic rock-faced coastline. Kyla sighed, this was the place where it had all begun...

"Why do you have to go?" 25 year old Spencer Roache asked gruffly, grabbing her arms. They were sitting on the ground in their special place just off the round-about which led in and out of Ryner's Village. Spencer had claimed this place some months ago, far out in the bush in the shadow of a great big stone. It was perfect for them since they could not get to meet or be really alone any place else.

"You don't have to go Ky" he pleaded earnestly, "You can stay with me. I will take care of you."

"Spence, you know my mother is never gonna let that happen," 16 year old Kyla responded, "You know she is a Christian. She doesn't even know I have a boyfriend."

"So?" he asked defiantly.

"Spence I have to go with my mother."

"You don't have to do anything you don't want to!" he argued.

"That's not fair Spence. You know I love you, but how do you expect me to tell my mother that I want to go and live with my boyfriend? She will freak out, not to mention maybe call the police for you."

"Am I your boyfriend Ky?"

The question took her by surprise because they both knew that they had agreed to be together. True, they had never done *it* in all of the six months that they had known each other, but they were a couple. He must have realized he had hurt her with the question and so he came closer and hugged her tightly.

"I have been waiting for you to finish growing up and now you are going away to grow up without me," he said brokenly.

She did not respond. She could not respond. What could she tell him? He looked so defeated; her young heart went out to him. Their world as they knew it was falling apart and there seemed to be nothing that they could do about it.

"I hate God!" Spencer said explosively.

Kyla's heart almost stopped. She may not be the Christian her parents thought she was, but she pulled the stops at blasphemy against God.

"Are you crazy!" she demanded angrily, pulling away from him, "how can you say something like that?"

"So what?" he demanded in return, "what is He going to do? Take you away from me?" he jeered, "Well He is doing that already."

They stared at each other with a love-hate intensity which took their breaths away as the sun made its way quickly across the sky. She was going to have to leave soon, or her mother would start walking down the road to look for her.

“I love you so much Ky.”

“I love you too Spence,” she said leaning into his strong, caring arms. He hid his face in her neck so she would not see him cry. His heart was breaking, and she had not even gone yet. She felt him tremble and held him tighter...

The touch-down of the small aircraft jolted Kyla back to the present. She shook her head to clear it from the memories, although they were as vivid as if they had been made yesterday. As the plane taxied down the short runway of the John A. Osborne Airport in Gerald's, Kyla began to feel some sort of excitement because she was doing something she had wanted to do for so long. She was home! But her excitement died a quick death as she stepped out of the aircraft and saw and heard family and friends calling out and waving to the people alighting from the aircraft. There was no one there to greet or meet her and it dawned on her that although she was home, she was a virtual stranger. Determined not to let anything put her down now that she was finally home, Kyla repeated to herself something she had learnt as a child: *A stranger is simply a friend you have not met. I am somebody's friend, they just don't know it yet.* With that her steps became lighter as she made her way to immigration. A handsome, clean-shaven officer maybe in his early 20's attended to her. After he had scanned her British passport and returned it to her, he smiled broadly and said: “Welcome home!”