



Dead in the Water (Lily Larkin Mysteries #4)

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Category: Suspense Thriller

Description: A body in the harbour. A yacht full of secrets. And a race against the tide to find the truth.

With her ice cream shop thriving, Lily feels at home in the close-knit Isles of Scilly. And now that she's uncovered the shop's true owner, she hopes the long-held mystery of her unconventional childhood will soon be solved.

But when her friendship with the charming PC Grainger hits troubled waters, she has little time to dwell—especially after a customer is found floating lifeless in the harbour.

Determined to uncover the truth, Lily turns her attention to the victim's travel companions—longtime friends and co-owners of a luxury motor yacht. But the closer she gets, the more secrets she unearths.

Was the death truly an accident, or is there something more sinister at play?

With the suspects preparing to sail away and her trusted ally absent from her side, Lily must decide—can she crack the case alone, or will she set aside her pride and seek PC Grainger's help before the killer leaves with the tide?

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Chapter One

Apparently, the group of customers on the only occupied table in the ice cream shop thought Lily had gone into the back room, rather than merely ducking down behind the counter to wipe up a blob of spilled ice cream.

If she popped up again now, while the haughty woman was making derogatory comments about the coffee it was going to be awkward.

“Honestly, it’s awful,” she went on. “It’s a good job the ice cream is excellent. That’s all I can say.”

Lily’s lips curved in a slow smile. Sod it. She could do with some entertainment after a quiet couple of days.

“Thank you,” she said as she stood, then smothered a laugh at the array of reactions from the six people around the table. The woman with the perfectly styled auburn hair visibly winced, while her friends looked thoroughly amused.

At a guess, Lily would judge them to be in their sixties. Two women and four men.

“Can I get you anything else?” she asked cheerfully. “More coffee, perhaps?”

“I think we’re fine, thank you,” the woman said, frowning into her mug.

“You don’t mind us lingering, do you?” a serious-looking man with wire-rimmed glasses asked. “We thought we’d wait until the rain calmed down, but who knows if

that will ever happen?”

“It’ll probably stop soon,” the grey-haired woman beside him said, slipping her hand onto his knee.

“Ever the optimist, aren’t you, Joyce?” the other lady said mockingly. “You’ve been saying that for two days now.”

“It’s only a bit of rain.” The man beside her patted her on the back affectionately. “Tomorrow will surely be better.”

“They’re getting lovely weather down in Spain,” the woman said huffily. “I checked the weather reports.”

The others in the group fell into a silence that even Lily found uncomfortable.

It was broken by the sound of a chair scraping. A moustached man stood up and there was a split second when Lily was certain he was about to make a dramatic exit from the shop, but he walked up to the counter.

“I think I’ll have an ice cream after all,” he said, standing at the glass-fronted counter.

While the rest of them had already eaten ice cream, he’d opted for just a coffee.

“What flavour would you like?” Lily asked, paying no attention to the hushed conversation between his friends that sounded distinctly like bickering.

“I’ll go for strawberry, I think.”

Lily nodded and picked up the scoop. “Are you enjoying your holiday so far?”

“It’s all right, I suppose.”

“Come on,” Lily said lightly. “Surely the coffee isn’t that bad?”

He chuckled at the lame joke, then his features turned serious. “I think some holidays are just destined to be a disaster.”

“Oh, dear. That doesn’t sound good.”

He took the ice cream cone from her and sidestepped to the till. “It’s not so bad, really.”

Lily took his money and deposited it in the till. Then she lowered her voice.

“Did you give the casting vote on the Isles of Scilly or something? Because someone seems upset that they’re not enjoying some Spanish sunshine.”

He gave her a conspiratorial smile. “Something like that.” He looked over his shoulder at his friends, who were now deep in a conversation about which other islands they would visit when the weather cleared. “Sorry about Kerry, by the way.”

Lily dipped her eyebrows in confusion. “Oh, you mean the coffee comment? It’s fine.”

“The coffee’s really not that bad.”

Lily beamed. “I’d argue with you on that one, but I suspect you’re only being polite.”

“You don’t like your own coffee?”

“No, but I love the coffee at the cafe a few doors down. If you want good coffee, you

should go there.”

“I’m not convinced about your marketing tactics,” he said, then licked at his ice cream.

“This is an ice cream shop,” she said flatly. “I want to be known for the great ice cream, not for the coffee. I didn’t offer coffee at all when I first opened, but people kept asking, so I gave in.”

“It seems you’re missing a trick by not offering both good coffee and good ice cream.”

Lily shrugged. “I don’t want to put myself in competition with other small businesses.

The island isn’t big enough for that. Especially since I really like the woman who owns the cafe.

Now I get to go to her place and have a decent coffee as a treat.

It wouldn’t be the same if I had access to great coffee all the time. ”

“You make some good points.” He wiped a smudge of ice cream from his moustache. “The ice cream is definitely good enough to keep people coming back, so you have no worries there.”

“Thanks,” Lily said, glancing out at the rain, which was still coming down hard. “I hope the weather picks up for you tomorrow. The islands are spectacular when the sun comes out.”

“I think they’re pretty lovely anyway,” he said, offering her another smile before

returning to his friends.

At a noise from the back room, Lily went to check what Jessica was up to. She was still getting used to having an employee, and it wasn't the first time she'd forgotten Jessica was there.

She'd met the confident teenager a month or so earlier when her boyfriend had gone missing and Lily had helped to track him down. Having just finished secondary school, Jessica had been looking for a summer job and enquired about working at the ice cream shop a few days after Lily had opened.

At sixteen, she was full of energy, and had been quick to learn the ropes. Having an extra pair of hands was great when the weather had been decent, but the two days of solid rain had kept customers away, leaving them scrabbling for ways to kill the time.

"What have you found to do now?" Lily asked, amused to find Jessica crouched in front of the new cabinets with a bucket of soapy water and a cloth. All the food which had been in the cabinets was laid out on the countertop.

"Just giving the cupboards a clean," she said, reaching to the back with her cloth. "Do you need me out the front?"

"No." Lily leaned against the counter. "Considering the cupboards were only installed a few weeks ago, I'm not sure they're in need of a deep clean."

"Sorry." She sat back on her heels. "I couldn't think of anything else to clean and time goes slowly when there's nothing to do."

"You could just go home early," Lily suggested. "There really isn't much point in us both being here when it's so quiet. I appreciate all your cleaning efforts, though."

Idly, Jessica ran her cloth over the cabinet door. “I was also thinking I’m fine alone here if you ever need to leave early. I’m sure I’d be fine to lock up if you wanted.”

“Thanks. It’s great that you feel so confident. I’ll probably take you up on it at some point.”

“Tonight would be fine. If that would be helpful.”

Lily tilted her head. “Why do I feel like you’re trying to get rid of me? Were you planning on inviting your friends over for a party or something?”

Jessica blew a raspberry as she laughed. “That’s a great idea and I’ll keep it in mind for the future, but I was actually thinking you might want extra time to get ready for your date this evening.”

Lily did a slow blink. “My what? ”

“Your date.” Jessica sucked in a sharp breath. “Oh my goodness. Was it supposed to be a secret? I promise I wasn’t eavesdropping. I was standing right next to you when you arranged it, so I assumed you knew I could hear.”

“If you were standing next to me, could you please remind me of the details because I don’t know what you’re talking about.”

“Your date with PC Grainger,” she said, a flicker of concern in her eyes.

“Oh, that!” Lily snorted a laugh. “That’s not a date.”

“Really? He said he was cooking for you. It sounded like a date.”

“Did it?” Lily’s mind flashed up an image of the time they’d kissed on the beach a

few weeks back. Something her brain liked to remind her of regularly.

“Does he cook for you often?”

“No, but I was teasing him the other day because he always comes here and I cook, so I think he just took the hint finally.”

“He’s pretty good looking,” Jessica said. “I thought you two were dating or something.”

“No. Just friends.” She swallowed hard and looked at all the food on the counter, most of which were containers of sugar. “Why don’t you put all this away and head home early?”

“Thanks, but I’m happy to hang around. I’m not supposed to finish for another hour and a half.”

“You’re very dedicated,” Lily mused, as she wandered away. After a couple of steps, she backtracked and looked around the doorframe at Jessica. “I just want to make sure we’re clear on something. If I send you home early, I will still pay you for the whole day.”

“Really?”

“Yes.” Lily stifled a laugh as Jessica picked up the pace of refilling the cupboards.

“That would be amazing then, thank you. I’m saving up for some new clothes, you see, and everything helps.”

“If it’s ever busy and I ask you to work longer, I’ll pay you extra for those hours, but if there’s nothing to do and I send you home early, I’ll still pay you.”

“I love working here. You’re a great boss.”

The compliment gave Lily a warm tingle in her stomach. “It’s good having you around.”

Jessica cleared away the countertop at lightning speed, then moved to the end cupboard to retrieve her bag and her raincoat.

“I’ll see you tomorrow,” she said as she rushed past Lily. “Enjoy your date.”

“Thank you,” Lily said before giving a quick shake of the head. It wasn’t a date.

In the shop, the customers were leaving too.

Left alone with her thoughts, Lily pondered whether she’d missed some clue and Flynn really had invited her for a date.

It was unusual for him to invite her to his place. And him cooking was unheard of.

She shook her head. They were just friends.

Admittedly, she often got butterflies at the sight of him. And she couldn’t deny the intrusive thoughts about kissing him. But they’d agreed to just be friends, and she was fine with that.

She really was.

Now she should stop overthinking things. Since she probably wouldn’t get any more customers, she could close the shop early and get ready for her date.

She cursed herself.

It wasn't a date.

At least she was reasonably sure it wasn't.

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Chapter Two

Flynn spent a good portion of his day debating what to cook for dinner.

After his shift, he settled on his couch and searched for recipes he thought he could manage.

He was all set to head to the supermarket with his list of ingredients when he questioned what on earth he was doing.

There was no way Lily was expecting him to cook a proper meal.

He'd look like he was trying too hard and make things awkward again.

Finally, their friendship was back on an even keel and he was about to freak her out with his notions of a romantic dinner.

Scrap that idea.

He tidied up, at least. Then hopped in the shower when he realised he'd lost a lot of time searching through recipes.

A flash of nerves hit when the doorbell rang. After buzzing Lily into the building, he left the door open for her and shot back to his bedroom to grab a T-shirt.

"Hi," she called, wandering into the flat.

“Sorry.” Flynn’s words were distorted by his T-shirt, which he pulled over his head as he walked back from his bedroom. “I only just got out of the shower.”

Smiling lightly, she moved inside, drifting into the living room. “Did you only just get back from work?”

“No.” He grabbed a towel and rubbed it over his wet hair. “But I sat down with my phone and lost an hour of my life scrolling.” He slung the towel over the back of a chair.

“Dinner smells delicious,” she said sarcastically.

Maybe he should have cooked. “I’ll put the oven on now.”

“What are you making?”

“Pizza.”

She lifted an eyebrow. “From scratch?”

“If you call taking the pizza out of the freezer and slinging it in the oven making it from scratch, then yes.”

“I wouldn’t call it that, no.”

Okay, he definitely should have cooked. “You don’t want pizza?”

“Pizza’s fine.” She sank onto the couch with an exasperated sigh. “I just might have got the wrong idea when you said you’re cooking... Are we having a salad with it?”

He grimaced. “Did you want salad?”

“I don’t care.” She slipped her shoes off and put her feet up on the coffee table.

He turned the knobs on the oven, then came to join her on the couch. “It sounds as though you do care. I would like to point out that you’ve made frozen pizza for me before and I’ve never once complained.”

“I’m not complaining.”

“You should really be glad that I didn’t decide to cook a proper meal. I can’t imagine you’re keen for another bout of food poisoning.”

“Pizza’s fine,” she said, her voice clipped. “How was your day?”

He hesitated, debating whether to go along with the change of subject. “As dull as ever,” he said. “How about you? Did the rain put your customers off again?”

“Yeah. The whole day was quiet. Jessica was bored stiff. She kept finding things to clean until I sent her home early. On the plus side, the shop is sparkling.”

“How’s it working out with her?”

“Good.” Lily sank back into the couch cushions. “She’s great.”

While he went to put the pizzas in the oven, she chatted about the few customers she’d had and cheerfully regaled him with a story about a woman complaining loudly about the terrible coffee at the ice cream shop.

By the time he set the pizzas on the coffee table, she seemed much more relaxed.

“Have you seen anything of Glynis yet?” he asked through a mouthful of pepperoni.

“Is she up and about again after her poisoning?”

“I haven’t seen her since I visited her last week, so I guess she’s still not up to her morning walks. I spoke to her on the phone a few days ago and she says she’s okay, except for being frustrated that she isn’t recovering faster.”

“I don’t know why you don’t just speak to Maria,” Flynn said, shaking his head. “I’m not sure how all this waiting and wondering isn’t driving you crazy. Why not just confront her and ask if she owns the ice cream shop? And if she knew your parents.”

“I want to catch her alone.” Lily paused with a slice of pizza before her lips. “Which is difficult while Glynis is still housebound. As soon as she’s out and about again, I can go over and speak to Maria.”

“I feel as though you’re putting it off.”

She shook her head. “I’ve also been busy with the shop.”

“And part of you is scared of what you might find out when you speak to her?” he suggested gently.

“I will talk to her. But I could be completely wrong about her. Her wearing a necklace like the one in the photo of the owner could be a coincidence. I’m sure lots of people have necklaces with an anchor pendant.”

“Maybe.” He moved to get more drinks. “You should talk to her and find out for sure. The suspense is killing me.”

“I will,” she said, a faraway look in her eyes.

“You okay?” he asked, sitting back beside her.

“Yeah. Just tired. I think I’ll eat and run.” Mischief flashed in her eyes. “I realise it’s

pretty rude of me after you went to so much effort.”

He smiled at her teasing, but his jaw tightened. Why hadn't he gone with his gut and cooked something?

The answer was obvious and had everything to do with the fact that he was leaving in a couple of months. No matter how much he'd like there to be something more between them, it was unrealistic to think they could be anything more than friends.

While munching on the rest of the pizza, his mind took him back to a conversation he'd had with the sergeant a few weeks ago. He'd told Flynn he'd be happy for him to stay on the Isles of Scilly for longer if he wanted to. Flynn hadn't known what to say.

Since then, the conversation popped into his head regularly. Mostly when he was around Lily.

With the idea floating around his head once again, he waited until Lily left before sending the sergeant a message.

Realistically, he didn't even know if it was a possibility for him to stay longer. It wasn't as though it was the sergeant's decision.

There was no harm in asking him to look into it, though.

After pressing send, Flynn flopped back onto the couch, trying not to pay any attention to the knot of tension that had gathered under his sternum.

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Chapter Three

With the rain finally stopping and the sun appearing, Lily hoped the shop would be busier again. She propped the door open to set up the tables outside. The space was limited, but she could manage three small tables without causing issues with access on the promenade.

She was on her way back inside when she spotted a familiar face ambling in her direction. Lily smiled at Glynis automatically. Then she remembered her suspicions. If Maria was the owner of the ice cream shop, then Glynis surely knew that, and had kept the information from Lily.

She reminded herself that she didn't know anything for sure. And that Glynis was recovering from her hospital stay and didn't need unnecessary stress. It was the first time Lily had seen her out in a month.

As someone who'd always been so fit and full of vitality, it was tough to see Glynis looking frail. Shuffling slowly along the promenade, she looked every one of her eighty-six years.

"Hello," Lily said, greeting her with a gentle hug. "It's good to see you up and about."

"Thank you, dear." She patted Lily's cheek with an affection that made Lily's heart ache. Could she really have been deceiving her the whole time they'd known each other?

“How are you feeling?” Lily asked.

“I have to say I’m not feeling particularly fit. I was getting cabin fever, though. And I think I need to push myself if I ever want to get back to my previous fitness levels.”

“How do you feel about an ice cream?”

Glynis made her way to a chair at the front of the shop and accepted Lily’s help in lowering her into it. “I’m afraid my appetite is still pathetic. I’ve only been managing very bland food.”

“I’m sure you’ll bounce back soon. The fresh air will be good for you.”

“That’s what I think.”

“Do you want a coffee?”

“You’re serving coffee now?”

Lily nodded. “It’s not great. Whenever you want decent coffee you should go to the Cookie Jar.”

Glynis chuckled and patted her hand. “I could do with a glass of water, if you don’t mind. And if you’ve got five minutes to sit and tell me how you’ve been, that would perk me up no end.”

“Of course.” Lily smiled and made her way inside.

While filling a tall glass with water, she felt a heaviness in her stomach. Had Glynis come to visit Lily because they were friends and she was genuinely interested in her, or was she gathering information to pass back to Maria?

Heading back outside, Lily cast her eyes over Glynis and decided the notion was absurd. She barely looked fit enough to be out, never mind be on some convoluted spy mission.

Sitting, Lily filled her in on the shop, and how lovely it was to have Jessica working with her. Glynis smiled along, but wasn't her usual chatty self. After five minutes, she feebly said she should get home, then waved away Lily's offer to escort her.

Watching her go, Lily realised she hadn't asked about Flynn, which was a sure sign she wasn't back to full fitness.

Another thought hit her too – at the speed Glynis was going, Lily could easily nip around the other way and catch Maria alone.

Presumably, she'd be at home. As far as Lily could tell, she didn't leave the house much.

It was another reason she suspected her of being the owner of the ice cream shop – she was keeping herself hidden because she was concerned about being recognised by someone who knew her twenty years ago.

“Hello!” Jessica said, arriving for work and breaking Lily from her thoughts.

With Jessica there to look after the shop, there was no reason she couldn't finally confront Maria.

She smiled brightly at her chirpy employee. “It looks like the weather will be better for us today.”

“I hope it'll be busy,” Jessica said, walking inside with her. “I love seeing the customers reacting to your ice cream.”

“I like it too,” Lily agreed, pushing thoughts of Maria aside and focussing on her job.

As she’d suspected, they had a steady stream of customers over the morning.

They took it in turns to take a lunch break, though Lily’s was only a quick dash up to the flat to grab a sandwich.

At a lull in the afternoon, she left Jessica to keep an eye on the place and wandered onto Porthcressa Beach to stretch her legs.

She walked the length of the beach and had started back towards the shop when she caught sight of Seren. With her striking red hair swinging in a ponytail, she was easy to spot as she strolled towards her.

“Jessica said you were out for a walk.”

“I fancied some fresh air,” Lily said. “What are you up to?”

“Just killing time before I start my shift in the pub.”

“Were you on the hunt for ice cream, by any chance?”

“Not really, no.”

Lily raised an eyebrow. “Should I be offended?”

“No. You know I love your ice cream. I just think I love it a little too much. I need to get back to eating ice cream as a treat, rather than every single day.”

“Fair enough,” Lily said. “I feel the same way. I’m almost sick of the sight of the stuff already. But that’s probably a good thing.”

“We should start swimming in the mornings,” Seren said. “A few years back I swam a few times a week, but I got out of the habit.”

“I’m definitely up for that.” The thought had crossed her mind a few times recently, when she’d looked out of her living room window to see people getting their exercise out in the bay.

“Anyway,” Seren said, linking her arm with Lily’s. “I haven’t got long, so tell me what’s up?”

“How do you mean?” Lily asked, dragging her toes through the soft sand as they walked.

“You seem a bit down? Or are you just tired now that you’re working for a living?”

“I am tired,” she admitted. It was a good kind of tired though. The shop kept her busy, but she enjoyed it.

“It’s probably a shock to the system being so busy. It’s also kind of amazing that you’ve done so much in such a short space of time. Don’t you think it’s crazy that just a few months ago you had no clue how to make ice cream or how to run a shop?”

“It is pretty surreal when I think about it,” Lily agreed.

She could have left it at that. Or she could have confided in Seren about the issue with Maria. She didn’t want to do that yet, though. Not until she knew for sure that Maria was the owner.

There was one other problem she could share with her friend.

“I had dinner with Flynn last night,” she blurted out, before she could talk herself out

of sharing.

“That’s not exactly news, is it?”

“No. But he invited me to his place, which is unusual. And he said he was going to cook.” She dragged in a breath. “I got it into my head that it was a date...”

“Was it?” Seren asked.

“No. Definitely not.”

“Okay.” Seren seemed confused. “But you two decided you were going to stick to being friends, didn’t you?”

“Yes. We did. And that seemed logical. But last night when I got to his and realised it wasn’t a date, I was disappointed.” That didn’t quite cover it. “Actually, I was really annoyed with him. Which is a little unfair, but I couldn’t help it.”

“Did you say anything?”

“No.”

Seren squeezed her elbow. “Just because you agreed to be friends doesn’t mean you can’t change your mind about that. Talk to him and tell him you don’t want to just be friends.”

“I don’t know,” she said with a sigh. “He seems fine with things the way they are.”

“It doesn’t matter how he seems – you won’t know for sure what’s going on in his head unless you ask.”

“Maybe.” She glanced up at the promenade and spotted a large group entering the shop. “I should get back and help Jessica.”

“I better get to work, too.” They continued to the promenade together, then went their separate ways.

Lily got straight to work helping Jessica, and the rest of the afternoon was pleasantly busy. She sent Jessica home at closing time, but ended up staying open an hour later since every time she went to flip the sign on the door, more customers would arrive.

Keeping the customers happy by staying open longer had seemed like a good idea until she realised she still had to make new batches of ice cream.

The thought of that final task was tiring, but she soon got into the rhythm of chopping and blending ingredients. There was something soothing about the process and time went by without her noticing, but the tiredness hit her again when she moved three new batches of ice cream into the freezer.

Glancing from the back room into the shop, she spotted the tables and chairs which she’d forgotten to take inside for the night.

Now, the task felt overwhelming. Mostly, because there was someone sitting out there in the fading light, and the idea of having to make small talk – when all she wanted to do was collapse in bed – wasn’t at all appealing.

For a moment, she considered abandoning the tables and chairs for the night. But if there was a storm and they got blown around, she’d curse herself for her laziness in the morning.

Taking a breath, she psyched herself up for it.

It wasn't as though she had to chat. All she had to do was politely shoo them away and pack up for the night.

She'd be tucked up in bed in no time.

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Chapter Four

Only a sliver of the sun was still visible when Lily stepped outside. While it disappeared into the sea, it sent streaks of orange and yellow across the darkening sky. The reflection of the vibrant colours on the water drew Lily's attention – like twinkling lights as far as you could see.

Suddenly, the effort of putting the tables and chairs away was worth it. She inhaled the briny air and gazed out at the mesmerising view.

After a couple of minutes of taking it in, she turned to the grey-haired man sitting at the furthest table. "I'm afraid you're a little late for ice cream," she told him.

"I was just enjoying the sunset."

"It's stunning," Lily said.

"It must be an amazing place to live," the man said.

"I haven't been here long." Lily kept her eyes on the water, unwilling to miss a moment of the tail end of the sunset. "It is fantastic though. I should take more time to stop and watch the sunset."

He released a gentle hum of agreement. "It's nicer when you have someone to share it with."

His solemn words snapped Lily from her trance.

“Oh!” she said, catching sight of his familiar neat moustache. “You were in the shop with your friends yesterday.”

“Yes. My little group provided you with some entertainment, I think. I’m afraid Kerry has a knack for speaking without thinking. I’m glad you didn’t take offence.”

“Hard to be offended when I know the coffee isn’t great. Now, if she’d said something derogatory about the ice cream, I wouldn’t have taken it well.”

“There was no danger of that. They were still raving about the ice cream at breakfast this morning. Your interesting flavours had everyone hooked.”

“Glad to hear it,” she said. “Where are your friends this evening?”

“In the Mermaid Inn. Or they were. They might be back on the boat by now.”

“On the boat?”

“We share a yacht.”

“Wow!” She sank onto the chair across from him. “That sounds great.”

“I suppose it does.” He shifted in his seat. “My dad taught me to sail when I was young. When I hit middle age, I decided I wanted to spend my retirement years sailing the world.”

“And you’re actually doing it?” she asked in awe.

“My wife and I couldn’t afford to buy a yacht. But we had friends who wanted to join our little venture, so it seemed like the perfect solution. We’d known them for years and everyone got on well.”

“I suppose you’d have to be pretty close,” Lily mused. “I honestly can’t think of many people I’d want to be stuck on a boat with for long periods of time.”

His moustache twitched as he smiled. “We agreed to stay in hotels on longer trips so we wouldn’t be under each other’s feet the whole time.” He pointed along the promenade. “We stayed at the Star Castle the last couple of nights. We’re back on the boat tonight, ready for an early sail tomorrow.”

“Are you off somewhere nice?”

“Depends on your definition of nice. We’re heading home to St Ives, so it’s not far to go.”

“You don’t seem thrilled about that,” Lily remarked.

“I don’t think I’d be happy, no matter where we were going.”

She felt the muscles in her forehead pull tight. “Why not?”

“Long story,” he said, giving his head a shake as though clearing his thoughts. “Sorry, am I keeping you from closing up or something?”

She hitched her shoulders in a shrug. “I came out to put the tables and chairs away for the night, but I’m not in a rush...”

“It’s a fairly depressing story. You probably don’t want to hear it.”

“I don’t mind.” Funny how quickly you could go from not wanting human interaction to not wanting it to end. “If you want to tell it, I’d be happy to hear it.”

His thoughtful silence stretched for long enough that Lily wasn’t sure she’d get to

hear his story. It was an odd relief when he finally spoke.

“We’d had the boat for a month when my wife was diagnosed with a very aggressive form of cancer. She died within six months and we only managed a few day trips on the yacht.”

He had warned her it was a depressing story, but his words still brought tears to prick the back of Lily’s eyes. “I’m so sorry.”

“It’s a year since she died. Now I own a boat with two other couples who are keen to go off on all the trips we’d originally planned, and I’ve lost all enthusiasm for any of it.”

“That’s understandable.”

“They’ve been patient with me, but I know they’re secretly champing at the bit, waiting for me to get over it and move on. I feel guilty for holding them back, but I really can’t summon any motivation.”

“Couldn’t they go without you?”

“None of them are experienced boat people. They love the idea of sailing, but none of them feel confident to sail long distances – even though it’s a motor yacht and not a sailing yacht.”

“That must make things difficult,” Lily murmured.

“My wife was into sailing. It always feels more comfortable having someone else with knowledge when you’re out on the water.”

“That makes sense.”

He dipped his head to stare at his hands in his lap. “I finally agreed we’d do a trip around the Mediterranean. An acquaintance of mine from the sailing club agreed to come with us. He’d help with the sailing in return for a free trip. Everyone had met him before and it seemed like a good idea.”

Lily frowned, confused. “Are you on your way back from that trip?”

“No. This was the start of it. Except, almost as soon as we left, I knew I couldn’t face the trip. We planned on being away for six weeks. Leaving St Ives felt like I was getting even further from Lisa – my wife. Which is daft, I know, but that’s how it feels.”

“I don’t think it’s daft.” Lily smiled sadly. “So you’re going home?”

“Much to everyone’s annoyance, yes.”

“Could you fly home and they go on without you?”

“We talked about it, but almost as soon as I told them I didn’t want to continue with the trip, they suggested Russell buy out my share of the boat.”

“But you don’t want to sell?”

“I do. When they suggested it, I felt this tremendous sense of relief. I don’t want to sail the world without Lisa.

I want to be at home, spending time with my son and my grandson.

” He paused and looked thoughtful. “The problem is that I suspect they’d already been plotting for Russell to buy me out.

I'd pondered the idea of selling, but knew it would be difficult to find someone interested in a third share of a yacht.

No one wants to own a yacht with people they don't know. ”

“I imagine that would be hard. But selling to this Russell guy seems like a good solution.”

He nodded. “Except Russell knows it would be difficult to find a buyer, so he offered me less than it's worth. I know he's not short of money, so it feels as though he's trying to take advantage. On principle, I don't want to give in to him.”

“I don't blame you.”

He lifted his eyebrows as he smiled. “The others think I'm being unreasonable, but I said we need to sail back home tomorrow unless he can change his offer on the boat. I thought that might be a good way of putting a bit of pressure on him, but so far he hasn't budged.”

“So you'll sail home tomorrow?”

“First thing. Then they either need to encourage Russell to increase his offer, or we'll have to sell the boat. It doesn't matter to me either way.” His smile softened his features. “I told you it was a depressing story.”

“I'm sorry things didn't work out the way they should have.”

“That's life, isn't it? You can make all the plans you want, but some things are beyond our control.” He shook his head. “Sorry, I've just been wittering away, telling you all my problems. I'm Joseph, by the way.”

“Lily,” she replied. “It’s nice to meet you.”

“You too. I promise I’m not usually so gloomy.” He stood and smiled. “On a more cheerful note, this time tomorrow afternoon, I’ll be playing trains with my grandson.”

“How old is he?”

“Five. He’s quite the character. A proper little chatterbox. His favourite thing to do at the moment is play with the train set I bought him for Christmas.”

“That’s lovely.” Standing, Lily stacked her chair onto the one Joseph had vacated. “I hope you enjoy catching up with your family tomorrow.”

Joseph looked deep into her eyes. “It was great talking to you. You made me see things more clearly.”

“I barely even said anything.”

“Just talking it through helped me get things straighter in my head.” He picked up the chairs from the next table. “Let me help you.”

“You really don’t need to,” she said, manoeuvring the chairs through the doorway.

“It’s the least I can do. Then I’m going to call my son and make sure they have nothing planned for tomorrow. I really have my heart set on playing trains with Thomas.”

Once they’d got the tables and chairs inside, Lily wished Joseph well and watched him wander away. He didn’t get far before she heard the gentle sound of his laughter as he chatted on the phone.

Nice man. She felt a pang of sadness about his wife.

Hopefully, spending time with his grandson would bring him the peace he needed.

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Chapter Five

When Jessica came bursting into the shop on Monday morning, Lily was standing on a chair to update the menu on the blackboard.

“You’re early,” she said, then checked her watch. “Really early.”

“I know. I’m not here yet.”

Lily lifted her eyebrows. “Weird, because it definitely seems as though you’re here.”

“I’m not here to work. I was out for a run, but I went past the harbour. Have you heard what happened?”

“No.” She wiped the board, erasing the apple pie flavoured ice cream which they’d run out of yesterday. “What happened?”

“I don’t know, but the police are down there and there’s an ambulance. I heard someone died.”

Lily had raised her blackboard pen, but paused. “Seriously?”

The door swung open again and Seren rushed in. “Someone died!” she shrieked. “It’s horrible. Did you hear?”

“I’m just hearing now,” Lily said, stepping down from the chair. “What happened? Do you know who it is?”

“It’s not a local. A visitor. I was talking to Zack Wheeler, the fisherman.

He found the guy early this morning – floating in the water by the bottom of the harbour steps.

Blood on the back of his head. He thought it looked as though the poor fella had slipped down the steps, cracked his head on the way and ended up in the water. ”

Stunned, Lily walked out from behind the counter. “That’s terrible.”

“I can’t believe it,” Jessica said, heading for the door. “I’m going to finish my run and get showered. I’ll see you in an hour.”

She’d only just disappeared from view when the bell over the door jangled again. Pippa from the cafe a few doors down wandered in.

“Have you heard what happened?” she said quietly.

Seren nodded. “I was talking to Zack. He found the body.”

“It’s horrible.” Pippa’s face was pale and her eyes sorrowful. “Some of his friends were in the cafe this morning. This poor woman, Joyce, was distraught. I think it was putting off my other customers, but I could hardly ask her to leave.”

“The guy was here on holiday, right?” Seren asked.

“Yes.” Pippa pressed a hand to her chest. “This was their first stop on a sailing trip down to the Mediterranean.”

Lily felt the blood drain from her face. “Friends who own a yacht together?”

“Yes.”

“Joseph?” Lily asked. “Was the man’s name Joseph? Please tell me it wasn’t?” He said his friends had been in the pub – maybe one of them had fallen after a couple of drinks too many. Not that she’d wish any of them any harm, but she’d enjoyed chatting to Joseph. Surely he wasn’t dead.

“Yes, Joseph,” Pippa said. “Did you know him?”

She shook her head and moved automatically to the nearest chair. “He’s dead?”

“It looks as though he slipped on the harbour steps.” Pippa pressed her lips together. “Knocked himself out and ended up in the water.”

“No,” Lily whispered.

Seren pulled out the chair beside her. “You knew him?”

“He came in for ice cream a couple of days ago with his friends. Yesterday evening he stopped to watch the sunset outside the shop, and we had a chat.”

“You spoke to him last night?” Pippa asked, pulling up a chair.

“Yes. He seemed like such a nice guy.”

“You might have been the last person to speak to him.”

“He was talking to his son on the phone when he left,” Lily said.

“That must have been right before he died.” Pippa pressed her palms onto the table.

“His friend Joyce said he didn’t come back to the boat last night.

Apparently, he’d gone off for a walk while they were in the pub.

When they got back to the boat, they all went to bed and didn’t notice until this morning that he didn’t make it back to the boat.

They woke up to see the police pulling his body out of the water.

Apparently, he was snagged on a bit of rusted ladder close to the bottom of the steps.
”

“Oh, god.” Lily’s mind went to Flynn, assuming he’d been involved in that grim task. “I wonder if someone’s told his son. It sounded as though they were close.” Tears stung the back of her eyes as she remembered him talking so fondly about his grandson.

“His friend, Joyce, called his son,” Pippa said. “She came in the cafe straight after, and couldn’t stop crying, the poor thing.”

“Why were they in the cafe?” Lily asked.

Pippa shrugged. “Sergeant Proctor wanted to speak to them, but he needed to deal with the body first. They didn’t want to just sit around on their boat, so they came for a coffee while they waited. They’ve gone now. What a terrible holiday.”

“How old was he?” Seren asked.

Lily stared at the table. “I’d guess mid to late sixties.” Her stomach lurched with a wave of sadness. “He seemed perfectly fit and healthy. He was excited about going home today and playing with his grandson.”

“It’s so sad,” Seren murmured. “Makes me feel sick. His poor family.”

“I better get back to the cafe,” Pippa said, smiling wanly as she stood. “I’ll talk to you later.”

“Are you okay?” Seren asked Lily when they were alone.

“Yeah. It’s not as though I knew him... but it’s really sad.”

“It makes you realise how precious life is.” She stood and stretched her neck. “On that note, I’m off to find Kit to give him a big hug.”

Lily managed a smile.

“Here, you can have one too.” Seren bent and wrapped her arms around Lily, squeezing so hard that she couldn’t help but laugh. “You should call Flynn,” she said when she released her.

Oddly enough, that had been Lily’s instinct as well.

“Why?” she asked, affecting a puzzled air.

“He’ll have been dealing with it this morning. He’ll know all the details. And you should tell him you spoke to the guy last night. The police might want to talk to you.”

“I suppose they might,” she said. “I’ll message him.”

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Chapter Six

The sergeant's reply to Flynn's message the previous evening had merely said they could discuss the prospect of him extending his stay in the morning.

Of course, the discovery of the body in the harbour meant a change in priorities.

With the busy morning, Flynn hadn't even given it a thought, but it came to him when he took the sergeant a coffee at lunchtime.

"Thought you might be ready for a caffeine fix," he said, setting it on his desk.

"Thanks. Are they here yet?"

With his mind elsewhere, Flynn squinted in confusion. "Who?"

"The friends of the deceased. They were supposed to come over at noon."

"They're not here yet."

Sergeant Proctor checked his watch. "No time for lunch before they get here. We'll get sandwiches once we've spoken to them."

"Okay. Are you going to speak to them in here?"

"No. In the interview room. I'll talk to each of the couples, then the other guy. I'm fairly sure we got all the information we need from them at the scene, but it can't hurt

to chat through things again, when they've had a bit of time to digest everything."

Slowly, Flynn shook his head. "Presuming he fell straight after speaking to his son, it wouldn't even have been that late. If someone had heard something and gone out to check, things might have been different."

"I'm sure they'll all be kicking themselves that they didn't stay up longer. Too late for 'what ifs' now, though."

"Yeah." Flynn backed up to the door, deciding the conversation about making his position permanent would wait until tomorrow. "I'll let you know when they arrive."

"Thanks. I'd like you there when I speak to them."

"Me?"

"Yeah. Jeff can man the phone and the front desk. I'm sure we're going to have lots of curious residents as word gets out."

"Okay," Flynn said slowly.

"What's wrong?"

"Nothing." He rubbed at his forehead. "I just thought you'd want Jeff with you."

"You're better at this sort of thing."

Flynn opened his mouth, then closed it again.

The sergeant leaned onto his desk. "Is there a problem?"

“No. I just don’t want to cause any issues with PC Hill...”

“It’s fine. He’s happy manning reception. And he agreed you’re better at interviewing people. It makes sense to work to our strengths.”

“Great. Thanks.” Noise from the front of the building had him tilting his head. “That sounds like them now.”

Joyce Hughes fidgeted in her seat in the interview room. A constant stream of tears ran down her cheeks and the sound of tissue scraping every time she pulled another from the box was beginning to annoy Flynn.

“I just feel so terrible,” she said, after walking them through the events of the previous day. “If we’d have waited up for him, he’d still be alive. Why did we choose last night to go to bed early?” She directed the question at her husband, Keith, beside her.

“We weren’t to know,” he mumbled. “We were tired, so we went to bed. He’s a grown man. Of course, it didn’t occur to us to wait up for him.”

“But if we’d stayed up for another drink, Joseph might still be alive.”

The sergeant sat up straighter. “I’m afraid there’s no turning back the clock now. No sense in beating yourself up over what might have been.” He glanced down at his notes. “When you went to bed, your friends were still up. Is that correct?”

“Yes.” Joyce nodded. “We had a drink together back on the boat. Kerry and Vic were still in the galley when we went to bed, but I heard them going to bed soon after.” She swung around in her seat to face her husband.

“If only I hadn’t put my earplugs in. I’m a light sleeper usually,” she said, flicking

her gaze to the sergeant.

“I had earplugs in and my eye mask on. Keith snores, you see.”

“You mentioned that,” the sergeant said, eyes on the notes they’d made at the scene.

“We both said when we woke up that we slept really well,” she went on, babbling away. “It must be the sea air, but we both slept deeply. Why did it have to be that night that we slept so well?”

“That last whiskey knocked me out.” Keith sighed heavily. “I wish I’d skipped it now.”

“I feel awful about all that business over selling the boat,” Joyce said and reached for yet another tissue.

“What business was that?” Flynn asked.

“Joseph wanted to sell his share of the boat,” Keith said. “We’d found a buyer – Russell, who’s travelling with us – but they couldn’t agree on a price.”

Joyce blew her nose noisily. “It caused some friction on the trip.”

“Nothing major,” Keith said. “There were a couple of uncomfortable conversations, but there wasn’t a lot we could do if they couldn’t agree on a price.”

“So Mr Whittaker changed his mind about selling?” Sergeant Proctor asked.

“No. I think he was just going to wait and see if Russell would increase the offer, or look for someone else to sell to. Like I say, it wasn’t a huge deal. Just a shame that it hadn’t been the relaxed trip we expected.”

“Joseph changed his mind about the holiday, so we were cutting the trip short and sailing back to St Ives,” Joyce added. “I just wish our last days together hadn’t involved that stress. We used to get on so well.”

“I imagine there’s always some friction when friends own a yacht together,” the sergeant said as he stood. “There’s really no sense in beating yourselves up. Thanks for speaking to us again.”

“What happens now?” Keith asked, standing.

“I spoke to Joseph’s son,” the sergeant said with a hand on the doorknob. “He wants to come over here and go through his father’s things on the boat. He’d also like to escort the body back to the mainland, so I’m waiting to hear when he can make it over.”

“We’ll have to stay longer then,” Joyce said, a hand on her husband’s arm. “We’ll stay and wait for James.” A fresh round of tears made her chest shudder. “Poor James.”

Flynn escorted them back to the reception and invited Russell Hart back to the interview room. The man was a good few years younger than the rest of the group, and sharply dressed in chinos and a short-sleeved shirt.

With his cool demeanour, he told them how he’d been staying at the Star Castle Hotel the previous evening.

As the only member of the party who wasn’t an owner of the yacht, he had the smallest cabin – which was so cramped that he avoided sleeping on the boat if there was another option.

He’d heard nothing about Mr Whittaker’s death until the others had informed him

after the body had been found.

“We heard there’s been some dispute about you buying Mr Whittaker’s share of the boat?” Flynn asked, when Russell rounded up his account of the last twenty-four hours.

“Yes. We couldn’t agree on a price, though.

He thought I was lowballing him, but the boat’s in need of some repairs and maintenance.

Also, while buying in with other owners is appealing in some regards, it’s problematic in others.

I like the other owners and it’s great to have like-minded people to travel with, but there’s always some tension that comes with it too. The price needed to reflect that.”

“How did you leave things?”

“He said he wouldn’t sell unless I increased the offer.

I told him I wasn’t interested in buying at the price he wanted.

We left it at that. To be honest, I thought that with a bit of time he’d change his mind, especially as I knew he wouldn’t get a better offer.

Vic and Kerry were especially put out at having to cut the trip short.

They thought Joseph should let us continue on the boat without him, but he was adamant about going back to St Ives until everything was sorted out. ”

Flynn and the sergeant nodded along with his account, which matched what they'd heard from the Hugheses. After another five minutes, they'd been through everything with Russell and thanked him for coming in.

Flynn's stomach growled while Kerry and Vic Cooper went through their recollection of events. The thought of sandwiches made his mouth water, and he sipped his coffee to keep the hunger at bay.

"You both went to bed at the same time?" he asked Kerry eventually.

"Yes. I was exhausted. We both were." Unlike Joyce, she never once looked at her husband for confirmation or reassurance. She sat ramrod straight and the tissue box was in the same state as it had been when she walked in.

"I took a sleeping pill," her husband said, running a hand over his bald head and drawing attention to his sunspots. "So I was out like a light."

For the first time since entering the room, Kerry's eyes slid to her husband. Then a small smile lifted her thin lips. "I'd been on the G&Ts in the pub, and then had a whiskey back on the boat, so I was dead to the world from the moment my head hit the pillows."

If she registered her slightly unfortunate word choice, she didn't show it.

"What a way to go," she said blithely. "Awful for his son, of course, but I can't help but think he's with his wife now. He wasn't the same after Lisa passed away. I'm not a religious person or anything, but it's comforting to think of them together again."

Flynn tapped his pen against his notepad. "We heard you weren't happy about shortening your holiday when Joseph wanted to go back to St Ives."

“Of course we weren’t happy!” Kerry shook her head. “It was selfish of him. Just because he didn’t want to continue, there was no need to spoil things for the rest of us. He could have flown home and we’d have sorted out selling his share of the boat later.”

“Kerry,” her husband said, shooting her a warning glance. “The man’s dead. Have some respect.”

She rolled her eyes. “I was fond of Joseph, but I don’t see the need to make a saint of him. He had his faults. Let’s not pretend he didn’t just because he’s dead.”

Vic heaved in a breath and eyed the sergeant. “Joyce mentioned we’d need to stay on the island until James arrives.”

“He wants to view his father’s body and go through his possessions on the boat,” the sergeant said.

“That makes sense,” Vic said. “I suppose we might continue our trip as planned.”

Kerry shifted in her seat. “Do you think so?” she asked her husband. “Wouldn’t it feel wrong to go off on holiday now?”

“I don’t know.” He shook his head. “We’ll also have to figure out what happens with the boat. I imagine James owns Joseph’s share now. Maybe he’ll sell to Russell.”

“He seems keen to come out here anyway,” the sergeant said. “If it’s fine with you, I think the best thing would be for you to wait for him.”

“We’ll see if we can get rooms at the hotel again,” Kerry said to her husband. “I don’t want to be around the harbour thinking about Joseph in the water every time I pass.”

“We’ll be in touch if we have any more questions,” the sergeant said, bringing the conversation to a close. “Thanks for your help.”

Flynn escorted them out, then headed back to the sergeant who’d returned to his office.

“All seems straightforward,” Flynn said.

“Yeah.” The sergeant straightened papers on his desk. “We’ll need to wait for the post-mortem, but I imagine Doctor Redwood’s initial assessment of accidental drowning will be confirmed.”

Flynn was at the door, intent on doing a lunch run, when he stopped. “I forgot to mention that Lily messaged me. She saw Joseph Whittaker yesterday evening when she was closing up the shop. It must have been when he’d left the pub to go for a walk.”

Sergeant Proctor’s face broke into a broad grin. “Do you reckon anything will ever happen around here without her being involved somehow?”

“He just called into her shop,” Flynn said amused.

“Make sure the timeline fits with what we know so far.”

“Will do.”

“Lunch first, though!” he called after him.

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Chapter Seven

Lily still wasn't used to the gossip which seemed to be a natural part of living in a small community. Generally, she found it amusing, but today it irritated her.

As the day wore on, she got sick of overhearing customers chatting about Joseph's death.

It wasn't as though people were saying anything disrespectful, but several times she caught an odd flicker of uneasy delight when people talked about it – as though it was an exciting titbit to be thrown around with little thought for the person or his family.

Flynn had replied to her message, and they'd had a short back and forth, which included him saying he'd come and see her when things quietened down at the station.

Every time the bell jingled above the door, she looked up for him.

By the middle of the afternoon, she needed a change of scenery and left Jessica alone to take a break out on the gusty beach.

The cadence of the waves didn't soothe her as it usually did, and squawking seagulls made her grit her teeth and mutter unfriendly instructions for them to shut up.

After walking barefoot for a hundred metres, she sat on the sand, hugging her knees and staring bleakly at the horizon.

“There you are.” Flynn’s voice pulled her from her trance a little while later. “Jessica said you probably weren’t far away.”

“I needed to get out for a while,” she said, not looking at him.

“You okay?” he asked, looming above her.

“Yeah. It just seems unfair. I was chatting with him last night and he was excited about going home today. It’s weird that life can end so quickly, with no warning.”

“It’s shit.” He crouched next to her – his black boots and police uniform entirely out of place on the sunny beach.

“It is shit,” she agreed, then inhaled a deep lungful of the salty air. “Did you have to...” She paused, searching for the right words.

“Pull him out of the water? Yeah.”

“I guess that wasn’t pleasant.”

“No.”

Finally, she lifted her eyes to look at him properly. “Are you okay?”

He nodded.

“Busy day for a change?”

“Yeah. Though it’s not the kind of busy I’d ever wish for.

We had his friends in the station to go over what happened.

One woman couldn't stop crying. That's harder to deal with than the dead body.

Grieving friends and family are the worst thing about a death.

"He shifted his weight, then gave up on crouching and shifted onto his bum.

"What time did you speak to him yesterday?"

"Sunset," she said. "I guess around nine thirty, quarter to ten, something like that."

He nodded. "The sergeant spoke to his son, who said he'd been on the phone to him shortly before ten. He'd been walking to the harbour."

"I saw him make the call as he left me."

"We think he probably fell immediately after that phone call. The doctor estimates he'd been in the water around six to twelve hours." He paused for a moment. "What did you speak to him about?"

"His boat and his retirement plans. He'd wanted to sail the world, but his wife died a year ago and now he just wanted to be home with his son and grandson."

Flynn hooked his arms around his bent legs. "It'll be hard for his son. Losing both parents in the space of a year."

"Yeah." Lily's chest felt tight as she remembered what Seren had said about how precious life was. And how quickly things could change. Her heart rate increased as she examined Flynn's profile.

Maybe it was her unstable emotional state, but she suddenly felt so connected to him that she didn't even contemplate it before leaning into him. With a hand on his jaw,

she turned his face.

Surprise flashed in his eyes, but he didn't pull away when she tilted her chin and brushed her lips over his. She closed her eyes, savouring the softness of his lips and the familiar scent of him.

The beach seemed to fall quiet.

While she was kissing Flynn, the world made a lot more sense.

"Lily," he murmured, hooking her hair behind her ear when he pulled back.

"Oops," she said flatly.

"I'm on duty." He cringed slightly. "And while you know I don't take my job here overly seriously, I do like to maintain some basic standards..."

She glanced around. "No romantic trysts on the beach while in uniform?"

"That's about where I draw the line, yes."

"Sorry." She wasn't at all remorseful though, and she felt surprisingly calm. Ever since the first time they'd kissed, she'd wanted a replay. She refused to overthink it.

"Come on," he said, standing and pulling her up. "I have to get back to the station, but walk with me for a bit."

He kept hold of her hand for a moment as they set off. Just long enough for her to know that she didn't need to feel conflicted about kissing him. They were on the same page, she was sure of it.

Walking to the sound of the waves and the suddenly soothing cries of seabirds, she didn't feel the need to speak. Flynn kept quiet too until they reached the promenade.

"Do you want to go to the pub tonight? I can treat you to dinner after my shift..."

"Won't you need to work late today?"

"I don't think so. The sergeant has everything under control."

"The pub sounds good," she said, then hesitated. "Actually, shall we do something different for a change?"

"Have you found something else to do on this island?" he asked mockingly.

A flutter of nerves rippled through her stomach, but all she could think of was Joseph's comment about the sunset being better when you shared it with someone. "How about a beach picnic? We could watch the sunset."

He hesitated for long enough that Lily felt slightly nauseous.

"Yeah, okay," he said eventually.

"I'll organise food. You bring drinks?"

He nodded. "I can manage that."

"Give me a shout when you finish work?"

"Will do." He raised a hand and waved.

Before he got very far, she called out to him, then swallowed hard when he turned

back. “To be clear... I meant it as a date. I was asking you on a date.”

A smile teased his lips. “Yeah. I got that.”

“Good. I just wanted to make sure.”

“I’ll see you later.” His smile widened, and her stomach fluttered wildly as she watched him go.

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Chapter Eight

Strolling back to the station, Flynn forced himself to concentrate on his surroundings. He greeted several locals and stopped for a quick chat with the woman who ran the post office. Inevitably, she had questions about the incident at the harbour, and he did his best to answer them.

Only when he had the station in his sights did he allow his thoughts to drift to Lily and their kiss on the beach. His mouth pulled into a secret smile as he pushed the door open.

The front desk was unmanned, but Sergeant Proctor appeared from his office at the back when Flynn called out a greeting.

“Did you find Lily?”

“Yeah. She was a little shaken up about the whole thing, but she’s okay.”

“What time did she speak with Mr Whittaker yesterday evening?”

“Sunset. It sounds as though he probably left her about nine forty-five.”

“That makes sense. He must have called his son straight after.”

“She said he was on the phone as soon as he left. Do you want to get an official statement from her?”

“No.” He drew in a breath which puffed out his chest. “Let’s try to keep her name out of our report for once.”

Flynn stifled a grin. “Did you hear any more from the guy’s son?”

“Yeah. He’s adamant he wants to come out here and fly back with the body, but he’s panicking because his wife is away on a business trip and there’s no one else to look after their son. He doesn’t want to bring him.”

“I don’t blame him.”

“So he’s going to be here as soon as he can, but it sounds as though it’ll take a few days.”

“Is that an issue?”

“No, I don’t think so. There’s a backlog for the post-mortem, anyway. I just felt sorry for the guy. Sounded as though he wanted to get on the next flight.”

For lack of anything useful to say, Flynn shook his head sadly. “Is there anything else that needs to be done?”

“I reckon we’re on top of it. There is something I wanted to talk to you about, though.” He tipped his head to his office and Flynn followed him back there. “It’s about your message last night,” he said, as he seated himself at his desk.

Flynn sat opposite him. “To be honest, I’m still not certain of anything, but I’d be keen to know if it’s a possibility to stay longer.

It’s definitely something I’d consider...” He paused, thinking of kissing Lily on the beach.

He was pretty sure he would stay longer if he could.

“That’s if you’re still keen to have me for longer,” he added uncertainly.

“Absolutely.” The sergeant’s smile had an oddly wistful quality. “PC Hill and I managed fine when it was only the two of us, but we both agree that an extra pair of hands makes life much easier. And I really think you’re an asset to the community.”

“Thank you.” Flynn couldn’t contain his grin. “So you’ll look into it?”

“That’s the thing,” the sergeant said. “I already asked last week. I wanted to know if there’d be a chance of us getting an extra PC, even if you decided against it.”

Flynn’s chest tightened. “They said no?”

“I’m afraid so. I’ve been advised that I can make a special appeal for an extra officer...”

“Is that likely to work?” Flynn asked with bated breath.

“I’m not convinced anyone would even read the appeal. I think I was being fobbed off.”

“Right.”

“We’ve operated efficiently with two of us, so as far as my superiors are concerned, there’s no reason to extend the budget. It’s also been suggested that we recruit Special Constables. We had some in the past and that worked well, but we seem to have a knack for finding people who move away.”

“Right.” Flynn nodded solemnly. Taking on voluntary support made sense for the

usually quiet islands.

“I’m disappointed. I really would have liked to keep you on. It’s amazing how quickly your time here is going. Six months is going to be up before we know it.”

“Yeah.”

“Eight weeks, if you can believe it?”

Flynn snapped his head up to meet the sergeant’s gaze. “What?”

“Only eight weeks and you’ll be back in London. PC Hill and I were discussing it yesterday. We’re both going to miss having you around.”

“Eight weeks?” Flynn echoed. So far, he’d been measuring his remaining time in months. To hear it in weeks sounded like nothing at all.

“Time flies when you’re enjoying yourself.”

“Apparently so.” Flynn straightened as he attempted to compose himself. “Thanks for looking into it, anyway.”

“I’m just sorry there wasn’t a different outcome. I really did try. And I will put in that special appeal, but as I say, I can’t imagine anything will come of it.”

Flynn forced a smile as he stood. “I should get back to work.”

The sergeant tipped his chin, and Flynn moved mechanically back to the front desk, where he switched the computer on and leaned back in his chair to stare blankly at the screen.

Over the next couple of hours, he concentrated enough to reply to some messages on social media and deal with a couple of phone calls – all concerned citizens, wanting to know what had happened at the harbour that morning.

When the sergeant wandered out from the back, Flynn was staring at the wall in a trance.

“You can go,” Sergeant Proctor said, jerking him from his thoughts.

He let out a quizzical grunt as he sat up straighter.

“I appreciate your dedication, but your shift ended an hour ago.”

“There were a couple of phone calls,” he said, tipping his head toward the phone.

“The death at the harbour has people in a panic.”

“Stuff like this always does.” The sergeant lifted an eyebrow. “I could have dealt with the phone calls. Are you avoiding going home or something? I’m not complaining, but usually you’re very efficient at clocking off on time.”

“No. Just lost track of time.” He switched the computer off and stood, retreating to the back room to lock his radio and belt away with his stab vest.

“See you tomorrow,” the sergeant said as Flynn passed him.

He nodded and stepped outside. With his insides twisted in a knot, a whisper of panic dried his throat.

He’d always known his time on the island was limited. Until a few weeks ago, that had been something he was grateful for.

Things were different now, though.

As he wandered home, all his excitement about his evening with Lily vanished.

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Chapter Nine

Lily's lack of attachment to material possessions was probably a result of her upbringing. Moving between European cities every few years in her childhood – and her uncle's minimalistic tendencies – meant they'd never accumulated much unnecessary stuff.

The mindset had stuck with Lily in adulthood. There was some comfort in a lack of clutter, and knowing she could pack most of her things into a couple of suitcases with little notice. It gave her a sense of freedom.

It also had its downsides.

Staring at the contents of her wardrobe strewn across her bed, she couldn't help but think it would have been a good idea to have accumulated a better selection of clothes over the years.

What were you supposed to wear for a date at the beach, anyway?

Surely comfort was the major factor. Or it should be. It annoyed her that she wanted to look good for Flynn. Not just for him. She'd feel more confident if she was happy with her clothing choice.

But she'd also like Flynn to rake his gaze over her appreciatively when he set eyes on her.

With a groan, she rummaged under the clothes until she found her phone, then sank

onto the bed to call Seren.

“What would you wear for a sunset picnic on the beach with a guy you fancy?”

The response was a high-pitched squeal that made Lily move the phone away from her ear. It also brought a satisfied smile to her face.

“Are you going on a date with Flynn?” Seren asked breathlessly.

“Yes.”

“Did he ask you, or did you ask him?”

“I asked him.” Lily’s smile widened at her friend’s obvious excitement. “After I kissed him on the beach.”

“What!” Seren screeched. “Tell me everything.”

“There’s not much to tell. I was feeling down about the guy who died at the harbour. Flynn found me on the beach, and I suppose I just felt like making the most of life... so I kissed him. It felt natural in the moment.”

“Wow. And he kissed you back?”

“Briefly. He was on duty, so it wasn’t anything wild.”

“Okay. And then you asked him on a date?”

“He asked if I wanted to go to the pub tonight, and I suggested a picnic instead.”

“Right.” Seren’s enthusiasm dulled. “I don’t want to squash your excitement, but I

just want to check... does he definitely know it's a date?"

"Yeah." Lily grinned. "He knows."

"Are you sure? Because he's a man. Maybe he heard picnic and just thought food and nothing more. Not that I'm saying he wouldn't want to go on a date with you, just that I wouldn't trust him to know that's what's happening."

Lily laughed. "I agree completely. I didn't trust him to realise either, so I told him clearly that I was asking him on a date. He said he'd already figured that out. Anyway, there's definitely no confusion."

"That's great," Seren said. "It's good that you checked. Men can be dense about these things."

"So what do I wear?" Lily asked, getting the conversation back on track.

"I don't think it matters too much. This is the beauty of getting together with someone you're already friends with – there's not too much pressure to impress. I was the same with Kit. We'd already known each other forever when we got together."

"I want to make an effort, though. But it's the beach, so it would be weird to make too much effort."

"True." Silence hung for a moment. "I'd probably suggest jeans since it'll cool down later. Ooh!" She went slightly high-pitched. "Or wear a skirt, but take a blanket so you can snuggle up when you get cold."

"I think I'll go for jeans," she said, feeling a pang of nerves. "I'm going to end up in jeans and a T-shirt, aren't I?"

“Wear a vest top. Show off your figure and show some skin. Then you can throw a shirt or a cardigan over it if you’re cold. It’s casual, but you’ll still look hot.”

“Okay.” Idly, she sifted through the clothes on her bed.

“Are you excited?” Seren asked.

“I don’t know. I’m more nervous than I expected.”

“When was the last time you went on a date?”

“Ages ago. I’m out of practice.” She also didn’t remember ever being so anxious before a date – possibly because she’d never been overly attached to the outcome before.

“It’ll be great,” Seren said. “It’s been such a lovely, clear day. I’ll bet the sunset will be amazing tonight. It’ll be a magical first date.”

“Yeah.” Lily pulled a faded blue vest from the pile of clothes. “Do you think this is a bad idea?”

“No. Why? I know Flynn took a while to grow on me, but I really think the two of you are perfect for each other.”

“He’s only here temporarily.”

“Don’t let that stop you. Focus on enjoying the moment. Who knows what will happen in the future? Worry about that later. Besides, he’s still got a few months, hasn’t he?”

“I think so.” She didn’t know his exact leaving date, or if he even had one.

“Also, Sergeant Proctor has warmed to him now, so maybe he’ll be able to extend his posting here.”

“Perhaps.” The thought had crossed Lily’s mind too, but she hadn’t let herself linger on it, nor dared bring it up with Flynn. “I’m not sure he’d even want to stay here. He always says it’s boring to be a police officer here. I think he’s looking forward to getting back to London.”

“There’s an easy solution to that.” An edge of mischief rang in Seren’s voice. “You just need to make his life here a little more exciting. Starting tonight.”

Lily grinned and felt some of her nerves leave her.

“I have to get ready for work,” Seren said. “But message me later and tell me how it went. Or tomorrow, if that’s a more convenient time.”

Smiling, Lily shook her head and thanked Seren for her clothing advice.

An hour later, she was ready to go. She packed the picnic into her backpack and stared out of the living room window while she waited for Flynn to get in touch. Presumably it had been a busy day at work for him, so it wasn’t overly surprising that he would finish later than usual.

The feeling that something wasn’t right started a few minutes before a message popped up on her phone. It should have been a relief to hear from Flynn, but that niggling feeling stayed with her as she clicked into the message.

Sorry. Have to work late, after all. Rain check?

Disappointment hit her in a rush, along with a jolt of anger that was entirely unwarranted. It was hardly his fault he had to work late.

She waited a few minutes to reply, saying it was fine and that she'd talk to him tomorrow. The short, breezy message was entirely at odds with her internal state.

He was a police officer and dedicated to his job. It really wasn't as though he'd stood her up.

That didn't stop her from feeling as though that was exactly what had happened.

Chapter Ten

The walk across the island did nothing to ease Flynn's guilt. Unable to sit around at home, he'd set off for Jago Treneary's place, hoping a beer and a chat might help.

"What are you doing here?" Jago asked, his features scrunched in surprise when he answered the door.

Flynn frowned. "Nice to see you, too."

"Sorry. I thought you were on a date with Lily."

"How the heck do you know about that?" Flynn stepped inside just as Sylvie began descending the stairs dressed in sports clothes.

"I thought you had a date with Lily," she remarked as she greeted Flynn with a kiss on the cheek.

"That was the plan." His gaze bounced between the two of them. "Was it announced in your family's group messages, by any chance?"

Sylvie nodded. "We were excited for you. What happened?"

"It's been postponed."

"Oh." Sylvie patted his shoulder. "I'm off to yoga class, so I'll leave you to it." She gave Jago a peck, scooped up her yoga mat and called a cheerful goodbye.

In the kitchen, Flynn accepted a beer and stepped out onto the patio with Jago.

“So what happened?” Jago asked.

“I had to work late.”

“Because of the guy who drowned in the harbour? Was it a rough day?”

“It was okay.” Flynn sank down in his chair. “Not overly pleasant, but I’ve had worse days.”

“I heard he knocked himself out on the harbour steps and landed in the water.”

Flynn nodded. “I think I go into autopilot when dealing with corpses. It’s talking with the friends and family that’s emotionally draining.” He gave a quick shake of the head. “Anyway, I’m fine. And I didn’t have to work late. That was just my excuse for postponing the date.”

“What was the real reason?”

“The real reason is I’m going back to London in eight weeks, so getting into a relationship with Lily feels like a colossal mistake.”

“Couldn’t you figure something out? Because you two seem to be made for each other.”

“I thought I might be able to make my job here more permanent, but this afternoon the sergeant told me there’s no chance of that happening. He’s looked into it.”

“Ah,” Jago said sympathetically.

“It’s frustrating...” Flynn paused and took a sip of his beer.

“In the last couple of months I’ve enjoyed being here.

I got used to working in a small community and the slower pace of life, and I enjoy it.

But I hadn’t fully considered if I wanted to stay here.

Even when I started thinking about it in the last couple of weeks, I really couldn’t decide if it was something I wanted. ”

“Until the sergeant said you couldn’t?”

“Yeah.” Flynn stretched his neck. “I didn’t know how badly I wanted to stay until I found out I couldn’t. Now it feels like a massive blow. Suddenly, I’m dreading leaving.”

“Is there no other way for you to stay?”

Flynn huffed out a humourless laugh. “I suppose I could ask for a job at the pub. There’s no way I can stay here as a police officer, and I really can’t imagine doing anything else.”

“Maybe Lily would move to London.”

He shook his head. “The ice cream shop is thriving. She’s settled.”

“So you just stood her up for your date?”

“Yes,” he said with a sigh. “Which I feel terrible about. She was already having a bad day.” He dropped his head to his hands and dragged his fingers through his hair. “I

can't bring myself to start something with her, knowing that I'll be leaving soon. Leaving is going to be hard enough as it is."

"What about a long-distance relationship?"

"I've thought about that, but I don't think it's realistic."

Jago nodded. "You probably need to have this conversation with Lily."

"I know. I just couldn't face it today."

He'd need to speak to her soon, though. He couldn't imagine their friendship remaining intact if he wasn't honest with her.

And her friendship was one thing he never wanted to risk.

Chapter Eleven

For the first time since she'd opened the ice cream shop, Lily woke feeling unmotivated. Usually, she was raring to go and excited about the day, but today she felt groggy. She knew it was down to her cancelled plans with Flynn, and that fact annoyed her.

She shouldn't take it personally. He'd had to work, but no doubt he'd call in the shop later and they'd make new plans. For all she knew, they'd be on their picnic this evening and she'd kick herself for overthinking everything.

Fresh air and a morning walk would probably perk her up.

Going to the harbour hadn't been her conscious intention, but she supposed it made sense that she'd end up there.

It was eerie to think Joseph had died there. His life snuffed out, just like that. A chill crept up her spine, and she dragged the zip of her hoodie further up, despite knowing it wasn't the temperature that caused her to shiver.

"Morning!"

She turned at the cheerful voice and smiled at Rhys, who loomed over her. The teenager seemed to grow taller every time she saw him – which was pretty regularly now that his girlfriend worked for Lily. She never saw him alone, though, and they rarely exchanged more than a polite greeting.

“How are you?” she asked.

“I’m good.” His eyes sparkled as he grinned. “Work has been busy.”

“Ted mentioned there’s been more interest in the boat tours.”

He nodded emphatically. “Holidaymakers love it. It’s weird because all we do is take them along and do what we’d be doing anyway, but they love learning about the lobster pots.

And they’re so fascinated by the wildlife.

I guess I forget that this isn’t normal for most people.

” He gestured towards the water. “I think having some reviews has helped to get more interest, but a lot of it is word of mouth, which is really cool.”

“You do a great job of advertising it.” That had been left to him since he was way better at it than Ted, his stepdad.

“I’m really glad it’s working out well.” The tourist trips had been her idea.

It had always been clear to her it was something people would be interested in, but seeing their business expand gave her a buzz.

“It was a good idea,” he said with a playful twitch of his eyebrows.

He seemed so much more mature than when Lily had first met him a couple of months ago. Which made sense since he’d left school since then and had started working for a living.

“I forgot my phone on the boat this morning,” he said, tipping his head towards the jetty. “I was just heading back to grab it. What are you doing wandering out here? Don’t you have a shop to deal with?”

“I do,” she said, amused by his playful tone. “I felt like some fresh air before opening time. It’s a little morbid that I ended up here.”

“Because of that guy who died?”

She nodded once.

“It was creepy. I’m glad we didn’t have any tourists with us yesterday, because that would have been an uncomfortable end to the trip.”

“Did you see him?” Lily asked.

“Yeah. Zack and Kev found him in the water when they were coming back in for the morning.”

“Not when they first got here?”

“No. But it’s still dark when most of us are heading out.

” He cringed. “It’s kind of gross to think he was in the water when we set off for the morning.

The police were here when we got back to the harbour.

It’s weird how your instinct is to look, isn’t it?

Even though you know it’s probably not going to be a sight you want to see, you still

look.

I only saw him from a distance, but I sort of wish I hadn't looked. ”

Lily's stomach lurched at the thought. “I met him at the ice cream shop. I was chatting with him before he died.” She scanned the boats on the water, then looked along the harbour wall. “Which steps did he fall down?” she asked. “I thought there'd be a police cordon or something.”

“It was roped off most of yesterday,” Rhys said, pointing further along.

“Oh, yeah.” Lily only then noticed the small collection of flowers.

“I suppose they couldn't keep the steps closed off for too long. People use them. Also, there isn't much point in keeping them closed off.”

“I guess not. It just seems weird – that things go on as they did before.”

Rhys nodded. “I reckon his friends must feel awful.”

“How do you mean?”

“That's their boat.” He pointed. “Faith. ”

Lily was momentarily confused until she spotted the name on the side of the boat.

“Old people go to bed too early,” Rhys said. “If they'd stayed up a bit later, they'd have heard him fall, wouldn't they? It must have been a decent splash. And when the harbour's quiet, even the smallest noise sounds loud.”

His shoulders rose and fell. “If someone had found him quickly, he might still be

alive.” He shrugged again. “Or perhaps the fall injured him so badly that it wouldn’t have mattered. But if it was me, I’d be wishing I’d heard something so I could’ve got him out of the water and tried to help him.”

“Yeah,” Lily mused. “I hadn’t thought of that. It makes sense though. Especially as the boat is moored close to the steps. Or have they moved it since?”

“No, it’s been there the whole time.”

“It’s so sad,” Lily muttered.

A voice in her head niggled at her. Wasn’t it strange that out of a group of five people, not one of them had heard anything?

Chapter Twelve

Lily was almost back at the ice cream shop when she spotted Seren walking along the promenade.

“Hi,” she said as she reached Lily. “Are you okay?”

The slight tilt of her head told Lily it was more than just a perfunctory question. That and the fact that Lily had messaged her the evening before and told her about Flynn postponing their date.

“I’m fine,” Lily said, pasting on a smile.

“I always said he wasn’t good enough for you.” Seren sighed heavily. “How about I set you up with someone else? I’ve mentioned my friend, Felix, haven’t I? Shall I introduce you?”

“No!” Lily glared at her. “And you’ve been encouraging me to go for it with Flynn. You keep telling me how he’s changed since he met me.”

“Well, I thought so, but...”

“He can’t help it if he had to work late,” Lily said, continuing towards the shop. It took a moment for Seren’s answering silence to become unnerving. “Why have you gone quiet?”

“No reason. You’re probably right.”

“What aren’t you telling me?” Lily's chest tightened as she stopped in front of the door. “Oh, god. Was he picking women up in the pub?”

“No. Nothing like that.”

“What then?”

Seren’s eyes swam with sympathy. “I don’t know anything for sure.”

After turning the key in the lock, she gestured for Seren to go inside. “Tell me what you’re thinking, please.”

“I think Flynn was drinking with Jago last night.”

Okay. That was better than him being out with another woman, but still not good news.

“How do you know?”

“I don’t know for definite. But I sometimes go to a yoga class at the community centre.

Sylvie goes too. It’s near their place so quite often I go back for a cuppa afterwards, but last night she was all cagey, saying she was tired.

I was getting weird vibes so when I got home, I messaged and asked if I’d done something to upset her.

” Seren leaned against the counter at the back of the shop.

“She replied to say there was no issue, but Jago had a mate over for drinks and she

hadn't wanted us to disturb them. ”

“You think it was Flynn?”

“Jago doesn't have friends here. He has brothers, and sisters-in-law. That's the only people I know him to hang out with. Except, recently he's started hanging out with Flynn.”

“Why wouldn't Sylvie have said that?”

“Because she knew you were supposed to be on a date with him.” Seren twisted her lips in a pained expression. “I guess she knew Flynn wouldn't want it known he was there after he'd cancelled his date with you.”

“But how did Sylvie know he was supposed to be out with me? Did you tell her?”

“Kind of...”

Lily's eyebrows shot up. “What do you mean, kind of? ”

“I mentioned it to Kit and he...” She pulled her chin to her chest. “He was excited for you. I think he mentioned it to a few people, but not in a gossipy way, only because he was happy for you.”

“Okay.” Lily shook her head. “So Flynn wasn't working late. He just stood me up?”

“I don't know anything for sure. Maybe I got it all wrong.”

“I don't think you did,” Lily mused. If Flynn really had been working late, he'd have given her more details about why. And he'd have suggested another night for their date rather than just leaving her hanging. She slumped into the nearest chair. “At least

I know where I stand now.”

“Where’s that?”

“Nowhere good,” she said, releasing a long exhale. “He decided he didn’t want to go on a date with me. To be fair, he told me a while back he wasn’t interested in getting into a relationship while he was here. He’ll be leaving before long, so it probably wouldn’t end well.”

“Do you know what I’ll do?” Seren said, plonking herself into the chair beside Lily. “I’ll invite you and Felix over for dinner with me and Kit. We’ll have a double date.”

Lily rolled her eyes. “Isn’t he your ex? Wouldn’t that be awkward?”

“You’re right. Kit’s pretty chilled out, but I doubt I could get him to agree to that, even to help you out.”

“I don’t need you to help me out,” Lily said, but Seren didn’t seem to hear her.

“How about if I ask Noah and Keira to double date with you?” She shook her head manically. “No, that won’t work. Noah has some history with Felix. He won’t agree to it.”

“Why are you trying to set me up with a guy who no one likes?”

“It’s not that they don’t like him, per se. I like him. I used to date him.”

“Yeah, but you split up with him...”

“I’m telling you, he’s a great guy.”

Lily let out a humourless laugh. “I don’t want to date him. It wasn’t that I wanted to date for the sake of dating. I only wanted to go on a date with Flynn.”

“Sorry.” Seren squeezed her hand. “What can I do?”

“Nothing. It’s so humiliating. I feel like an idiot.”

“Don’t. It’s his loss.”

“It’s not just that he stood me up, it’s that most of the island is going to know about it thanks to you and Kit.”

She bit down on her lower lip. “We only told the family, and only because we were excited. Are you really angry with us?”

“No. I’m angry with Flynn.” She paused then raised an eyebrow at Seren. “I am a bit angry with you. Can you please not gossip about me, even with your family?”

“Sorry,” she said again.

Lily rubbed at her forehead. “I need to get the shop set up.”

“Shall I stay and help?”

“No, thanks. I’m fine. Jessica will be here soon.”

She’d also like a little time alone to get her thoughts in order and figure out what she’d say to Flynn when she saw him.

Chapter Thirteen

A couple of tables were occupied in the ice cream shop when Flynn appeared in uniform in the middle of the afternoon.

Lily's traitorous stomach cartwheeled at the sight of him, while the more rational part of her flashed with anger.

Instinctively, she turned away from him, though she wasn't sure how pretending not to notice him would help matters.

"Hi," he said, strolling up to the counter as though he hadn't ditched her to hang out with Jago the previous evening.

Busying herself with tidying up the work surface, she only cast him a cursory glance over her shoulder as she muttered a greeting.

"I wanted to come earlier, but work's been pretty busy."

"We've been busy here too."

"That's good."

Finally, she forced herself to turn, but looked at the ice cream counter rather than him. "Want an ice cream?"

When he didn't respond, she lifted her face to meet his gaze.

“Are you angry with me?” he asked.

“Maybe.” She smiled tightly. “I’m not sure. Should I be angry with you?”

“I’m sorry about last night.”

She tucked her hair behind her ear, hating the part of her that hoped Seren might have got it all wrong and that his excuse about having to work had been genuine.

“Are we going to reschedule for another time?” she asked quietly. “Or are we not bothering?”

He shifted his weight and kept quiet.

A heaviness settled on her chest. “That’s what I thought.”

“Can we talk about this in private?”

“Hello!” Jessica said cheerfully, walking out of the back room.

Flynn smiled a greeting at her, then tipped his head in the direction she’d come from and walked back there.

Clenching her jaw, Lily followed him. “We don’t need to talk about it,” she said when they were away from prying ears. “It’s fine.”

“I’d like to explain.”

“You don’t need to. I know what happened – you decided you didn’t want to meet me after all. Which is fine. Now, if you don’t mind, I’ve got stuff to get on with.”

“Just let me explain. You don’t have anything so urgent that you can’t hear me out.”

“How do you know?” she snapped. “For all you know I might be off to have drinks with Jago Treneary... Or something equally important.”

Flynn’s frustrated growl was all the confirmation she needed.

“So you were with him? Was it an important police matter he wanted to discuss?”

“I’m sorry, okay. I panicked and lied about having to work.”

“It doesn’t even matter. Let’s just forget it.”

He opened his mouth, but she cut him off.

“Please, don’t. I know what you’re going to say - that you’re leaving soon and there’s no point in us starting something, but I don’t want to hear it because I think the truth of it is that you’re a coward.

” She hated how hurt she sounded - and even more, she hated the sympathy in his eyes.

“Please, let’s just forget it,” she said after a strained silence.

He rubbed at his forehead. “Are we still friends?”

“Yeah, sure. Whatever.”

“Lily...”

“There is something I wanted to ask you,” she said, cutting him off and waiting for

him to give her the nod before she continued. “Are you treating Joseph’s death as an accident?”

He screwed his eyes shut and shook his head. “I thought we were talking about last night.”

“We talked about it. It’s all good. But I’d like to know about Joseph... what’s his last name?”

He stared at her for a moment, then seemed to resign himself to the subject change. “Joseph Whittaker.”

“Was there anything suspicious about his death?”

“No. Why?”

“I just wondered.” She paused, pondering what Rhys had said. “Where were his friends when he fell? Were they on the boat or still in the pub?”

“On the boat. Except for one of them who was staying in the hotel.”

“And the ones on the boat didn’t hear anything? He didn’t call out as he fell, or they didn’t hear a splash when he landed in the water?”

Flynn shook his head. “No.”

“Isn’t that strange?”

“They were asleep already.”

“At ten o’clock?”

“We don’t know what time he fell. It’s likely it was immediately after he ended his call with his son, but maybe he walked for longer, or he sat on a bench for a while. There’s no way to know for sure.”

“There are no cameras in the area?”

The slight shift of his eyebrow was enough for her to know that it had been a stupid question. Of course there were no cameras.

“Thanks,” she said. “That’s all I wanted to know. I need to get back to work now.”

He followed when she walked back into the shop. “I’ll talk to you later?” he asked.

She nodded, but was happy she didn’t need to specify how much later that would be. They may still be friends, but that didn’t mean she wasn’t furious with him.

And hurt, too, but she didn’t like to dwell on that.

She wanted to put it all out of her mind.

With the bell above the door signalling Flynn’s departure, she took her phone out and hastily typed out a message. She didn’t need to wait long for a reply, and a smile pulled at her lips as she read it.

“Do you think you’ll be all right here on your own for an hour?” she asked Jessica.

When she nodded eagerly, Lily made a dash for the door.

Chapter Fourteen

When Lily had first visited St Mary's, she stayed in a bed-and-breakfast in a quiet corner of the island. It was where she'd met Oscar – the eighteen-year-old who did some gardening and odd jobs at the holiday accommodation.

He also worked at the Star Castle Hotel. Which Lily hoped was about to come in useful.

In his message, he'd said he was at work. Lily had replied that she was on her way and needed to talk to him. At the top of the steep path up to the hotel, he stood looking out over the bay.

"Nice to see you," he said with a knowing smile. "Are you working on a case?"

She grinned. "Are we in a crime TV show?"

"Feels like it when you're around." His smile faded. "I assume it's not a coincidence that a guy who was staying at the hotel died, and then you wanted to meet me here?"

"Now it seems you're the detective," she told him lightly, then toed her shoe in the dirt. "I spoke to Joseph Whittaker at the ice cream shop. Probably less than half an hour before he died. He seemed like a nice guy. And he said some things that made me wonder if someone had it in for him."

Oscar nodded gravely.

“Did you have much to do with him and his friends when they were here?”

“I checked them in, and I saw them around the place a few times. They all seemed pleasant enough.”

“There were six in their group, right?”

He nodded slowly. “Two couples and two single guys. Off on a sailing trip together. It sounded cool in theory, but I’ve seen their yacht and it looks pretty cramped for six people. I reckon it could get stressful quickly.”

“They all seemed to get on well, though?”

“For the most part...”

“What does that mean?”

“Apparently they had a barny in the bar the first night they were here.”

“Did you hear what it was about?” Presumably that had been when Joseph had broken the news that he didn’t want to continue with the trip, but she’d like to be sure.

“Not personally. Sean told me about it. He was working in the bar that night. I think he saw quite a bit of them while they were here. Judging by all the stories he’s been telling.

He reckons a woman in the group was flirting with him.

It’s all he can talk about.” He pointed at the hotel.

“He’s working now. I can introduce you if you want.

He’s pretty full of himself, though. I only believe about fifty per cent of the things he tells me. ”

“I’d like to talk to him if he’s around.”

“My boss is out at the moment,” Oscar said as they set off towards the striking castle with an outer wall in the shape of a star. “She probably wouldn’t appreciate you nosing around, so you shouldn’t stay too long. Also, you know they’re still staying here, right?”

“Who?”

“The yacht group,” he said lightly. “The friends of the dead guy.”

“No, I didn’t know that. How come?”

“I guess they need to hang around for a few days and they didn’t want to stay on their boat, so they’re staying here.”

“Have you seen them recently?”

“No. And if they appear, you have to promise not to badger them.”

“Umm...” She scrunched up her nose as her investigative instincts sparked with excitement.

“Promise,” he said sharply.

She straightened up. “I promise not to interrogate them or anything... but they were

in the ice cream shop the other day, so it probably wouldn't be out of place for me to strike up a conversation if I see them."

He looked entirely sceptical. "Just don't upset anyone, and don't let my boss catch you."

"I'll be discreet," Lily promised as she pulled at the door.

In the depths of the building, the Dungeon Bar lived up to its name. Originally a prison in the castle's basement, it could easily have been claustrophobic, but the gentle background music and soft furnishings gave a cosier vibe.

The barman, Sean, was a tall wiry guy who looked to be around Lily's age - late twenties. After shaking Lily's hand across the bar, he walked around to perch on a stool beside her.

"Lily wanted to ask you about the guy who died," Oscar said, then glanced back the way they'd come. "I should check on reception. I'll be back in a bit." He wandered away, leaving Lily and Sean alone in the empty bar.

"So, do you think someone killed the guy?" Sean whispered, leaning close.

Lily rested her elbow on the bar. "Not necessarily. But I spoke to him before he died, and he mentioned some problems between him and his friends. I thought I'd ask a few questions and see what comes up."

"You're a private investigator, right?"

"No. I'm an ice cream seller."

"That's an excellent cover for your investigator business."

Inwardly, she groaned at his leery smile. “It’s not a cover. I’m not hiding anything. Do you know anything about Joseph and his friends, or not?”

He held his hands up in a defensive gesture, but his smarmy smile didn’t shift. “They drank in the bar every evening during their stay.”

“Which was how long?”

“Three nights.”

“Oscar said they argued on the first night?”

“Things seemed to get a little heated. They weren’t rowdy or shouting or anything, but voices were raised and the conversation was tense.”

“Did you hear what it was about?”

He nodded. “They were arguing about their sailing route. I guess some of them wanted to go to Spain and round to the South of France, but some of them wanted to stay around the British Isles.” He lifted a shoulder in a half-hearted shrug.

“Just the one guy, I guess. And he’s dead now.

” His eyes flashed with mock excitement.

“Do you think they bumped him off to settle their argument?”

Lily ignored the sarcastic remark. “Do you have anything else useful to tell me?”

“One woman kept flirting with me, which was a little disturbing since she’s about twice my age and her husband was with her.”

“Do you know their names?” Lily asked.

He shrugged again. “I heard the guy who died was called Joseph. I don’t know about the rest of them.” He turned and looked towards the door. “Come with me,” he said, sliding off the stool and striding across the room.

“Where are we going?” Lily asked as they walked back up to the reception area which was now empty except for Oscar, who stood at the computer.

“Look up the guests,” Sean said, sidling up beside Oscar. “The friends of the dead guy. We need their names.”

A small smile tugged at Lily’s lips. He might be annoying, but he was useful.

“We can’t give out guest information,” Oscar protested. “It’s confidential.”

“We only want their names.” He nudged Oscar aside and tapped on the keyboard. Then he glanced up at Lily and tipped his chin in a beckoning gesture. “There are photos of them as well. We take copies of the passports.”

“You aren’t allowed back here,” Oscar said when Lily walked around the desk to join them.

“I’m only having a quick look.”

“Why have you got your phone out then?” he asked in a panic. “You can’t take photos of the information.”

“I’m not.” She patted his arm. “Just making a note of their names.”

“This is the one who kept flirting,” Sean said, bringing up the photo of the slightly

glamorous woman with red hair who'd been uncomplimentary about Lily's coffee. "Kerry Cooper," Sean announced. "She has an annoyingly loud laugh."

"Keep your voice down," Oscar said, glancing nervously around.

After scrolling some more, Sean brought up a picture of Kerry's husband, Vic. The larger, bald guy.

"Here's the other couple," Sean said. "Joyce and Keith Hughes. I liked them. Quiet and polite, but friendly."

"What about the other guy?" Lily asked.

"Oh, yeah." Sean brought up another page with Russell Hart's information and photo. "He drank like a fish and tipped generously. I'd like more customers like him. I'm not sure I trust anyone who's that flashy with money, though. If anyone killed the guy, my bet would be on him."

"Shh!" Oscar hissed.

Lily stared at Sean. "Really?"

"No." He laughed. "I was joking. And I don't actually think anyone committed murder at the harbour."

She had the names at least, Lily consoled herself. Even if she hadn't got any other new information.

"Thanks," she said, walking out from behind the reception desk.

"I can tell you something fishy..." Sean leaned on the desk, his upper body sprawling

across it. “On the second night, when they came into the bar, they came without the dead guy.”

Lily gritted her teeth at the lack of respect in his tone. “Where was Joseph?”

“Went to bed early, I think. His friends were plotting to ditch him and head off down to Spain without him. I thought they were just talking about leaving him behind.” He grinned. “But I guess they could have been alluding to more sinister measures.”

Lily glared at him. “This isn’t a joke.”

“Sorry,” he said, chuckling. “It just sounds far-fetched that they’d kill him. They’re just normal people, not killers.” A jolt of laughter burst out of him, and his eyes slid to Oscar. “Can you imagine that mousy little lady killing someone in cold blood?”

“Did they really talk about leaving Joseph?” Lily asked, frowning at Sean.

His features turned somewhat serious. “They said it was unfair of him to hold them back, and that they all owned the boat, so he didn’t get to decide for all of them.

Something like that anyway.” He peeled himself off the desk.

“But I guess they sorted it out because they were all in the bar the next night. They were playing cards and chatting. It all seemed amicable.”

“Thanks,” Lily said again, a little more heartfelt this time.

Oscar shifted his weight. “The boss will probably be back soon.”

“I’ll go.” She smiled warmly at him. “Thank you.”

He walked her to the door.

“How’s Katie?” she asked.

All the tension left him at the mention of his girlfriend. “Great, thanks.”

“Bring her in for ice cream sometime,” Lily said. “My treat.”

When he went back inside, Lily lingered for a few minutes, enjoying the view of Hugh Town and the boats swaying on gentle waves in the bay.

Setting off down the hill, it took her a moment to recognise the two figures walking towards her. With her head bowed, Joyce looked as meek and mild as she had in the ice cream shop. Her husband walked beside her with a hand at her back.

They would have walked straight past her, but Lily caught the man’s eye and smiled.

“Oh, hello,” he said.

“Hi.” She smiled at Joyce. “You were in my ice cream shop the other day. I’m Lily.”

“Yes,” Joyce said, her lips twitching in an attempt at a smile. “I remember now.”

“I was very sorry to hear about your friend. It’s so terrible.”

Tears welled in Joyce’s eyes. “Thank you,” she mumbled.

“It must have been such a shock,” Lily went on, hoping to encourage them into chatting.

Joyce merely nodded and glanced at her husband.

“I don’t think it’s really sunk in yet,” he said, rubbing his wife’s back. “It doesn’t seem real, does it, love?”

She shook her head and sniffed. “We don’t know what to do with ourselves. We can’t go home, but it’s not as though we can enjoy a holiday now.”

“How long will you stay?”

“We’re waiting for Joseph’s son to arrive.” Keith sighed. “I think he’ll be here on Thursday so it’s only a couple of nights, but time is moving slowly. It feels as though we’re stuck in limbo.”

“It would feel wrong to leave while Joseph’s body is still here anyway,” Joyce said. “And of course, James needs to go through his things on the boat.”

“James is his son,” Keith offered. “We owned a boat with Joseph.”

“Yes, I know.” Lily winced slightly when they looked at her questioningly. “I spoke to Joseph outside my shop on the evening that he died. He told me about the yacht.”

Joyce let out a faint gasp. “What else did he say?”

“Not much.” Lily chewed on her lip, choosing her words. “He talked about how he missed his wife and how he wanted to spend more time with his grandson.”

Joyce sobbed and was immediately enveloped by her husband’s arm around her shoulder, pulling her against his side.

“Sorry,” Lily said.

“James will be devastated,” Joyce spluttered into Keith’s chest. “And poor little

Thomas will be heartbroken. He adores his grandad.”

“They’ll be okay.” Keith rubbed vigorously at Joyce’s back. “It’s awful, but they’ll be all right in the end. And I’m sure James will take comfort in knowing that his parents are together again. Joseph hasn’t been the same since Lisa died.”

“Don’t be stupid,” Joyce snapped, drawing away from him. “It’s no comfort at all. How does both of them being dead make anything better?”

Keith’s brow wrinkled, and he looked apologetically at Lily. “I was just trying to find something positive...”

“He was our friend, and he’s dead,” Joyce said, dabbing at her eyes with a soggy tissue. “There’s nothing positive about it.”

Lily offered a sympathetic smile. “Is there anything I can do?”

She shook her head. “We just need to get through the next few days, then we can go home.”

“I think we could probably do with a proper holiday,” Keith said wearily.

Joyce frowned. “I just want to be at home.”

“I can imagine.” Lily pressed her lips together then caught Keith’s eye. “If you get fed up with the hotel, come to the shop. Ice cream is on me.”

“Thank you. That’s kind.” He extended his hand. “I’m Keith, by the way. This is my wife, Joyce.”

After shaking his hand, Lily offered her condolences again.

As Joyce moved away, fixed to her husband's side, Lily couldn't help but think of Sean's comment. It was quite laughable to think of her killing someone.

That didn't mean it wasn't possible.

Chapter Fifteen

Thinking so much about Joseph was a little depressing, but it was preferable to the other thoughts which plagued Lily.

The situation with Flynn was something she was happy to push into a corner of her mind.

The same went for the niggling notion that she should approach Maria and find out if she owned the ice cream shop.

And if so, why she was intent on hiding that fact.

When she woke on Wednesday after a fitful sleep and still couldn't put Joseph out of her mind, she decided chatting everything through might help.

On the way to the police station, it occurred to her that Flynn might be on duty.

A jolt of unpleasantness hit deep in her stomach at the thought that she'd rather not see him.

Mostly that was because she wanted to focus on making sure Joseph's death really was an accident.

Seeing Flynn would raise other issues – the ones she'd locked in a corner of her mind, to be ignored until a later date.

If it was only the sergeant and PC Hill on duty, that would make things easier. She could chat everything through with them and see what they thought about what she'd found out about Joseph – specifically his dubious relationship with the co-owners of his yacht.

Sadly, Flynn was manning the front desk, which meant all her carefully constructed questions turned into a jumble in her head the moment she walked inside.

“Hey!” He sat up straighter, an uncertain smile pulling at his lips. “How are you?”

“Fine, thanks.”

“I messaged you this morning.”

“I forgot to reply,” she lied. The message had only asked how she was, so it wasn't as though it warranted a speedy reply. “Is the sergeant around?”

Creases formed across his forehead, but he didn't have time to reply before Sergeant Proctor walked out from the back room.

He tipped his chin in greeting. “Hi, Lily.”

“Hi, Sarge.”

He grinned and drifted further into the room.

“I wanted to ask you about the man who died at the harbour,” she began.

“Poor man. Terrible tragedy.”

“Yes.” That standard response was grating on her nerves. “I was wondering if you

would share what you've found so far? Maybe we could exchange information."

"How do you mean?" the sergeant asked, his eyebrows lifting suspiciously.

"What's your take on it all?"

The sergeant sank into the chair behind the other desk, frowning deeply. "He slipped on the wet steps. It was an unfortunate accident." His words were deliberate, as though addressing a child. "There's nothing to suggest otherwise."

"That's what I thought."

"Good. We agree for once."

"No, I mean that's what I was expecting you to say, but I suspect you're missing some vital information."

The sergeant leaned onto his desk, clasping his hands in front of him. "Such as?"

"There'd been a disagreement," Lily said, taking the chair across the desk from the sergeant and placing Flynn out of her sight line. "Between Joseph and his friends."

The sergeant nodded. "He wanted to sell the yacht. They were already on their way for a six-week sail when he broke the news to them that he didn't want to make the trip. Tempers were strained and there'd been some heated words."

"You already know?" Lily asked, surprised.

"It doesn't seem to be a secret."

"Who told you?"

“His friends. They all mentioned it when we spoke to them. There was some guilt that their last days together hadn’t been easy ones.”

“Okay,” Lily said. “And you don’t think that gives them motive?”

The sergeant’s gaze flicked to Flynn before landing back on Lily. “Motive for what?” he asked, once again sounding as though he were indulging a child’s questions.

“For one of them to kill Joseph?”

“No. I don’t.”

Lily’s temper flared. “You haven’t even considered the possibility?”

The sergeant’s eyes darted across the room once again. Lily felt Flynn beside her before he perched himself on the corner of the desk in front of her. She couldn’t avoid looking at him then.

“We’ve asked all of our questions,” Flynn said calmly. “There’s nothing to suggest it was anything other than an accident.”

“But he’d been arguing with his friends,” she said. “They were all angry with him. It doesn’t seem much of a stretch to think one of them wanted him dead.”

Except, as the words flowed out of her, she could hear how unlikely it sounded. But while her brain told her she was being irrational, her gut told her that something wasn’t right.

“Look,” she said before either of them could get a word in. “I spoke to Joseph the evening he died. We watched the sunset together. He was a good man and if someone killed him, we owe it to him to find out who.”

“Flynn mentioned you spoke to Joseph before he died,” Sergeant Proctor said. “It must have been upsetting to find out you were one of the last people to speak to him.”

Lily sucked in a breath, hoping it would calm her but feeling no such relief. “I’m mostly upset because he was a nice guy and I don’t think you’re investigating his death properly.”

Neither of them said anything and the looks on their faces were entirely condescending.

“You didn’t even consider that it wasn’t an accident, did you? The steps he fell down were open for people to use again almost immediately. You should have secured them for a proper forensic investigation...”

“We followed proper procedure,” the sergeant said. “But it had rained heavily in the early hours and people had already been using the steps, so even if there had been reason to think it wasn’t an accident, we weren’t going to find anything more from the scene.”

“Do you really believe he just fell?” Lily asked, her gaze fixed on the sergeant.

“The sun had only just set,” he said. “The pub was still open. There would have been people around. It’s highly unlikely that no one would have heard or seen something had there been any kind of scuffle.

You know what it’s like around here... people notice things...

and they talk. But no one has come forward to report anything. ”

“Don’t you think it’s strange that no one heard him fall? If his friends were on the boat, as they claim, surely at least one of them would have heard a splash.”

The sergeant shrugged. "I imagine if you're used to sleeping on a boat, you get used to hearing splashes and other noises. The mind probably filters it out so you barely notice it at all. That's if they were still awake. There's every chance they were fast asleep."

"It doesn't ring true," Lily insisted. "If no one heard anything, I imagine it's because someone was purposely being quiet. And careful. Perhaps they waited and made sure there was no one around."

The sergeant leaned back in his chair. "The way he was found, and his head injury seem to be consistent with a fall."

Lily threw her hands up. "Can you consider the possibility that you've missed something? Just for a minute? Because it's not that long since you were convinced a man fell to his death from the cliffs until I proved otherwise. You were sure you were right then as well."

"There'll be a post-mortem," Flynn said, bracing his hands on the desk. "That will show anything suspicious."

"So you're just waiting around for that?"

Flynn's eyes narrowed. "There's not a lot else we can do."

"I'll tell you what we'll do," the sergeant said in an annoyingly measured tone.

"We'll go through all the statements again and check we didn't miss anything.

We'll keep asking if anyone heard or saw anything on the evening of his death.

His son is also arriving tomorrow, so we'll chat with him again and see if he has any

reason to suspect anything untoward.

And if you stumble upon any evidence, let us know and we'll follow up. ”

“Fine,” Lily muttered, her jaw tense as she rose from the chair. “I’ll let you know if I find anything.”

She stalked out of the station and almost refused to stop when Flynn called out to her a moment later.

Except she’d look petty if she ignored him completely.

“Are you okay?” he asked, when she turned back.

“Yes. Why wouldn’t I be?”

“Because you can barely look at me. I’m sorry, okay...”

She rolled her eyes, hoping the action would mask her hurt. “I already told you it’s fine.”

“It’s clearly not fine. You’re angry with me and now you’re all worked up about the guy who died.”

She threw her hands up. “You think I’m so distraught about you standing me up that I’m looking into a man’s death to distract myself?”

He scratched at his jaw. “I think you have a lot on your mind. There’s also the stuff with Maria which you’re avoiding dealing with.”

“I’m not avoiding it. I just haven’t had a chance to speak to her alone.”

“Okay,” he muttered.

“I really think there’s something that doesn’t add up about Joseph’s death. You can sit around waiting for the post-mortem, but my gut is telling me that something isn’t right and I intend to figure out exactly what happened.”

He nodded slowly. “I could help.”

“You already said there’s nothing you can do without evidence.” She held up a hand when he started to speak. “I don’t need your help.”

Walking away from him, her heart felt heavy. He was probably right that looking into Joseph’s death was a distraction from her problems.

It wasn’t only that, though. She’d felt a connection with Joseph and knew she wouldn’t sleep well while there were unanswered questions about his death.

Chapter Sixteen

Kit Treneary stepped out of the Cookie Jar with a croissant in one hand and a takeaway cup in the other. He smiled widely when he spotted Lily, but his cheerful demeanour faded almost immediately.

“What’s wrong?” she asked.

“Nothing. Are you angry with me?”

Puzzled, she opened her mouth to ask why she’d be angry with him, but stopped herself.

“Because you’ve been gossiping about me?” she asked, affecting a serious tone.

“Not gossiping, no... just...”

“Talking about me behind my back and telling people my private business?”

“On second thoughts, I think I prefer to say gossiping. But I didn’t really think it was a secret, and I wasn’t saying anything bad. Plus, I have bets with my brothers about...” His eyes flashed with panic and his words trailed away.

“Kit!” Lily glared at him. “You have bets with your brothers about me?”

“Sort of... but not really because no one will bet against you and Flynn getting together.”

“They probably should have done,” Lily mumbled.

“I’m sorry. I promise it won’t happen again. What can I do to make it up to you?”

“Nothing,” she said, falling into step beside him.

“I’d buy you breakfast, but I’ve got a train trip in an hour and I have a couple of things to do before then.”

An idea swirled in Lily’s mind and she stopped short. “Maybe there is something you can do...”

“What?” He took a large bite of his croissant as he turned back to her.

“Could I come on the train with you?”

“Yes,” he said, words muffled as he chewed. “Why the sudden urge for a tour of the island?”

“Can I bring friends...” She winced and corrected herself. “Acquaintances.”

“Yeah.” He arched an eyebrow. “Has this got anything to do with that guy who died?”

“I’m not sure I can share that information with you.”

“I promise not to tell anyone... apart from Seren. I can’t not tell Seren.”

“I was chatting with two of the man’s friends yesterday and they’re at a loose end. They can’t leave the islands for a few days and don’t know what to do with themselves. I think I might suggest a train tour.”

“And you need to escort them?”

She smiled lightly. “Maybe I’ll take the opportunity to ask them a few questions.”

“Are you thinking the guy didn’t just fall down the steps?”

Flynn’s words came back to her, suggesting she was just looking for a distraction from her own problems. “I don’t know. I have the urge to dig around a bit, that’s all.”

“I guess it can’t hurt. I might see you later then.” He took a few steps backwards. “Make sure you’re a few minutes early. You’re welcome to a free ride, but I can’t boot people off for you if the train is already full.”

She nodded. “Thank you.”

Backtracking, she got herself a coffee from the cafe and had a quick chat with Pippa while she was in there. Jessica was just arriving when she reached the ice cream shop.

“How would you feel about me leaving you alone again for a while today?” she asked, opening the door and holding it for Jessica.

“That’s fine.”

“Really?” Lily let the door swing behind her. “If you’re uncomfortable with it, you can say so.”

“I love it,” Jessica said beaming. “I mean, it’s cool when you’re here too, but I really like the feeling that I’m in charge. Even if it’s just for a little while.”

“I’m glad you enjoy it.”

“You can leave me to take care of the place whenever you want. That’s why you hired me, isn’t it?”

Lily nodded. To start with, she’d been thinking about needing help when it was busy, but it felt good not to be tied to the place every minute of the day.

“What have you got planned for today?” Jessica asked.

“Nothing definite yet.” She took a sip of her coffee. “Can you start setting up? I need to make a phone call. I’ll come back and help you after that.”

She wasn’t even in the flat yet when Oscar answered her call. “Are you at the hotel?”

“Yes.”

Letting herself into the flat, she headed for the kitchen. “If I call the front desk, can you be the one to answer the phone?”

“Why?”

“Can you? Are you near the reception?”

“I could, but why?”

“I’ll call in one minute. Just make sure you answer and I’ll explain then.”

It took a minute for her to find the number for the hotel. Oscar answered quickly, his tone suddenly much more formal.

“Hello,” Lily said, stifling a smile. “Friends of mine are currently staying at the hotel and I need to speak to them urgently. Could you please put me through to their room?”

It's a Mr and Mrs Hughes. Joyce and Keith."

"Lily!" Oscar hissed.

"Please. I need to speak to them and I don't want to trudge all the way up there."

"What do you want to talk to them about?" he said, his voice a hushed whisper. "You can't just call and start interrogating them?"

"I'm way more subtle than that. Besides, I saw them yesterday and we chatted so it won't seem weird. It's to do with what we talked about. I promise they won't think it's odd that I'm calling, and I definitely won't interrogate them."

"You're going to get me into trouble. I need this job."

"I promise you won't get into trouble. Please, just do this one thing for me. I'll owe you a favour, which you can call in at any time."

He hesitated. "Fine. Hang on. I'll put you through to their room. I don't even know if they're there, though."

"Thank you," she said, before a ring tone sounded in her ear. It took a while before the male voice answered with a questioning hello.

"Is that Keith?" Lily asked.

"Yes."

"This is Lily. We spoke yesterday. I own the ice cream shop."

"Hi," he said, a puzzled ring to the lone syllable.

“I hope I’m not disturbing you, but I keep thinking about you and what a difficult time it must be for you and your wife.”

“Thank you,” he muttered.

“I know you said you were feeling a little lost with what to do with yourselves, and I don’t know if this interests you, but I just realised I have free tickets for the tourist train which runs around the island.

It’s one of those things that I always put off doing, what with me living here...

” That was a lie – she’d been on it a few times.

“I wondered if you’d want to go with me.

I hear it’s a lovely trip, and it might be a nice way to take your minds off everything.
”

She gritted her teeth and sank into a chair as she waited for a response.

“That’s very thoughtful. Hang on a second and I’ll see what Joyce thinks.”

Lily listened to his muffled voice as he relayed the invitation to his wife. From what she could make out, Joyce declined, but Keith was pretty firm in coaxing her into it.

“That would be lovely.” His voice came clear in her ear again. “What time is the tour?”

“There’s one in an hour,” she said. “Or one this afternoon.”

After another hushed conversation, they settled on the afternoon trip and arranged to

meet at the ice cream shop. It was actually easier to go in the afternoon – it gave Lily time to help Jessica set everything up and make sure everything was under control with the shop.

With an influx of customers over lunchtime, the time went quickly and before she knew it, Lily was standing outside waiting for the Hugheses.

“I’m so glad you could make it,” Lily said as they approached in matching waterproof jackets which were unwarranted for the weather.

Unless Lily had missed something and was underdressed in her jeans and T-shirt.

“It was good of you to think of us,” Joyce said, her voice so quiet that Lily had to strain to hear. “I think it’s probably a good idea to get out and do something.”

Keith nodded gravely. “Sitting around the hotel isn’t doing us any good.”

“Would you like an ice cream for the trip?”

They exchanged a look before shaking their heads in unison.

“Maybe afterwards,” Joyce said. “It’s not long since we ate lunch.”

“Let’s get going then.”

When they reached the little electric train at the far end of the promenade, Kit was busy chatting with a family with two excited kids. He gave her a nod of acknowledgement and she took Keith and Joyce to the back of the train, taking the seat behind them and hoping no one took the spot beside her.

“Is it a guided tour?” Joyce asked, twisting to look back at Lily.

“Yes. Kit talks about the history of the islands and points things out along the way. I’ve heard it’s very good.”

“It must be nice to run your own business,” Keith said. “Having the freedom to plan your day is such a luxury.”

“It is,” Lily agreed, thinking how lucky she’d got with the ice cream shop. Her thoughts drifted to Maria and the conversation she needed to have with her.

A moment later, Kit’s voice came over the speaker system on the train, shifting her thoughts back to the present.

For the next half hour, she tried to keep her focus on Kit’s tour. It was slightly difficult when he paused the train to point out the police station and speak about the police force on the Scillies.

Her heart pounded at the thought that Flynn was probably inside the small building and might step out at any moment. Given the way things were between them, she wasn’t keen to see him.

Which also felt weird.

That, and the fact that she knew she’d been unreasonable. She was angry with him for cancelling their date and didn’t know how to be around him now.

Leaving the police station behind, she was lulled by the sound of Kit’s voice as he talked so passionately about the islands.

Listening to his tour felt fresh every time. There was always some new titbit she learned, and a different joke he’d throw into his repertoire. It made sense, she supposed – if he spouted the same script for each trip it would be boring for him as

well as the passengers.

“It’s fascinating,” Keith said, turning as Kit slowed the train at the Northern tip of the island for a ten-minute stop for photographs.

A small, appreciative smile hit Joyce’s lips. “I didn’t expect it to be so informative.”

“The view from here is fantastic,” Lily said. “It’s such a clear day today.”

Finally, they ditched their coats, leaving them on the train as they walked with Lily to the headland to take in the view over to Tresco and Bryher.

“It could be the Caribbean, couldn’t it?” Keith said. “It’s so tropical. Look at that water, Joyce. The colour of it is unbelievable.”

“It’s beautiful,” she agreed weakly, but kept her gaze fixed on the ground.

“We should get a photo of us with that view in the background.” Keith held out his phone for Lily. “Would you mind?”

“Not at all.”

“I’m sorry, I can’t,” Joyce croaked out before walking purposefully away from them.

Keith caught Lily’s eye and gave her an apologetic shrug before following his wife.

Hanging back, Lily did her best to appear absorbed with the view while surreptitiously straining to hear their conversation.

“Everything feels wrong,” Joyce said tearfully. “It doesn’t seem fair that we should enjoy this when Joseph can’t. Don’t you feel guilty getting on with life as though

nothing happened?”

“There’s not much else we can do but get on with life.”

“I don’t understand you,” Joyce shot at him. “How are you so calm?”

Keith stepped closer to his wife, bowing his head and speaking so close to her ear that Lily had no hope of hearing his words.

“We should have been more supportive of Joseph...” Joyce’s words were difficult to make out and Lily took a subtle step closer to the couple. “...I feel as though we let him down.”

Keith put a hand on her back and led her further away as he whispered to her. With the extra distance between them, Lily gave up on her attempts to eavesdrop.

Instead, she switched to contemplating Joyce’s words, but even with her investigator hat on, nothing seemed suspicious. She sounded genuine in her remorse.

Lost in thought, Lily forgot she was still holding Keith’s phone until it vibrated in her hand. Fighting the urge to look only lasted for a moment, then she discreetly tilted the phone in her hand to view the screen.

A message from Kerry glowed in the centre of the screen.

Good that you managed to get Joyce out of the hotel, hopefully a change of scene will calm her down. Maybe we can even convince her to go along with ...

That was all of the message that was displayed on the screen. Curiosity pricked at Lily, but there was nothing she could do to get to the rest of the message.

“Sorry,” Keith said, marching towards Lily, with Joyce’s hand clasped in his.

“It’s okay. I was just enjoying the view.”

“I’m afraid Joyce is struggling. We both are. Losing a close friend so suddenly is a lot to deal with.”

“I can’t imagine how you’re feeling,” Lily said, handing Keith’s phone back. He didn’t check the screen, but slipped it straight into his pocket.

“I’m sorry,” Joyce said to Lily. “I’m afraid I’m not great company.”

“You don’t need to be. I only thought it might take your mind off everything. I’m sorry if it’s too much for you.”

Joyce sighed. “It was a lovely idea. And I think it was good to get out of the hotel for a while.”

“Makes the time go a little quicker if nothing else,” Keith said as they started back towards the train.

When they got close, Lily broke away from them and made a beeline for Kit.

“Am I forgiven?” he asked, leaning casually against the front of the train.

“I suppose.”

He cast a glance in Joyce and Keith’s direction. “Have you found out anything interesting?”

“Not really.”

“That’s probably a good thing, isn’t it?”

“Maybe.” Once again, Lily thought about Flynn’s notion that she was looking for a distraction. “I might be reading too much into things. If you’re looking for something, you tend to find things, but maybe they don’t really mean anything.”

The message she’d read was probably completely innocent.

“Anything I can do to help?”

“No, thanks.” She patted Kit’s arm and wandered back to take her seat.

Maybe instead of involving herself in other people’s business, she should focus on her own problems.

Chapter Seventeen

The rest of the train trip was spent watching the scenery go by.

Occasionally, Lily tuned in to Kit's voice and took in the information about the islands, but mostly she spent the time psyching herself up to speak to Maria.

The chances were she'd find out she was entirely wrong about Maria owning the shop, but she needed to know once and for all.

After parting ways with Joyce and Keith at the end of the tour, she wandered past the ice cream shop.

There were a few customers but since Jessica appeared to have everything in hand, Lily didn't even go inside, but continued towards Glynis's house.

Even if Glynis was at home, it didn't mean Lily couldn't speak with Maria alone.

That had only been an excuse to put it off.

"Hi," Maria said when she opened the door. "I'm not sure Glynis is up to a visit now. We've been for a walk this morning and she's exhausted. She just fell asleep in her chair."

"I won't disturb her," Lily said, resisting the urge to postpone the chat for another day.

Maria began to close the door. "I'll tell her you called."

"Actually," Lily said, placing a hand on the door. "I wondered if we could have a chat."

"You and me?" Given the unease in her features, anyone would think Lily had suggested they move in together not have a conversation.

"Yeah, it won't take long," Lily said breezily, then strode inside.

"I really don't have much time." Maria closed the door behind her. "I have a few jobs to do while Glynis is napping."

Walking to the kitchen, Lily hovered beside the table and inhaled a calming breath.

"I've been wanting to ask you something..."

"She trailed off, distracted by Maria reaching into the neck of her sweater and pulling out her necklace.

With the pendant tight in her grasp, Lily couldn't get a good look at it.

"Is that an anchor?" she finally asked.

"Excuse me?"

"Your necklace? Is it an anchor?"

"Yes." She tucked it away again and crossed the room to stand beside the sink. "Was there something in particular you wanted to talk about?"

“Yeah.” She squared her shoulders. “Are you Gail Greenwood?”

Maria – or Gail, if that was who she really was – chewed on her bottom lip. There was no hint of surprise in her features, but she avoided Lily’s gaze and moved to fill the kettle.

“Are you?” Lily demanded. “I’m fairly certain you are.

I just can’t figure out why you’d lie about your name.

” A pulse of anger swept through her. “Actually, that’s not true...

I think I know why you’d lie... Because you don’t want anyone to know you own the ice cream shop.

I just don’t know why you want to keep that a secret. ”

Maria’s shoulders rose and fell before she turned to face Lily. “I didn’t lie about my name. Maria is my middle name. I haven’t gone by Gail for a long time.”

“How long?”

“Twenty years,” she said nonchalantly.

Lily’s thoughts whirled so fast she felt slightly dizzy. “Why?”

“I never really liked the name Gail. I wanted a change.”

Lily struggled to keep track of the questions that buzzed in her mind while the kettle gurgled in the background. “Why did you hide from me?”

“I didn’t hide.”

“You did!” Lily spat. “You hid when you didn’t tell me you owned the ice cream shop. Why wouldn’t you want me to know that?”

She waved a hand in front of her face, then turned when the kettle clicked off but made no move to do anything with it. “I didn’t want the stress of it. If you knew who I was, you’d have questions.”

“You’re right about that. I have so many questions I’m not even sure where to start.” The chair screeched on the tiled floor as she pulled it out and dropped onto it. “Did you know my parents?”

It took a moment for Maria to turn again and when she did, her face was a blank mask. “No,” she said flatly. “Why would I know your parents?”

“They visited your shop.” She searched her bag for the photograph, noting the tremble in her hand when she drew it out. “Here,” she said, crossing the room. “That’s them, and me. Twenty years ago.”

“Lots of people visited the shop.” She frowned at the picture. “I’m sorry, I don’t remember them.”

“Did you take the photo?”

“Possibly.” Her lack of reaction was infuriating. “It was a long time ago. And the shop was always very busy in the summer.”

“Are you sure you didn’t know them?” Lily asked desperately. “Their names were Julia and Christopher Larkin.”

“Doesn’t ring a bell,” she said. “I’m sorry I can’t help. I really do have a lot to get on with, if you don’t mind.”

“I do mind.” Lily went back to the chair and sat with her back perfectly straight. “What made you close up the shop and leave the island?”

Maria rubbed at her forehead, and her jaw tightened. “I bought the shop impulsively. A midlife crisis, I suppose. But living on a remote island didn’t turn out quite how I imagined, so I left.”

“And the fire?”

Her shoulders rose a fraction. “What?”

“There was a fire in the shop, wasn’t there?”

“Yes.”

“Was that why you left?”

“Partly. I’d already been toying with the idea. The fire felt like a sign that it was time to go.”

“How did the fire start?”

Her eyes were full of suspicion when they strayed to Lily. “I don’t know.”

“Wasn’t there an investigation, or anything?”

“I had candles on the tables in the evenings. It’s thought that I probably forgot to blow one of them out.”

“You sound as though you don’t believe that.”

“Maybe I forgot. When you do things on autopilot it’s hard to know. In the end, it didn’t matter how it started. There was a fire, it was dealt with. No one was harmed. That’s the main thing.”

“Yes,” Lily whispered, sadness rushing through her in a heavy burst. “My parents died in a fire.”

“I’m sorry,” Maria said.

“Thanks.” Feeling defeated, Lily stared at the floor.

“I don’t want anything to do with the shop,” Maria said eventually, breaking the silence. “That’s why I didn’t want you to know who I was. I don’t want you calling me with every little problem, or asking my advice. Everything needs to go through Mr Greaves.”

“Why didn’t you sell it when you left?”

“I couldn’t find a buyer back then.”

“And since then? I know you had offers.”

“I’m not really sure.” She leaned against the counter. “Maybe sentimental reasons.”

Lily leaned onto her knees. “Why did you offer it to me? I know other people had been interested.”

“You asked at the right time. I’d just moved back here.

I suppose seeing the place abandoned stirred something in me.

It had been a popular spot when I ran it and it seemed a shame it was in such a dilapidated state.

There had been complaints that it was a blight on the landscape and I realised that was true.

” Her lips lifted into a small smile. “Then you asked about the place and it seemed like a sign.”

“But I didn’t ask if I could open it. I was asking about you. I wanted to know if you remembered my parents.”

“There must have been a miscommunication. Mr Greaves told me you were interested in leasing it.”

Lily frowned as she tried to collect her thoughts. She wasn’t sure if Maria was lying, or if she wanted her to be lying because she wasn’t getting the answers she wanted.

“What about the note you left me?” Lily asked accusingly.

Creases formed between Maria’s eyebrows. “I didn’t want to be involved, but I thought the recipes might be helpful.”

“Not that note. Before that – you left me a note saying you hoped I finally found a home here.”

“Yes,” she said slowly.

“How did you know I was looking for a home?”

Her expression didn't change. "Mr Greaves had mentioned your parents had died. I suppose I just assumed you were looking for a fresh start."

"You really didn't know my parents?" Lily asked, gazing at her searchingly.

She shook her head. "No."

The lump in Lily's throat expanded and grew increasingly painful. She needed to get out, quickly.

"Sorry to have bothered you," she muttered and bolted from the house.

Chapter Eighteen

For most of her walk back to the shop, Lily was too lost in thought to notice anything around her.

But the woman with the striking auburn hair caught her attention.

Watching her walk along the promenade with the two other men, Lily clicked into the notes on her phone to remind herself of their names.

Kerry Cooper. Her husband, Vic, walked on her left – his bald head covered by a beige trilby hat. That left Russell on her right – the guy who wanted to buy Joseph's share of the boat.

Walking uncomfortably slowly, Lily maintained her distance from them. She almost slowed to a stop when they paused outside of the cafe. After exchanging a few words, they went inside.

Lily had no hesitation over whether to follow them in. She waited a few minutes, though, giving them time to order and get settled.

With most of the tables occupied, it was easy to go unnoticed in the bustle. It also helped that Kerry's group had taken a table by the window and seated themselves to look out and take in the view of Porthcressa Beach. Once Lily was at the counter, they all had their backs to her.

"I was just thinking about you," Pippa said warmly. She gave a subtle nod towards

the window.

“I saw them come in,” Lily whispered. “And I suddenly had a craving for a cappuccino.”

Pippa leaned closer. “Grab that table behind them and I’ll bring it over to you.”

“Thank you.” Lily got out her purse to pay, but Pippa waved her away.

The small round table was perfect for eavesdropping. Lily took the chair directly behind Kerry, and sat so she could easily keep an eye on the three of them, but could also turn her back to them if any of them turned around.

Engrossed in their drinks and the view, they were irritatingly quiet for a good few minutes. Finally, Kerry commented on the quality of the coffee and cake. That led to a conversation about the food at the hotel restaurant, which they were all very impressed by.

“I wonder if James will eat with us tomorrow?” Kerry remarked eventually.

At the mention of Joseph’s son, Lily stopped with her mug in front of her lips.

Vic draped an arm along the back of his wife’s chair. “If he does, we should convince Keith to keep Joyce out of the way. James will be feeling bad enough without having to endure an evening of her snivelling.”

“I should have a word with her anyway,” Kerry said, tilting her head. “You know what James is like... he’ll feel duty bound to comfort Joyce if she keeps blubbering like she has been. That’s not fair to him. I’ll tell her we all need to be strong and help him through all of this.”

The men on either side of her nodded their agreement.

“And we’re definitely going to speak to James about me buying the boat?” Russell asked. “You don’t think we should wait until after the funeral? Give the lad some time first?”

“No,” Vic said. “I don’t want this hanging over us. I’m sure James will feel the same. He’ll be happy to have one less thing to think about. And if we tell him his dad already agreed to it, that should sway him.”

Kerry stared out of the window. “Hopefully, Joseph hadn’t said otherwise to him.”

“Maybe I should offer him more,” Russell said.

Vic barked out a laugh. “You wouldn’t budge on the price for Joseph! It would have saved a lot of grief if you had. I guess you were happy to take advantage of your old friend, but draw the line at conning his grieving son?”

“I wasn’t trying to take advantage,” Russell said, a bite to his words. “And I’m not conning anyone.”

“Stick with the price you offered Joseph,” Kerry said firmly. “I’m certain James won’t quibble over it. If it’s an issue for him, you can offer him a bit more, but there’s no sense in going in too high. Tell him the boat is due for repairs and the price takes that into account.”

“I suppose so,” Russell replied.

Lily took another sip of her coffee. That sounded as though the boat wasn’t due for repairs at all. It seemed it was just like Joseph had said and they were trying to screw him over.

“We should take the boat for a spin tomorrow morning,” Kerry said. “I need something to kill the time until James arrives in the afternoon. All this sitting around is tedious.”

“A boat trip is a good idea,” Vic said.

Kerry lifted her coffee, pausing with it halfway to her lips. “It’ll probably be good for Joyce too – might help sway her.”

Sway her into what? Kerry’s message to Keith earlier had also mentioned them trying to convince Joyce of something.

Apparently, Lily wasn’t going to get an answer as the chatter shifted to a conversation about the food supplies they needed for the boat.

Five minutes later, the group stood to leave. Lily turned in her seat and bent her head over her coffee. Chances were they wouldn’t recognise her anyway, and even if they did, sitting on the next table in the cafe was unlikely to raise suspicions.

Even so, she was happy when they left the cafe without noticing her.

Their conversation played on her mind for the entire afternoon. Scheming to take advantage of a grieving son was pretty low. She hoped James would realise what they were up to and not let them get away with it.

Maybe she should try to speak to him when he was over. He’d be upset, though, and might find it intrusive.

With her thoughts all over the place, and that niggling feeling that something just wasn’t quite right about the situation, it annoyed her that she couldn’t chat to Flynn about it. Or wouldn’t speak to him.

He called her mobile shortly after Lily had closed up the shop but, after dithering for a moment, she ignored it. It wasn't as though she thought she could avoid him forever – or wanted to. She just needed a little space to figure out how to just be friends with him.

The thought that he might come over to her place after she'd ignored his call contributed to her decision to take an evening stroll. Not just that though – she also had the overwhelming urge to snoop around Joseph's friends a little more.

Slamming his mobile down on the desk, Flynn released a quiet growl. Lily wasn't just angry with him, but ignoring him, too.

“Everything okay?” Sergeant Proctor's baritone made Flynn jump.

“Fine,” he said, glancing at his boss, who stood in the doorway behind him.

“I think you've been over those witness statements enough now.” He wandered over to the desk, which was strewn with papers. “Don't you?”

“I feel as though I'm missing something.” Flynn ran his hands through his hair. “Maybe Lily's right that there's more to this case than an accident.”

“I'm not really seeing anything to suggest that.”

“It is strange that no one heard anything. The way they were all talking about having slept so well seems a little off.”

“They'd all been drinking, so that's a factor.”

“I suppose. But what about the dispute over selling the boat?”

The sergeant shrugged. "I'd agree that would be concerning if they'd tried to hide it, but they were upfront about it."

Flynn released a frustrated breath. "What if they were upfront about it because they knew it would be suspicious if it came out later? They seem like intelligent people. Maybe they thought being honest would put us off investigating further. Make it look as though they have nothing to hide..."

"Honestly, I'm not sure what we can do except wait for the post-mortem. You've already combed through the statements."

"When will the post-mortem be?"

"I imagine the beginning of next week at this rate."

"Why so long?"

"I spoke to the guy's son. He's arriving tomorrow afternoon. He wants to spend Friday going through his dad's things on the boat. Then he'll fly back with the body on Saturday morning. Realistically, nothing will get done over the weekend."

Flynn turned his phone over, willing Lily to call him back. His gut was telling him something wasn't right, but he wanted to hear it from Lily. Trusting her instincts was far easier than trusting his own.

"That's too long," he said eventually. "You need to override the son's wishes and put a rush on it."

The sergeant perched against the corner of the other desk. "Do I?"

"Something isn't adding up," Flynn said. "I can't put my finger on it, but I think it's

worth pushing for the post-mortem as soon as possible.”

“I’ve just spent the afternoon arranging to transport the body on Saturday.”

Flynn massaged his temples. “Okay.”

“I guess I could try to reorganise it for tomorrow, but it would involve several phone calls and probably a lot of grovelling and calling in favours. I’d also have to convince the coroner to put a rush on it... and who knows if there’s even a forensic pathologist available before next week...”

Flynn raised a hopeful eyebrow.

“I’ll see what I can manage,” the sergeant said, shaking his head as he walked back to his office.

“Thank you!” Flynn called after him, a surge of triumph lifting his spirits.

The impulse to tell Lily had him reaching for his phone, before remembering she wasn’t speaking to him.

Chapter Nineteen

Knowing that Joseph's friends had frequented the hotel bar every evening during their stay at the Star Castle, meant Lily didn't have to do a lot of detective work to track them down.

She spotted Kerry, Vic and Russell as soon as she entered the underground bar.

Keeping her gaze fixed on Sean, she walked up to him and exchanged greetings before ordering a glass of white wine. He poured her a drink, and was immediately drawn away to serve other customers.

After a long swig of wine, she turned and feigned surprise as she caught Kerry's eye.

"Hello!" she said with a manic little wave.

Kerry responded with a bemused smile.

"We met at the ice cream shop," Lily said, approaching the group.

"Oh yes," Kerry said, though Lily would swear she still didn't recognise her.

"I went on the train yesterday with Joyce and Keith. I was so sorry to hear about your friend." She tipped her head in a display of sympathy, then thrust her hand out.

"I'm Lily, by the way." She shook each of their hands, repeating their names as though she didn't already know them.

“I don’t want to bother you, but I just wanted to say I’m so sorry for your loss. It’s just devastating.”

“Yes,” Vic said. “You never think something like this will happen to a friend.”

“It feels like a bad dream.” Kerry lifted her lips to smile at Lily. “But people around here are so wonderfully kind. It makes a difference at a time like this.”

“How’s Joyce today?” Lily asked.

“Holding up.” Kerry nodded sagely. “She was probably the closest to Joseph and she’s been struggling. She’s gone for an early night. Hopefully she’ll sleep better tonight. A lack of sleep makes things even more unbearable.”

“Fingers crossed,” Lily said, struggling to know how to draw the conversation out. “I should leave you in peace...”

“Great ice cream, by the way,” Russell said. “Possibly the best mint choc chip I’ve ever tasted.”

“Thank you.” She dipped her chin. “You should call in again if you have time.”

His smile was all charm. “We might just do that.”

“You should,” Lily said, running with the idea. “I’d love to see you.” She held Russell’s gaze for an extended moment, smiling sweetly. Then she backed away and returned to prop up the bar.

When Sean wandered over, his eyes were on the group at the side of the room. “Were you just flirting with him?”

“I don’t know.” Lily winced. “Maybe.”

“He must be about twice your age.”

“It’s not as though I fancy him,” she said, brows pulling tightly together. “I just thought...”

He leaned onto the bar. “You thought he might be a murderer and that turns you on?”

“Oh, my god!” She shot him a contemptuous look. “Did you really just say that?”

He raised his hands. “You’re the one with a kink for criminals. Don’t give me your judgemental looks.”

“I don’t have a thing for...” She trailed off and rolled her eyes. “I thought he might be more likely to come to the shop tomorrow if I fluttered my eyelashes a little. He seems like the sort of guy who’d respond to that.”

“And you want him to visit your shop so you can seduce him?”

“No!” She took a sip of her wine. “I just wanted to make a connection so I can find out more about Joseph’s death.” Not that it was likely to lead to anything. If her information was correct, Joseph’s son would arrive tomorrow, so she was running out of time to investigate.

Lingering at the bar, she tried to listen in on Kerry’s conversation with her companions, but they were too far away. She could make out the occasional word, but nothing that made any sense, or that sounded overly interesting.

Towards the end of her drink, she swivelled on her stool, looking for Sean so she could pay and get home to bed. A glance at her phone showed a message from Flynn,

but she decided it could wait.

Sean was just coming over to her when she felt a presence beside her.

“I’d like the bill, please,” Russell’s husky voice commanded. “Add this wine to it as well.” He pointed at Lily’s glass. “And a nightcap. Whiskey.” His eyes slid to Lily. “Care to join me?”

“I’m not a fan of whiskey,” she said automatically, then cursed the missed opportunity to hang around and chat with him. “I could drink another wine, though.”

He nodded and picked up her glass, swilling the dregs before sticking his nose into the glass. “Get her something decent this time,” he said without looking at Sean. “Not this cheap rubbish.”

“O–kay,” Sean said, dragging the word out and catching Lily’s eye before moving away.

He returned a moment later with their drinks, the bill and a card reader. Sneakily, Lily clocked the total, then shifted to see what exactly had got them to such a high number. Apparently, he wasn’t cheap when it came to alcohol, only yachts.

“Cheers,” Lily said, clinking her glass against his, then taking a sip. It might be more expensive, but her untrained palette struggled to discern why. “Sorry again about your friend.”

“Thank you.” He stared into his tumbler.

“Had you known him long?”

He nodded. “Yes, but let’s not talk about such depressing subjects. Tell me about

yourself. Cheer me up.”

“There’s not much to tell,” she said slowly. “The ice cream shop takes most of my time.”

“Do you own the place?”

She nodded, not wanting to get into the technicalities of not owning the building.

“Do you buy the ice cream in or make it yourself?”

“I make it myself.”

His eyes widened. “Impressive. How did you get into that business?”

“By accident really.” She forced her shoulders to relax and flashed her brightest smile. “I’ve always loved ice cream, though.”

“Don’t we all,” he said, amused. “It must be a nice life, living on such a picturesque island. Too quiet for my liking, but I imagine you find ways to entertain yourself.”

“I do seem to be pretty good at that.” Her smile came naturally, and she took another sip of wine. “What about you?” she asked, the alcohol loosening her tongue. “What’s your life like?”

“There’s a question. It’s mostly business deals and sailing.”

“Sailing?” she echoed, hoping he’d expand.

“I’ve always been happiest out on the water. That’s how I ended up here. We came by yacht. The plan was to head down to the Med, but that looks to be out of the

window now.”

“I’ve never been on a yacht,” Lily said. “It sounds like the height of luxury.”

“It’s the best way to travel.” He leaned closer. “Or not travel. Staying still is fine too. Sitting on the deck on a sunny day with turquoise water below you and bright blue skies above. Put a drink in my hand and I’m in my element. Nothing better in the world.”

“I’m adding it to my bucket list,” Lily said, pressing her lips together.

“Don’t bother...” He trailed a finger over her bare upper arm in a way that made her stomach tighten.

“I thought you were going to bed,” Kerry said, appearing behind them with her husband at her side.

“Just taking a small detour,” Russell said, eyes fixed on Lily. “I’ve been having a lovely chat with Lily about how she makes her own ice cream.”

“How nice,” Kerry said, an undertone of annoyance to her words.

Russell’s eyebrows twitched as he smiled. “She’s going to join us on the boat tomorrow, aren’t you Lily?”

She’d definitely been angling for an invitation, but his lecherous smile and the lingering feel of his fingers against her skin made it seem like a very bad idea.

She swallowed the last of her wine and forced a smile. “I’d love to,” she said brightly.

Chapter Twenty

Going for a morning sail on a motor yacht with a bunch of strangers didn't feel like such a bad idea until Lily was standing on deck watching the harbour recede into the distance.

Maybe she should have at least told someone where she'd be.

All she'd told Jessica was that she'd be gone for a few hours.

She'd asked Kit to call in and check to see if Jessica needed any help, but when he'd asked over the phone where Lily would be, she'd only told him she was on an investigative mission.

He'd chuckled, but hadn't seemed put out by her secrecy.

That secrecy seemed daft now. She should have told him where she was going. If she didn't come back, Kit would have known what to do.

Or Flynn. He'd have been a good person to share her plans with. She still hadn't answered his calls and messages from yesterday. Not properly anyway – she'd sent a thumbs up emoji when he'd asked how her day had been, but that was it.

Standing beside Russell at the helm of the boat, she toyed with her phone in the pocket of her denim shorts. There was still time to send a quick message and let someone know where she was. If she had a signal, anyway. She was about to pull her phone out to check when her eyes roamed over the deck.

Joyce sat nestled against Keith's side on the white leather bench seat – Joyce looking out at the endless expanse of water, while Keith had his head in a Sudoku book, pen poised in his hand. Across from them, Vic pursed his lips as he stared at his laptop on the table in front of him.

Looking at the sedate group, Lily's worries about her safety seemed suddenly laughable. She was out for a gentle boat trip with a bunch of retirees. If anything, she might be in danger of being bored to death, but she couldn't imagine she had much else to worry about.

Her fingers relaxed, releasing her phone in her pocket, and she pulled her sunglasses down from the top of her head as the sun slipped out from a cloud.

The shrieks of gulls occasionally interrupted the gentle hum of the engine.

Taking a moment to notice the scent of salt in the air, and the feel of the deliciously warm sun on her face, it all felt pretty intoxicating.

A day away from the ice cream shop may have been exactly what she needed.

“Look at that,” Russell said, pointing to a bunch of rocks where seals lay in the sunshine. “They look very chilled out.”

Lily smiled at the sight. “A friend of mine told me they're really playful. If you get in the water, they'll often swim right up to you.”

“We can stop if you fancy a swim,” Russell suggested.

She shook her head. When she finally got around to swimming with seals, she'd go with Seren, who'd mentioned it a few times recently.

Besides, they'd only left the harbour five minutes ago so she couldn't imagine anyone would be keen to stop.

Briefly, she wondered how long the little sailing trip would last. Given that Joseph's son should be arriving soon, she couldn't imagine it would be too long.

"What time is James arriving?" Lily asked Russell quietly. Hopefully she might get a chance to talk to him.

"Sometime this afternoon," he replied, only just getting the words out before being interrupted by Joyce who stood and inhaled an excited gasp.

"There are puffins on that rock," she pointed out, picking up a bulky camera from the seat beside her. "There's something so special about puffins."

"Never mind the birds," Kerry said, emerging from below deck with a bottle of champagne in one hand and a collection of glasses in the other. "Who's ready for a drink?"

"It's not even eleven o'clock," Vic said, rolling his eyes but not looking up from his computer.

"Champagne," Joyce squeaked. "That seems a little..."

"Inappropriate," Keith said, finally dragging his attention from his puzzle book. "I don't think anyone is in a celebratory mood."

"They should be." She offloaded the glasses onto Vic.

Keith cleared his throat. "What exactly are we celebrating?"

“Life,” Kerry said firmly. “Given our recent reminder of how fragile it is, I think we should make every day count.” She popped the cork and drizzled the frothy liquid into a glass. “Joyce, be a dear and fetch more glasses, will you? I couldn’t manage enough for everyone.”

“I don’t want one,” Joyce said primly.

“Everyone else does,” Kerry told her without getting confirmation on that. “Two more glasses if you’re really not having one.”

Joyce had a flash of defiance in her eyes, which was gone in a blink. She disappeared down the steps into the heart of the ship.

Lily moved to take a glass when Kerry thrust one in her direction.

She passed one to Russell too, but her eyes were on the steps when Joyce returned.

Hopefully, one of them would offer to give her a tour later, otherwise she’d suggest it herself.

She had said she hadn’t been on a yacht before.

They shouldn’t be surprised by her being curious.

“To the simple pleasures in life,” Kerry said, raising her glass when everyone except Joyce had one. “And to not taking anything for granted.” Smiling fondly she ran the back of her fingers down her husband’s cheek.

Taking a sip, Lily hid her bemused frown. Most people she knew wouldn’t consider drinking champagne on a yacht to be a simple pleasure. After a couple of sips she moved to sit beside Joyce, who smiled gently before she went back to enjoying the

view. Keith's focus was firmly on his book.

Kerry sat forwards in her seat. "How did you get into the ice cream business, Lily?"

"Quite by accident." She paused, considering how much of her story she wanted to tell. "I came here for a visit and the owner of the ice cream shop was looking for someone to lease it. I suppose it was serendipity."

"How long have you lived on the Scillies?" Vic asked, closing his laptop and extending his arm behind his wife.

"I only moved here earlier this year."

"Who were you visiting?" Kerry asked.

Lily shook her head. "No one. I'd been to the islands when I was a kid and wanted to revisit them for a bit of nostalgia."

"It seems it worked out well for you," Vic remarked.

"Yes." Her smile came automatically. "It did."

"Interesting place to live." Kerry's playful smirk was slightly intimidating. "Can't be bad when you find yourself spending your days off drinking champagne on a yacht."

"I can't complain," Lily said, then cast her gaze to Russell, who was staring right at her.

He held his glass up. "Top me up, will you, beautiful?"

Kerry tutted and passed Lily the bottle. "I assume he's talking to you."

Stifling a wave of nausea, Lily walked over and refilled his glass, then did the same with her own. Maybe alcohol would make her feel better about the fifty-something man flirting with her.

“It’s hard to believe these islands are part of the UK,” Russell said. “The colour of the water is stunning. With the sun shining, it’s like some tropical paradise.”

“It is,” Lily agreed.

“Fancy having a go at piloting this thing?” With a hand on her back, he nudged her to the wheel, leaving her little space to protest.

“There’s nothing to it,” he whispered in her ear. “Just don’t tell that lot, or they’ll think they don’t need me.” He nodded at his companions and Lily could almost feel the heat of Kerry’s stare on her.

“It’s fun,” she said, dutifully holding the wheel and keeping them on a level with the coastline on the eastern side of St. Mary’s.

“Lily!” Kerry called. “Be a sweetheart and bring the bubbly back.”

Taking the bottle from Russell, she happily accepted the excuse to move away from him and his hot breath on her neck.

“Thank you,” Kerry said sweetly as she took the bottle and filled her glass to the brim. “You said you’ve never been on a yacht before?”

“No,” Lily said. “This is a first.”

“I’m sure you’ll want a tour then.”

“I’d love one,” Lily said, while Kerry poured the last of the champagne into Vic’s glass.

“I was going to show her around below deck,” Russell called out.

“I have no doubt about that,” Kerry muttered under her breath, then smiled brightly back at Russell. “You need to stay up here and captain the ship. Heaven forbid you leave one of us to do it. Haven’t we had enough mishaps this holiday?”

Joyce’s sharp intake of breath was edged with anger. “A mishap?” she said, eyes welling up. “Can you please try not to be so crass?”

“Don’t be dramatic.” Kerry waved her hand. “You know I didn’t mean anything by it. Come on,” she said to Lily. “I’ll show you around.”

With her glass in her hand, she sauntered down the few steps. “This is the galley,” she announced when the tight space opened into a compact kitchen and seating area. “Cosy, isn’t it?”

“Yes,” Lily said, taking in the space with the white leather seating, in a similar style to that on the deck. “It’s more luxurious than I thought. It doesn’t feel cramped.”

“Not now it doesn’t, but with six people in here it feels a lot less spacious.

” She set her glass on the table. “Five now,” she murmured.

“It still feels surreal. I’m not actually the monster Joyce makes me out to be.

I just don’t see the point of dwelling on what we can’t change.

” With a flick of her wrist, she beckoned for Lily to follow her.

“This is where things get a little tighter,” she said, walking down a few more steps into a hallway with wood panelling so glossy Lily could just about make out her reflection in it.

“It’s actually very well designed, but it can still get a little claustrophobic. ”

“How many can it sleep?” Lily asked, peering into the door which Kerry pushed open to reveal a tiny bathroom.

“Comfortably? Seven. Theoretically, the galley could also sleep an extra person, but I can’t imagine that would be fun.

” She closed the bathroom door and moved to the door opposite.

“This is the master,” she said, but paused when she reached for the handle.

She gave a small shake of her head, then continued along the hall.

“Joseph’s cabin,” she said. “Probably better we don’t go in there. ”

“Yes,” Lily said, hurrying after her. “Of course.” As curious as she was, it felt like crossing a boundary. “Are the cabins all a similar size?”

“Not really. Ours is a similar size to the master.” She opened the next door and stepped inside.

A quick look around the room easily identified it as Kerry’s.

Even if it weren’t for the garish clothing hanging on the back of several cupboards, and abundance of cosmetics, the scent of it would have been a giveaway.

The cloying haze of floral perfume was almost tangible.

“We also have an en suite. Nothing fancy, just a toilet, sink and a tiny shower cubicle.” She pointed to a door at the back corner, then retreated out of the room.

“This is Keith and Joyce,” she said, opening the door opposite, but not moving inside.

“That’s... smaller,” Lily said.

“Yes. I’m afraid Joyce and Keith drew the short straw. Not that it matters too much. We stay in hotels whenever we’re docked.”

“That makes sense,” Lily murmured. Not financially, but it really would be tight to all stay on the boat for long periods.

“Also, their cabin is extremely comfortable when you look at the one Russell’s in.” At the next door, Lily peaked inside at the single bed in extremely tight quarters.

“I see what you mean. But for one person, it’s not so bad.”

“Yes. I imagine he’ll move into Joseph’s cabin at some point. It is the captain’s cabin, after all.”

Lily made a noise of acknowledgement, but wasn’t entirely sure what to say. Apparently Russell was benefitting nicely from Joseph’s death.

“That’s it really.” Closing the door, Kerry gestured back towards the galley. “Not overly exciting, I’m afraid. The best bit is drinking champagne on deck without a care in the world.”

“Sounds like bliss.” Though Lily wasn’t sure about the carefree sentiment since her

friend had died just a few days ago. Hopefully Kerry's comment was meant in a more general sense.

"Speaking of which..." She sauntered over and opened the fridge. "How about we crack open another bottle?"

"I'm still going with this one." Lily held up her full glass, then inwardly grimaced when she noticed Kerry had drained hers while giving the tour.

She eased the cork off without spilling a drop and filled her glass. "I don't know about you," she said. "But I'm ready for some sunbathing."

Smiling weakly, Lily followed her back up onto the deck.

Chapter Twenty-One

On the daybed at the front of the boat, Kerry lifted her oversized sunhat to peer out at Lily. “It’s all a lot of scaremongering, this nonsense about skin damage. The vitamin D is good for you. And the sun will do far less damage than the chemicals in that sunscreen.”

“I burn easily,” Lily said, continuing to rub lotion into her legs. “And being burnt to a crisp is painful. Also, red isn’t really my colour.”

“You should gradually build a tan,” Kerry said. “That’s the best way. Milk white isn’t your colour either.”

“I’m not milk white.” Maybe she was currently, but that was only a result of being a little too liberal with the sunscreen.

Also, because she was beside Kerry, who was showing off her deep bronze tan in a leopard print swimsuit.

Lily had opted to remain in her shorts and T-shirt, mostly because of Russell and his leery gaze.

“Where are you going?” Kerry sat up and looked questioningly at Vic, who headed towards the galley steps.

“For a nap,” he grumbled. “If that’s all right with you?”

Kerry sighed. “We’ve just dropped anchor. Joyce and Keith are making lunch. Why don’t you wait and eat?”

“Not hungry,” he muttered, then disappeared below with his laptop tucked under his arm.

“He won’t sleep,” Kerry said, settling back down with her hat shielding her eyes. “He’ll be working down there. The man never stops.”

“He’s not retired?” Lily asked.

“In theory,” Kerry said. “He passed the business over to our sons, but he can’t let go of it.

Which is convenient for my lazy children who are happy to act incompetent so Vic continues to do most of the work.

” Her head whipped to Russell who lounged at the side of the boat.

“See if Joyce needs help with the food. I’ve no idea what’s taking her so long. ”

“Here’s a crazy idea,” he drawled. “Why don’t you help her?”

“I’m entertaining our guest.” She waved a hand in Lily’s direction.

“I can see if Joyce needs help,” Lily said, happy to have a reason to escape Kerry for a few minutes.

“Stay where you are,” Kerry barked. “Russell will go.”

Lily was already up and moving. “I need to nip to the toilet, anyway.”

In the galley, a platter of sandwiches sat on the table, but there was no sign of Joyce or Keith. Venturing along the hallway, she reached the toilet door, but paused at the sound of voices. Unable to make out the words, she crept along until she was right outside Joyce and Keith's door.

"I would just like it if you could stick up for me now and again," Joyce said. "You watch Kerry boss me around and you do nothing."

"I keep telling you not to let her boss you around. Of course she continues when you always do what she says. If you'd stand up to her now and again, she'd treat you differently."

"The last time I tried being assertive you didn't back me up. It's made me a little apprehensive."

"Well, it wasn't really appropriate for you to suggest we swap cabins with Joseph so soon after Lisa died. Your timing was off, that's all. You should have waited a while."

"It's ridiculous that he had the biggest room for himself while we were cramped in here."

Lily leaned closer to the door as the voices stopped. It took her a moment to realise it was because Joyce had started crying.

"I can't believe I'm speaking badly about him when he's dead," she said, her voice muffled by her tears.

"But I've just been sleeping so badly and I'm not thinking straight.

I know it shouldn't matter, but you heard Russell at breakfast yesterday, saying he's

going to move into Joseph's cabin once James clears it out.

" Her voice rose in pitch. "You should have said something yesterday. Nipped the idea in the bud. I can't believe you just kept quiet. "

"You didn't say anything either," Keith said wearily. "He was only suggesting it, anyway. It wasn't a firm plan. We can tell Russell he can't have the cabin if you're so set on it."

"I couldn't say anything yesterday. Everyone would think I was being insensitive again. Kerry and Vic are still annoyed with me for suggesting we swap with Joseph."

"It's a hassle to move cabins though," Keith said. "And we really should try to keep Russell sweet until the yacht is officially his. If he backs out, we're a bit stuck, aren't we? Difficult to go off on our trips without someone to skipper the boat."

"I just wish it could have been Joseph."

"He didn't want to travel any more. Besides, it's better for us financially to have Russell as an owner. You know this."

"I know," Joyce said quietly.

Keith's voice increased in volume, making Lily back away from the door and hurry back to the toilet. She caught sight of Keith stepping into the hall just as she slipped inside.

In front of the mirror, she released a breath and rubbed at a smear of sunscreen on the bridge of her nose.

What had Keith meant about it being a financial benefit for them if Russell bought

the boat?

Automatically, she pulled her phone from her pocket.

Flynn had messaged, asking how she was. There was also a message from Kit to say he'd just called into the shop, but Jessica had everything under control and had declined his offer to help.

Quickly, she thanked Kit, then went into the message thread with Flynn.

Her thumb hovered over the keypad.

She wanted to tell him where she was and what she'd learned. But a solid lump of anger wedged itself under her sternum. She put her phone away quickly.

It wasn't as though she'd ignore him indefinitely, but right now she had enough on her plate.

For the sake of appearances, she flushed the toilet, then ran the water in the sink before stepping back out into the hallway.

In the galley, Keith smiled at her before disappearing outside with a fruit salad.

"Can I help at all?" she asked Joyce.

The mousy woman glanced up from adding cherry tomatoes to the platter of sandwiches. "You could carry the plates up. I'm afraid it's not a particularly exciting spread, but it's something to nibble on."

"It looks great to me," Lily said, picking up the plates and heading back outside.

The conversation over lunch was mundane.

They talked about the weather and the wildlife – with Keith occasionally spotting some sea bird and then passing around a pair of binoculars.

Only Joyce seemed to share his enthusiasm.

The rest of them dutifully looked, but didn't put much effort into feigning interest. Kerry even rolled her eyes from time to time.

When they lifted the anchor and set off back to the harbour, Lily looked around the group on deck.

Maybe she was way off the mark in thinking Joseph's death was anything other than an accident.

It didn't seem plausible that any of the people sitting in the sunshine with her could have had a hand in it.

The wind picked up and she secured her hair in a ponytail, then tilted her face to the sun and soaked up the tranquillity of her surroundings.

"What time is James arriving?" Kerry asked Joyce loudly, breaking the peace.

Joyce turned her wrist to check her dainty watch. "In about an hour."

"Are you going to meet him when he lands?" Kerry said.

"No." Joyce shook her head. "The police sergeant is going to meet him. I think he's going to take him straight over to see Joseph's body."

A hush fell over them and Lily stared at the harbour as it came into view.

“Did you remember to reserve a place for James at dinner tonight?” Joyce said, looking at Kerry.

“I thought you were making the reservation,” Kerry replied. “Also, didn’t James say he wouldn’t eat with us?”

“He might change his mind.” Joyce shifted in her seat. “You didn’t make the reservation?”

“I’ll do it when we get back to the hotel,” Kerry said with a dismissive wave of her hand. “It’s fine.”

“I already did it.” Russell momentarily looked over his shoulder at them. “I assumed Kerry would forget.”

Kerry’s amused smile suggested she wasn’t offended by the remark. “We should have asked Lily for advice about somewhere different to eat. Dining at the hotel is getting a little dull.”

“I’m probably not the best person to ask,” Lily said. “The pubs serve good food, but other than that, I don’t eat out much. I had lunch at the hotel once, in the conservatory restaurant. That was nice. I’ve never eaten in the hotel’s main dining room, though I’ve heard good things about it.”

“That’s where we’re eating tonight,” Russell called over his shoulder. “You should join us. I guess we’ll have an extra place if James isn’t coming.”

Joyce shuffled in her seat again. “He might change his mind and want to join us.”

“Doubt it,” Vic said. “He’s a quiet lad at the best of times. I can’t imagine him wanting to go out to dinner after viewing his dad’s body.”

“I’ll ask him all the same,” Joyce said.

“I wouldn’t want to intrude,” Lily said, though she’d actually like to meet James.

Keith’s eyes slid to Lily. “James might like to meet you,” he said slowly. “You did speak to Joseph right before he died.”

“Did you?” Kerry jumped in.

Lily nodded. “Just briefly. He was watching the sunset outside the ice cream shop.”

“Oh.” She pulled her chin in, looking a little put out.

“Come for dinner,” Russell boomed, slowing the boat as they entered the harbour.

Lily did a quick sweep to gauge reactions, but as far as she could tell no one seemed openly against it.

She nodded. “If you’re sure that’s okay.”

With a few murmurs of agreement, they settled her evening plans.

Chapter Twenty-Two

Not knowing where Lily was left Flynn entirely unsettled.

When she hadn't responded to his message at lunchtime, he'd called in at the shop, but she wasn't around.

Jessica didn't know where she was. Presumably, she was investigating the death of the guy in the harbour, but after a casual scout around the hotel, Flynn learned that the owners of the yacht had gone out to sail around the islands.

Surely that meant Lily had to put her investigations on hold.

He tried calling her again after work, then went over and rang her doorbell, but it seemed she was intent on avoiding him. That, or she'd got herself into some kind of trouble. A chill ran through him and he stared up at her living room window before pressing the bell again.

"At least let me know you're okay?" he grumbled to himself, typing out another message for her.

He paced across the promenade and frowned at the horizon before deciding on his next move.

Five minutes later, the door hinges creaked when he walked into the Mermaid Inn. Approaching the bar, Seren tipped her head in acknowledgement but didn't smile. Apparently, he was back in her bad books.

“Have you seen Lily today?” he asked, deciding not to attempt small talk.

Shaking her head, she walked over to him, taking up position across the bar.

“She didn’t work today, and she’s not at home,” he went on.

“Maybe she’s at home but ignoring you.” She tilted her head and glared at him.

“Would you blame her?”

Flynn rubbed at his brow. “Possibly not. But I didn’t come here for a lecture. I came because I’m worried about Lily. I’m sure she’s been digging around, asking questions about the man who died. She was annoyed that the police weren’t investigating it further.”

“I doubt she really has a problem with the police not investigating,” Seren said. “I’m fairly sure she’s mostly annoyed at you for cancelling your date.”

He sighed heavily. “That as well, but it’s not really the point. For now, I’m more concerned with where she is, and if she’s okay. Can you just tell me for a fact that she’s at home and fine?”

Seren’s features softened as she drew in a breath. “I haven’t heard from her today, but I know she was planning to be out for most of the day. She asked Kit to call in and check on Jessica at the shop.”

“Where did she go?”

She shrugged. “I don’t know, but I guess you’re right that she’s trying to get information from the friends of the guy who died.”

“They were out on their boat today.”

“In that case, she may have been on a sailing trip.”

“Really?” Flynn slid onto the bar stool beside him. “You think she’d go out on a sailing trip with a bunch of strangers?”

“You think she wouldn’t? ”

It only took him a moment to ponder that. Of course she would.

“She’s avoiding me because she’s angry with me,” he said. “And I understand that, but I just need to know everything is okay with her... she won’t answer her phone or reply to my messages.”

Seren didn’t hesitate for long before taking her phone out.

“I’ll message and check she’s okay, then you have to promise to give her space. Don’t go banging on her door if she doesn’t want to see you.”

“Promise,” he said. “Can I also have a pint, please?”

She’d just set it on the bar when a response came through from Lily. He focused on his drink instead of dwelling on how quickly she’d replied to Seren.

“Is she okay?” he asked, when Seren stared at her phone for far too long.

“She’s okay. And she is also as crazy as I thought. She went out on the boat with them today.”

Flynn rolled his eyes. “But she’s home and fine?”

Seren opened her mouth, then closed it again. “I’m not sure I should share this

information with you. If she wanted you to know where she was, she'd tell you herself."

"So she's not at home? Is she at the hotel?"

Seren groaned. "You guessed that! I didn't tell you. And I'll neither confirm nor deny it."

"I'll bet she wanted to speak to Joseph's son." He shook his head. "Thank you for checking on her for me."

"I don't get it," Seren said, leaning to rest her elbows on the bar. "You obviously care about her."

"Of course," he muttered, eyes on his pint.

"And you don't just see her as a friend, do you?"

He rolled his shoulders, uncomfortable having this conversation with Seren.

"You two should be together," Seren said firmly. "Just tell her you're an idiot and you made a mistake. Ask her on a date."

"It's not that simple," he said wearily.

"Only because you're making the situation more complicated than it needs to be. Worry about the future later."

He took a long swig of his pint. "Thanks for the advice," he said flatly.

She muttered about him being an idiot as she walked away.

He wouldn't disagree with her there.

Chapter Twenty-Three

Walking into the restaurant at the hotel, Lily felt a stab of guilt over ignoring Flynn's messages. She'd had a busy day, though. Also, they'd spoken the previous morning, so it wasn't as though she'd been ignoring him for long.

Forcing her mind to the present, she smiled as she weaved through tables to join her dinner companions at the far side of the room.

"I hope you're up for a double date," Russell said, eyes twinkling as he stood and pulled out the chair beside him.

"Oh, for god's sake!" Kerry muttered. "Don't put the poor girl off her food."

"James didn't feel up to it," Russell explained. "And Joyce felt it was disrespectful to go out for dinner while James hid away in his room."

"She's ridiculous sometimes." Kerry sipped her water, leaving a bright red lipstick stain on the rim. "What difference does it make if we go out or not? It doesn't change anything. And James wanted to be alone, so it doesn't matter to him what we do."

Lily hid her disappointment at not getting to meet James and picked up a menu. "How is he?"

"As you'd expect," Kerry said.

Vic's attention had been fixed on his phone, but he placed it face down on the table.

“The police screwed up the arrangements for Joseph’s body, so that hasn’t helped things.”

“I don’t think they screwed it up,” Russell said. “I think they changed the plans on purpose.”

“It screwed things up for James,” Vic argued. “Which seems a little insensitive at a time like this. I don’t see why they couldn’t have held off...”

Finally, Lily could get a word in. “What happened?”

“They moved the body to the mainland this morning,” Russell said. “Apparently, the coroner wanted the post-mortem carried out immediately.”

She cursed herself for ignoring Flynn’s calls. He’d probably wanted to tell her about it himself, and her precious pride had got in the way of the investigation.

“Is that normal?” she asked.

“Apparently there’s always a post-mortem for an unexpected death.” Kerry shot her husband a wary glance. “That’s what the sergeant told you, isn’t it? It’s just routine...”

“Yes.” Vic reached for his phone again. “That’s what he said.”

Kerry tapped her red nails against her glass. “James considered not making the trip, since he mostly wanted to view his dad’s body, but he decided to come over anyway. He’ll sort through his dad’s things on the boat tomorrow. I think he just needs to feel he’s doing something.”

“It’s probably good that they’re getting the post-mortem done quickly,” Russell said.

“It’s not something you want to have hanging over you for ages.”

“I don’t even see why they need a post-mortem.” Kerry huffed and picked up her menu. “But let’s not talk about such morbid things at the dinner table.”

When the food arrived, it was delicious, but the atmosphere as they ate was decidedly dreary. Kerry spent most of the meal complaining about Joyce and exclaiming repeatedly about how they needed to eat, and questioning what good it did anyone for them to eat in their rooms.

Aside from that, Lily spent the time attempting to ignore her now overwhelming guilt about not responding to Flynn’s messages and calls.

When Seren messaged her in the middle of the main course, she had no reservations about discreetly typing out a reply with her phone held under the table, but her speed at responding to Seren only intensified her guilt over ignoring Flynn.

As soon as she got home, she’d message him and tell him she was fine, but had had a busy day. Pushing her empty dessert plate away, she decided it was a good time to call it a night.

“How about we move to the bar for another drink?” Russell said, before Lily could speak.

“It’s been a long day,” Kerry said. “I’m sure we’re all ready to hit the hay.”

Russell ignored the suggestion. “Lily?”

“I imagine she wants to get home to bed,” Kerry said tightly. “It’s probably where you should be heading, too.” Her eyes went pointedly to the empty whiskey glass in front of him.

Again, he ignored her. “Shall we?” he said to Lily as he stood.

She hesitated – an overwhelming part of her insisting she should go home, while a quieter, more insistent voice in her head whispered that she might as well see if she could garner any more information.

Maybe Russell would let his guard down when they were alone.

Especially if he continued to consume alcohol at the rate he’d been doing over dinner.

“Maybe just one more drink.”

Kerry muttered something Lily couldn’t make out, then schooled her features into a wide smile and wished Lily goodnight.

“Don’t mind her,” Russell said as they walked out of the restaurant. “She gets jealous when she sees other people having fun.”

“She seems nice. Very self-assured.”

“You can say that again. Most people find it overbearing.”

“She’s a woman,” Lily stated. “People don’t like it when we’re confident and know our own minds.”

Grinning, he tilted his head. “I never said I find her over-bearing. Or at least I don’t think it’s a bad thing.”

As they entered the bar, he headed straight for a table, but raised his hand to get Sean’s attention behind the bar.

“Whiskey for me,” he said. “Wine for Lily.”

Feeling slightly woozy already, Lily had absolutely no desire for more alcohol. She needed to keep a clear head.

“I’ll just be a second,” she said to Russell, who slumped onto the bench seat along the back wall. “I want to make sure the barman doesn’t give me the cheap rubbish.”

“Yes. You tell him you want the good stuff. No expense spared when you’re with me.”

She smiled sweetly as she left him.

“You on a date?” Sean asked quietly, sauntering over to stand directly across the bar from her.

“Don’t be gross.” She shuddered at the thought. “I’m just talking to him.”

“Judging by the way he was staring at your breasts when you walked in, I’d say he’s interested in more than your conversational skills.”

“You might be right,” she admitted. “This feels seedy. Please tell me to go home immediately.”

“And spoil my entertainment? No chance.”

“This is a really dubious way to get information,” Lily said, more to herself than Sean.

“It is what it is,” Sean said breezily. “Use what you’ve got, I say.” He tipped his head at her chest.

“You’re not making me feel better. I can’t imagine I’m going to find anything, anyway. I’m wasting my time.”

“Just talk to him and see what he lets slip while his guard is down. If he gets handsy or inappropriate, I’m right here. Give me the nod if you need me to step in.” He paused and a moment passed. “Why are you looking at me like that?”

“Because you sounded genuine. I’m used to sarcasm from you.”

“Sometimes I can be serious.” He shrugged. “When the situation demands it.”

“Can you do me a favour and give me a non-alcoholic drink that looks like wine?”

“Like non-alcoholic wine, perhaps?”

She smiled. “Have you got some?”

“Yeah. It’s not something I generally recommend.”

“I don’t care what it tastes like. I just can’t drink any more alcohol, but I’d rather he doesn’t know that.”

“Need to keep your wits about you, while he loses his.” He nodded approvingly. “You’re good at this investigating stuff.”

She opened her mouth to tell him she wished she was better, since she hadn’t got much useful information so far. Her jaw clenched and she kept the thought to herself. It was a conversation she would have had with Flynn and it felt strange to talk to someone else about it.

Besides, Russell was waiting for her.

“I’ll bring your drinks over,” Sean said.

“Thank you.” Lily took a breath, then plastered on a bright smile before turning back to Russell.

She’d stay for one drink and one drink only.

That was her plan. It went out of the window when they finished their drinks and Russell ordered another round without asking.

There was a hint of a slur to his voice as he continued telling her his dream sailing destinations.

He’d given up on the flirting, and Lily wasn’t sure if that was a good thing or not.

It felt more comfortable, but she suspected it meant less chance of getting anything out of him.

He was finishing his drink when he pulled his phone from his pocket to check his messages. Lily only had time to see it had come from Kerry before he put the phone aside. The screen lit up with a notification of another message but he ignored it.

As curious as she was about the messages, the screensaver on his phone drew her attention too. She’d assumed he was single, but the picture of him and a brown-haired woman suggested otherwise.

“Who’s that?”

“An old friend,” he said, leaning back in his chair.

“She must be pretty special if she gets pride of place on your phone.”

He went to pick up his drink, only to find it empty. Lifting the glass, he called across the empty room to Sean. “Another one.” He pointed to Lily’s glass. “For both of us.”

Lily caught Sean’s eye and shot him a panicked look.

“I’m afraid it’s closing time,” he said. “Any more drinks will need to come from the minibar in your room. I have your bill here.” He wandered over with it and Lily’s eyes rounded at the numbers on the slip of paper.

“Bloody hell,” she whispered, apparently unable to control her mouth.

“Everything okay?” Russell asked, shifting in his seat to take his wallet out.

She blinked, checking she wasn’t misreading the bill. “The wine costs three hundred quid.” Looking at the glass, she felt slightly queasy at the thought of drinking something so expensive. Except she hadn’t even drank it.

Why the heck had Sean added something so expensive to the bill? Surely Russell would take issue with it...

“You’re absolutely worth it,” he said, breaking her thoughts and tapping his card against the reader without even glancing at the bill. Then he pulled a bunch of notes from his wallet and handed them to Sean who thanked him and wandered away.

Lily blinked rapidly and stared at Russell as he made a meal of putting his wallet away. “Thanks,” she murmured.

“You’re welcome,” he slurred. “Thank you for your company.”

On the table, his phone lit up again. The smiling face of the brunette appeared behind the message notifications. She wasn’t someone Lily would ever have put Russell

with. At a guess, she was probably a few years older than him and had a natural, graceful look about her.

“She’s very pretty,” Lily said quietly.

“Who?” Russell asked, then noticed his phone. “Oh, Lisa? Yes. A beauty, she was. Passed away a year ago, but I think about her often.”

Lisa? Was he talking about Joseph’s wife?

“Come on, then.” Russell swayed slightly as he stood. “I should walk you home. It’s pitch black out there and they don’t seem to go in for streetlights in a big way here.”

“Umm...” Under normal circumstances, Lily would have insisted she was fine alone.

But she’d really like to quiz him about the woman in the photo, and find out if it really was Joseph’s wife.

She was sure Russell was harmless, but letting him walk her home in the dark seemed like a pretty foolish move.

Across the room, Sean cleared his throat. With his jacket on, he was clearly waiting to leave. He quirked an eyebrow when he caught Lily’s eye.

Beside her, Russell pushed his phone into his pocket, oblivious to Sean’s presence. “Just need to visit the gents,” he said, patting Lily’s arm as he passed her. “I’ll be right back.”

As soon as he was out of the room, Sean strolled over. “He’s walking you home?”

“The conversation was just getting interesting.”

“Okay, but you realise his motives for walking you home might not be purely about your safety.”

“I don’t think his motives are dodgy. I suspect he’s just a lonely guy who gets an ego boost from talking to young women.”

“I think it’s dodgy,” Sean stated flatly. “Tell him you’re fine alone. There’s no crime on this island, so it’s not as though it’s dangerous to walk home alone. Or I can walk you... I’m heading home anyway.”

“No offence, but that doesn’t seem like a less creepy option.”

He curled his lip in a playful scowl, but seemed to take the joke as it was intended.

“Could you do me a favour?” She kept an eye on the door, looking for Russell returning. “Could you follow us? Then I can continue the conversation but not have to worry about getting myself arrested for assault if he tries anything. Or I’ll at least have a witness to say it was self-defence.”

He smiled approvingly. “It’d actually be fun to see you beat up an old guy.”

“I don’t intend to beat him up. Not unless he does something inappropriate.”

“Okay. I’ll follow.”

“Be discreet.”

His smirk was all confidence. “You won’t know I’m there unless you need me.”

“Thank you,” she said, then moved to wait for Russell in the lobby.

He arrived at the same time as her and made an elaborate gesture towards the door.

The air outside was pleasantly fresh, but not overly cool.

Russell was entirely off balance as they descended the steps and Lily wondered whether he was even capable of walking her home, or if she'd end up having to deal with him passing out at the side of the road.

"Was Lisa your girlfriend?" she asked, breaking the silence and glancing up at the almost-full moon in a show of nonchalance.

"No." He smiled fondly. "Just a friend. She was already taken when I met her."

Lily nodded. Given how drunk he was, she wondered whether he'd even remember the conversation tomorrow.

"I hope you don't mind me asking," Lily said. "Was Lisa Joseph's wife?"

His bark of laughter made her flinch. "Don't miss much, do you?" he said amiably. "She was. Though what she saw in that strait-laced bore I'll never understand. They seemed happy, though."

"Have you always had that picture of the two of you on your phone?"

"No. That wouldn't have gone down well, would it?"

Now that Joseph is gone I can remember her properly.

We were good friends and now I can remember her without worrying about upsetting her husband.

” He belched loudly and pressed a hand to his chest. “I thought your place was close, but it feels as though it got farther away.”

“Maybe because you keep veering from side to side,” Lily muttered under her breath before adding loudly, “Almost there!”

Chapter Twenty-Four

At the sight of the figure outside the shop, Lily wasn't sure whether to be grateful to Sean or curse him.

He was supposed to stay out of sight so Lily might find out more from Russell.

Admittedly, she probably wouldn't get more out of him now, and didn't relish the thought of saying goodbye to him alone on her doorstep.

She squinted into the shadows. How had he arrived before them? She'd have sworn he was behind them somewhere.

"Oh!" Her heart soared and she was glad the gentle moonlight would keep the flush on her cheeks hidden. "What are you doing here?" she asked Flynn, trying to get her head around the fact that she suddenly felt as though she hadn't seen him in weeks when she'd actually seen him the previous day.

Beside her, Russell's head swivelled, apparently trying to figure out who she was speaking to.

"Looking for you," Flynn said, strolling out from the shadowed doorway. "I was worried about you."

As he stepped closer, the earnestness in his features made her insides twist with another hit of guilt.

“I’m fine,” she said.

“Who are you?” Russell said. “And what are you doing lurking around Lily’s place like some creepy stalker?”

Flynn pulled his shoulders back. “We’ve actually met, Mr Hart. You probably don’t recognise me out of uniform.”

“Ah.” Russell scratched at his jaw and the action seemed to throw him off balance. He pitched to his left before righting himself. “The copper... PC...”

“Grainger,” Flynn said. “Lovely to see you again.”

“Yes.” This time Russell pitched to the right. “I was just seeing that Lily got home safely.”

“That was good of you,” Flynn said, with a glare that could melt ice. “It seems you’ve accomplished your mission.”

“Yep.” Russell turned to Lily. “Home safe and sound, just like I promised.”

She took a subtle step backwards. “Thanks for a lovely evening.”

“Pleasure was all mine,” he slurred.

Lily forced a smile. “Good night.”

Taking the hint, he raised a hand in salute, then set off back the way they’d come, swaying in a zigzag pattern.

“What was that all about?” Flynn said through gritted teeth, eyes fixed on Russell as

he retreated.

“I had dinner with them.”

“And you thought it was a good idea to let that creep walk you home in the dark?”

“It was fine. I had it under control.”

Flynn shook his head. “I know you can look after yourself, and I should probably have been more concerned for his safety if he tried anything, but even so... it seems like a dodgy situation to put yourself in.”

“I realise that,” Lily said, unsure whether to be peeved at him for thinking she was that stupid, or endeared by his concern. “I wasn’t on my own.”

“What do you mean?”

She glanced around, searching the shadows. Perhaps he’d ditched her after all. “Sean?” she whisper-hissed.

It was a little chilling, the way he slinked out of the shadow of the building a few doors down. Like a panther stalking its prey.

“Bloody hell.” Her heart rate went crazy even though she’d known he was there. “You’re a bit too good at stalking. It’s unnerving.”

“That was fun,” he said, wiggling his eyebrows as he passed her and Flynn. “You owe me a drink.”

“Sure,” she said to his retreating form.

“Who was that?” Flynn asked, but his gaze was on Russell, who appeared to have stopped on the promenade.

“Sean. He works in the hotel. I asked him to escort me home, because I’m not as stupid as you seem to think I am.”

“I didn’t say you were stupid.” He released a loud exhale. “I’m sorry if I implied it, but I was worried about you. You’ve been ignoring me.”

“Yeah.” There didn’t seem to be any point in denying it. Not that Flynn was listening to her. His attention was on Russell, whose dark outline was only just visible as he stumbled along again.

“I really want to talk to you,” Flynn said. “But I need to follow him and make sure he makes it back to the hotel. The guy is wasted.”

“Yeah he is,” Lily agreed, going after Flynn when he began to walk away.

“Are you coming with me?”

She shrugged. “I don’t like to think of you on a covert mission without me.”

He chuckled quietly. “I thought you’d be happy with the excuse to get rid of me and avoid talking to me.”

“We have to be quiet for covert missions,” she said.

“We’ll talk on the way back then.”

Lily trained her gaze on Russell. “If we must.”

Chapter Twenty-Five

Lights around the castle bathed the stonework in an orange glow. The stone steps of the entranceway were especially well lit and the female figure standing at the top of them was visible from a good distance away.

Exchanging a look with Flynn, Lily moved to the side of the steep path and continued walking along the grassy verge. From the way Russell continued his swaying walk with his head bent, Lily guessed he wasn't aware of the woman watching him from the steps, even as he reached the foot of them.

"Who's that?" Lily whispered, slowing her pace to match Flynn's. The moonlight caught his blue irises and cast shadows over his face.

"No idea," he replied. "I don't think we can get much closer without them spotting us." He tugged on her elbow, drawing her behind a small shrub. Instinctively, she crouched behind it, reasonably certain they weren't visible to the person on the steps.

Lily winced when the woman spoke. The distinctive cadence of Kerry's voice carried on the breeze, though she couldn't catch the words.

"That's weird." Lily couldn't take her eyes from them as Russell and Kerry launched into what sounded like a heated exchange. "I wish I could hear what they're saying." Glancing around, she decided that trying to get closer would risk being spotted.

"They don't sound happy," Flynn commented.

“No. They don’t.” Except, the situation seemed to change quickly.

Kerry’s demeanour was anything but angry as she lifted a hand to Russell’s face.

He stepped closer, closing the space between them, and Lily’s jaw slackened in shock right before they kissed.

“That’s not his wife.” Lily’s eyes shot to Flynn. “She’s married to the other guy. What’s going on?”

“Shh!”

“Sorry,” she whispered, while Kerry and Russell retreated into the hotel. “What on earth just happened?”

“At a guess, I’d say they’re having an affair.” He waited a moment before moving from their hiding place.

“He wasn’t really flirting with me,” Lily muttered as things fell into place.

“What?”

“He kept flirting with me and being all creepy, but I think it was only when Kerry was around. He was trying to make her jealous or something.” It was a relief that he didn’t actually think he had a chance with Lily. “Poor Vic, though. Right under his nose. How doesn’t he notice?”

Flynn looked thoughtful. “He takes sleeping pills.”

“How do you know?”

“He mentioned it when we questioned him about the night Joseph died. It was another reason we didn’t think too much about no one hearing anything – he’d taken a sleeping tablet, and Joyce wears earplugs.”

Once again, Lily was annoyed with herself for not discussing things with Flynn earlier. She’d missed information because of it.

“Why does he take sleeping pills?” she asked.

“He just said he hasn’t been sleeping well. Convenient for his wife, I suppose. Presumably once he’s out for the count, she can slip away without fear of him waking and noticing her gone.”

“What does this mean regarding Joseph?” Lily said in a rush.

“Does them having an affair change the circumstances of his death? Maybe Joseph found out about the two of them and they killed him to keep him quiet.” She stopped walking, remembering that Flynn had never thought there was anything suspicious about Joseph’s death.

“Anything is possible,” he said quietly. “But lots of people have affairs. It doesn’t necessarily mean anything.”

Lily fell into step with him again. “I’m shocked. I’ve been following them for two days trying to find stuff out, but I really didn’t see that coming.”

“Have you found anything else out?” he asked, a heaviness to his words that made her feel bad for keeping him out of the loop.

“Not much. It seems Russell was in love with Joseph’s late wife.”

“If Joseph’s wife had still been alive, that would have been a motive for Russell to get Joseph out of the picture.”

Lily bunched her shoulders against the sudden chill in the air. “I thought you didn’t believe anyone killed Joseph.”

“I never said that.” He leaned so his shoulder bumped against hers as they walked.

“There’s no evidence it was anything other than an accident.

Until there’s some solid reason to think there’s more to it, there’s not much I can do.

I’m hoping the results of the post-mortem might shed some light on things. ”

“Why was there a sudden rush on the post-mortem?”

He hesitated for a moment. “Because I suggested it should be done quickly.”

“So you weren’t just ignoring my suspicions?” She didn’t dare look at him, because it suddenly felt ridiculous that he or the sergeant would dismiss her concerns.

“The sergeant told you we’d continue to look into it, and we have.” They fell silent for a moment before Flynn spoke again. “What else have you found?”

Lily pondered her time with Joseph’s friends. “Joyce seems to have a problem with Kerry. I think she feels steamrollered by her a lot of the time. Possibly by all of them. She’s upset about not having a larger cabin on the boat.”

The relief at finally being able to talk everything through was immediate.

“Also, Keith mentioned something about it being a financial benefit to them if

Russell buys out Joseph's share of the boat. Why would that be?"

Flynn's eyebrows twitched together. "I don't know. That sounds a little odd. But I don't know much about expensive motor yachts. Maybe there's a legitimate reason. I can ask the sergeant."

"Thanks." Slipping back into her friendship with Flynn had been instant, but she felt the sting of rejection once again as she remembered he only wanted to be friends with her.

"I know you're annoyed with me," he said, as though reading her mind. "But do you have to avoid me? I don't like it."

"I've been busy, that's all," she lied. "Why were you hanging around outside the shop in the dark?"

"Waiting for you. Obviously."

"Did it occur to you I might have already been in bed? How long were you planning on waiting?"

He didn't reply, and it only took Lily a moment to figure out why.

"You knew where I was! That's why Seren wanted to know where I was... she was asking for you."

"Well, you were ignoring me," he said, as though that made it okay.

"Yes, I was! Because I didn't want to see you or speak to you. Which is my decision. You don't get to stalk me just because you're not getting what you want." Stopping in front of the shop door, Lily's blood pumped furiously.

Flynn shoved his hands into his pockets. “Yeah,” he said, eyes on the ground. “That’s fair. I’m sorry. But...”

“But what?” she prompted when he fell silent.

“You didn’t let me explain things properly.”

“I didn’t need to. You’re moving back to London soon, so there’s no point in us getting into anything. That’s it, right? What else is there to explain?”

He started to speak, but stopped himself and took a breath. A muscle in his jaw twitched. “Do you really not want to see me, or speak to me? Aren’t we friends?”

She twisted her lips, the question causing a battle to rage inside of her. Part of her didn’t want anything to do with him. But the bigger part of her craved his company, and his friendship.

Her conversation with Maria sprang to mind and she longed to tell him all about it.

The trouble was, she wanted more than he did. She didn’t know if she could deal with just being friends with him.

“I think I just need some space,” she said, her voice brittle.

He scuffed the toe of his shoe on the concrete. “Okay.” He pushed his fingers through his hair and looked for a moment as though he might say more. “Goodnight,” he whispered before he turned and walked away.

Lily fought the urge to call him back. They could just be friends and she could invite him in and tell him all about her conversation with Maria, and everything that had happened in the last two days.

In the end, she stayed silent and let herself into her lonely flat.

Chapter Twenty-Six

As Lily carried the tables and chairs outside the following morning, a hunched figure wandered out of the Cookie Jar with a takeaway cup in her hand.

Joyce exuded sorrow as though it was a part of her personality, though presumably it wasn't her usual state.

Head bent, she didn't wander far onto the beach before sitting on the sand.

Lily hastily straightened out the chairs before walking over to her.

"Morning!" she said, hoping her cheerful demeanour might cancel out some of Joyce's sadness. "How are you?"

"Fine," Joyce said, pushing a wayward grey curl behind her ear.

"It's such a lovely morning. The sea air is invigorating."

"I suppose it is." Joyce eased the plastic lid from her takeaway coffee.

"Where's Keith this morning?"

"Helping James on the boat."

"Ah." She softened her tone as she sank onto the sand beside Joyce. "How's he doing?"

“About as well as you’d expect for someone who’s lost two parents in the space of a year.” Her chin wobbled and she put a hand over her mouth to cover it. “He’s sorting through Joseph’s things, but I couldn’t face being there.”

“It must be so hard.” Lily gave Joyce a sympathetic pat on her arm.

“Everything just feels such a mess. Two years ago, we were six friends planning all these adventures for our retirement years. Now Lisa and Joseph are gone, and all the dreams are falling apart.”

“It must all feel like a shock at the moment, but you’ll still get your travels. I know it won’t be the same, but I’m sure Joseph and his wife wouldn’t want you to give up on your dreams because of them.”

“I don’t know what will happen.” She sighed and replaced the lid on her cup before setting it on the sand. “Cancer is such an awful disease.”

“Were you and Joseph’s wife very close?”

Joyce’s features flashed with surprise. “Yes, why?”

Lily stuttered a little but didn’t manage to formulate any words.

“Cancer?” Joyce closed her eyes. “Of course. Sorry, I wasn’t thinking of Lisa, though.”

“Oh?”

“Vic’s very ill,” she said slowly. “Terminally.”

Lily kept her features set in surprised concern, while her brain whirled. Vic being ill

explained why he'd been having trouble sleeping.

"He's being a typical man about the whole thing. Refuses to speak about it."

"Maybe he thinks he's doing you a favour."

"He didn't even want us to know about the diagnosis.

" Joyce's features morphed into a sardonic smile.

"I'm sure he didn't think about how difficult it would make life for Kerry.

She kept his secret for a while, but of course she needed to confide in someone.

Keeping something like that bottled up isn't right. "

Lily frowned. "So you pretend you don't know?"

"Crazy, isn't it?" Joyce idly ran her fingers through the sand beside her. "Apparently he wants to make the most of the time he has, without everyone making a fuss. I suppose I can understand that to some extent."

"It sounds like a difficult situation for everyone."

"Yes." She dusted the sand from her hands. "I think his illness is partly why Kerry got so upset about Joseph not wanting to continue with the trip. I suppose she was thinking it might be Vic's last chance to do it."

"Did Joseph know about Vic being ill?"

"No." She closed her eyes briefly. "I encouraged Kerry to tell him. If he'd known I

think he would have changed his mind about the trip, but Kerry said she already felt she'd betrayed Vic by telling me and Keith about his illness.

"She paused and her eyes glazed over. "She didn't even want us to know, but we overheard her talking to Russell. "

"No one else knows?" Lily asked.

She shook her head. "Just us. I hate secrets. Vic is our friend and we'd like to support him through this. We can't do that if we're not supposed to know about it."

Lily was a little lost for words. "I'm sorry," she said eventually.

"I'm sorry for offloading on you. I also feel bad for staying out of the way when I should be helping James sort through his dad's things. He shouldn't have to do that alone."

"Keith's with him, isn't he?"

"Yes, but he's not the most sensitive person. He'll be all businesslike about it. Which is probably helpful to some extent, but poor James needs sympathy too." She stood and brushed the sand from her floral skirt. "I'll go and see what I can do to help."

"I'm sure he'll appreciate that," Lily said. "Good luck."

"Thank you." Joyce reached for Lily's hand and clutched it in both hers while giving her a grateful smile. "You've been ever so kind."

"It's nothing," Lily murmured.

Maybe none of it had anything to do with Joseph's death, but it seemed there were

plenty of secrets between the group of friends.

Chapter Twenty-Seven

The morning jog around the island did little to dispense Flynn's frustrations.

In fact, it had the opposite effect. Since he'd usually have invited Lily to join him, her absence was a constant reminder of their rift, which he had no idea how to fix.

If she wanted space, he supposed he'd have to give it to her – even though the idea of it pained him.

His shift didn't start until after lunch and the free time did nothing to help his mental state. Arriving at the station early, he greeted PC Hill at the front desk, then went through to the sergeant's office.

"Any word on the post-mortem?" he asked, taking a seat.

Sergeant Proctor looked up from his computer screen. "I can't imagine we'll hear anything until tomorrow at the earliest."

"What about Joseph Whittaker's son? Have you heard any more from him?"

"I went through everything with him yesterday. As far as I know he was planning on sorting through his father's things on the boat today. I wasn't expecting to hear from him." He tilted his head. "How's Lily?"

"Fine," he said distractedly. "Do you know much about boat ownership?"

“Can’t say it’s my area of expertise. Why?”

Flynn tapped on the arm of the chair. “Can you think of any reason it would have been advantageous for the other boat owners if Joseph sold his share?”

“You’ve lost me,” the sergeant said.

“Lily overheard one of them saying that Russell buying Joseph’s share would be good for the rest of them. But I can’t see why?”

He gave a slow shake of his head. “Assuming they all keep the same share of the boat, I can’t see why it would make any difference financially.”

“Me neither. It’s weird, isn’t it?”

The sergeant shrugged. “Maybe she overheard wrong.”

“Maybe.”

“Has she found anything else?”

Flynn scratched at his jaw. “Two of them are having an affair.”

“Who?”

“Kerry and Russell.”

“I really wish this kind of thing surprised me.” He sighed and his features turned serious. “Does Lily still think Mr Whittaker’s death wasn’t an accident?”

“She’s still looking into that theory. It doesn’t seem as though she’s found anything

definitive.” He drummed his fingers again. “I thought I might nip down to the harbour and see if the son needs anything...”

Leaning back in his chair, the sergeant laced his fingers across his chest. “You know the drill – we don’t get involved in the personal side. We’ve done all the official stuff, now we step back and leave him to it.”

“It’s different over here,” Flynn argued. “There isn’t the same access to other support services, so our role is more flexible, right?”

The sergeant lifted an eyebrow. “You seem to only use that argument when it suits you.”

“I don’t see any harm in going down and asking how he’s doing, and if he has any further questions.”

“What’s your real motive?”

“It’s partly that,” Flynn argued.

“And the other part?”

“The other part is gathering more information in case Mr Whittaker’s death wasn’t an accident.” He leaned out of his seat. “I’ll be professional, and if he doesn’t want me around, I’ll leave immediately.”

After a long exhale, the sergeant gave a subtle nod. “Don’t ask inappropriate questions.”

“I told you I’ll be professional.” Flynn was out of his chair in an instant. He pretended not to notice his superior rolling his eyes as Flynn thanked him and rushed

away.

Five minutes later, the wind whipped around him as he strode down the harbour steps and landed heavily on the jetty.

A couple of fishermen stood beside a weather-beaten boat and tipped their chins in greeting as he passed.

There was no one to be seen or heard on Faith , and no reply when Flynn called 'hello' as he stepped aboard.

Ducking his head, he followed the few steps below deck and called out again.

No reply.

Maybe James had finished packing everything up and gone back to the hotel.

The luxurious seating area in the galley made Flynn's eyes widen, just as they had the previous evening when he'd done a quick internet search to check the price range of yachts this size.

Venturing further, he descended another few steps into a narrow hallway. He called out again as he approached an open door.

The guy who'd been bent over a large cardboard box straightened up. He was probably only a few years older than Flynn. The weariness on his features didn't shift as he moved to sit heavily on the edge of the bed.

"I thought I'd been over everything with Sergeant Proctor," he grumbled. "What else do you need from me?"

“Everything is taken care of.” Inwardly, Flynn winced, concerned he’d made an error in judgement by coming to the boat. “I didn’t mean to bother you. I only wanted to check in and see if you had questions about anything.”

“Sergeant Proctor went over everything. Unless you think he’s missed something?”

“No,” Flynn said quickly. “I’m sure he didn’t.”

The guy removed his glasses and rubbed at the corner of his eye. “Sorry. I’m not usually so grumpy.”

“No apology necessary. You can be as grumpy as you want. And I’ll leave you in peace if you’d prefer. Or if there’s anything I can do to help, just say the word.”

“I’m not sure there’s anything you can do to help, but I appreciate the offer.”

Flynn extended his hand and introduced himself. “If there’s anything we can help with, just call the station. Even if it’s something small. We’re happy to help if we can.”

“Thank you.” James dragged his hands through his already mussed up hair.

“I thought the other boat owners would be around to help.”

A shadow of a smile passed over James’s face. “Keith was here, but he wasn’t much help. Then Joyce turned up. She kept blubbering and it was driving me mad. I snapped at the pair of them and told them to leave.”

Flynn smiled sadly.

“I know they mean well and were only trying to help. I shouldn’t have been so short

with them.”

“I’m sure they won’t hold it against you, given the circumstances.” Flynn leaned against the door frame. “I assume you know them pretty well.”

He nodded. “Since I was a teenager. My parents used to be very fond of their little group of friends.”

“Used to be?”

“Apparently if you want to stay friends with people, you shouldn’t buy a yacht with them.”

“I heard it caused some tension.”

“Just a bit,” James said sarcastically. “They all got on so well when their friendship was limited to a meal every couple of weeks, and a weekend away every now and then. It was as though they didn’t really get to know each other until they bought the boat.

” He gave a subtle shrug. “My mum also got ill soon after they bought it, so I guess that didn’t help the situation. ”

“I’m sorry,” Flynn said softly, then glanced around the room. Clothes lay strewn across the bed, and open drawers displayed assorted papers and personal items. “Do you really need to do this now?”

“No. I could wait and do it back at St Ives, but I want it out of the way. Plus, I don’t like the thought that someone else might go through it.”

Flynn tensed. “They shouldn’t, since it’s not their property.”

“I’m not sure that would stop certain people.” He sighed. “Plus, it’s their boat.”

“Not entirely. Your dad owned an equal share of it, didn’t he? I’m assuming that share will pass to you?”

“As soon as it’s through probate, I’m selling it to Russell.” The bitterness in his tone was chilling. “I don’t want anything to do with it.”

“Do you get on with Russell?”

“I don’t mind him. It’s just the situation I’m not a fan of. And Joyce at this moment.”

“She cries a lot,” Flynn said. “It’s a bit much.”

“It is,” James agreed, standing and surveying the room. “That’s not the only reason she annoys me.”

“No?”

He rolled his eyes. “It’s stupid. I used to think she was this lovely, sweet lady and then my mum said something that put me off her. It’s funny how an off-hand comment can stick with you.”

Flynn pursed his lips. “I hope you’re going to tell me what your mum said and not leave me wondering.”

He chuckled and some of the tension left his features.

“Mum generally never said anything bad about anyone, but after a couple of glasses of wine, her tongue would loosen. She told me she didn’t trust Joyce, which I thought was odd.

Joyce seemed like the most trustworthy of the bunch of them to me. ”

A wistful smile hit his lips as though he was recalling the conversation.

“Mum said Joyce always tells people what they want to hear, which makes her come across as a nice person, but it means you can’t trust a word she says.

Kerry is loud and crass, but you always know where you stand with her.

You never have to wonder what’s going on in her head because she has no qualms about speaking her mind, regardless of who she might annoy or upset. ”

“It’s a valid point,” Flynn said.

“It was only a quick comment, but it made me see Joyce differently.”

“That makes sense.”

James groaned as he looked around.

“Are you sure I can’t do anything?” Flynn asked.

“No. I just need to get my head down and get it done.” He smiled at Flynn. “Thanks for stopping by.”

Flynn offered his condolences again before leaving. He ducked his head along the corridor and straightened up once he reached the galley. There, he stopped and listened.

The screech of gulls hit his ears first, along with the indistinguishable chatter of the fishermen. Quieter, but still easy to hear, was the steady slap of water against the

boat. A boat engine hummed and footsteps sounded on the dock.

Even amid all that, Flynn was certain a large splash would stand out.

Never mind at night when the harbour was considerably quieter.

It bothered him as he left the boat. As did the fact that he couldn't wander over and tell Lily about his chat with James and the feeling that she was right that someone on the boat should surely have heard Joseph enter the water.

He was rounding the corner onto Hugh Street when he noticed Glynis Ward walking slowly towards him.

"Hello!" he said, happy at the distraction from his thoughts. "It's good to see you terrorising the streets again."

She beamed. "If only! I'm so slow, I feel like a little old lady. Which I know is exactly what I am, but I never felt it before."

"You look well, anyway. I'm sure you'll be back to a heartier pace soon enough."

"I will," she said determinedly, then tipped her head. "Now tell me honestly, how much trouble am I in with Lily?"

His eyebrows pulled together. "How do you mean?"

"All this business with Maria. I assume Lily's not happy with me for keeping it to myself?"

"Oh." His smile slipped. "She isn't happy with me either at the moment. I take it she approached Maria about the shop?"

“I assumed you’d already know.”

“I knew she suspected Maria owned the shop. That’s all.” It stung that she hadn’t mentioned it to him.

Glynis stared at him in confusion, then gave a small shake of her head. “She came over a couple of days ago to ask Maria about it. I was sleeping, but apparently things got a little heated and Lily was upset when she left.”

“So Maria does own the shop?”

Glynis nodded. “I encouraged her to tell Lily, but she wouldn’t hear of it, and it wasn’t my secret to tell.”

“Hmm.” Flynn sighed heavily. “Did Maria have any answers for Lily about her parents? Did she know them?”

“No. That’s what Lily was mostly upset about. It sounds as though she’d got it into her head that Maria was somehow connected to her parents.”

“I think she wanted that to be the case.” His heart sank at the thought that she’d been dealing with that revelation alone. No doubt that situation was another reason she’d thrown herself into the situation with Joseph’s friends.

“I’m on my way to speak to Lily.” Glynis touched his arm. “I called in yesterday, but she wasn’t there. Is everything okay between the two of you?”

He wasn’t sure how to respond. The easiest thing would be to say things were fine, but he didn’t have it in him to lie. “Things aren’t great,” he said eventually. “I’m sure we’ll work it out, though.”

“I’m sure you will.” She gave his arm a reassuring pat. “You take care.”

“You too,” he said as she ambled away.

Glancing along the road, he contemplated heading back to the station before deciding the sergeant wouldn’t mind if he took a little longer.

With a determined stride, he set off towards Glynis’s house. If he couldn’t get an account of the conversation from Lily, he’d get the information from Maria instead.

Chapter Twenty-Eight

Maria answered the door quickly once Flynn clanged the knocker.

“Oh, hello,” she said, then glanced nervously over her shoulder. “Glynis isn’t home at the moment.”

“I was actually hoping to speak to you for a few minutes, if you have time.”

“Yes, okay.” She opened the door wider and he stepped inside, then continued along the hall to the kitchen.

He’d been to the house a few weeks ago, collecting a basket of contaminated food which had been delivered to Maria. That might be a good way to break the ice, instead of jumping in with questions about the ice cream shop.

“Are you fully recovered now?” he asked, smiling warmly.

She nodded to the chairs but didn’t offer him a drink – the typical greeting when he visited people on the island. Sometimes, they wouldn’t even ask, just make him a brew and set it in front of him. Often with biscuits too.

“I feel fine now, thank you.” She sat and clasped her hands in her lap. “I thought you were finished with investigating that. Didn’t the guy confess in the end?”

“Yes. I’m not here to dig into it. We just like to check in and make sure people are fully recovered.”

“Glynis and I are both fine.”

“That’s great.” He waited for her to say more, but she didn’t seem to be the chatty type. She’d been aloof the last time he’d visited, too, though she’d also been quite ill. “I didn’t actually come here in any official capacity,” he said to fill the silence.

“Okay,” she said curtly.

“I heard you own the ice cream shop.”

She pulled her necklace from her neckline and toyed with the pendant. “I do,” she said, the words clipped.

“You didn’t want anyone to know,” he stated, wondering how he could get her to open up.

“That’s not a crime, is it?”

“No.” He smiled, hoping to ease the tension in the room. “Lily was looking for the owner when she came to the island. She thought maybe you were connected to her parents.”

Maria inhaled through her nose. “I don’t know how she got that in her head, but I told her I didn’t know her parents. I’m sorry if she was expecting something from me, but as I told her, I don’t know anything, so I’m afraid I can’t help her find whatever it is she’s looking for.”

Flynn nodded. He’d interviewed enough people to know when you could entice people to say more and when nothing would make them talk. People wouldn’t talk until they were ready to. Especially when they were lying.

And he was reasonably certain Maria was lying.

“Is your necklace sentimental?” he asked, changing tack.

She moved the pendant back and forth along the chain, but didn’t reply.

“There’s a newspaper article with a photo of you from when the shop opened, and you were wearing it then, too.”

She shifted in her seat. “I suppose it is sentimental.”

“Was it a gift?”

A smile touched her lips then. “A friend of mine gave it to me when I bought the ice cream shop. I felt as though I’d been drifting through life until then.

I told my friend I wanted to do something for myself instead of always doing what was expected of me.

Buying the ice cream shop was my way of putting down roots.

That’s what I said.” Her eyes softened. “My friend said if I was going to live on such a small island, I’d need an anchor, not roots. ”

Flynn smiled at the story. “Are you still in touch?”

He could almost see her guard snap back into place. She tucked the necklace into her blouse, out of sight.

“We drifted apart,” she said. “We don’t speak any more.”

“That’s a shame.”

She nodded once, then stood abruptly. “It was good of you to call in.”

“Give my best to Glynis,” he said at the door.

He walked back to the station with even more questions than he’d started with.

Chapter Twenty-Nine

Lily wasn't surprised to see Glynis walk into the shop in the middle of the afternoon.

What surprised her was the anger that bubbled up in her.

With all her investigating, she'd put her conversation with Maria out of her mind, but now it came back to her in a rush – along with the notion that Glynis had known all along that the owner of the shop was living under her roof.

"I came yesterday." The small smile did nothing to disguise the guilt in Glynis's eyes. "Jessica said you were out somewhere."

Lily nodded. "I had a few things to do."

"Jessica seemed to have everything under control. It's good that you have some help around here."

"She's great," Lily said with a forced smile.

Glynis dropped her voice to a whisper. "You're upset with me, aren't you?"

"Yes." There didn't seem to be any point in denying it.

"Can we talk for a minute?" Glynis asked, tipping her head towards a lone table at the side of the room.

With a resigned sigh, Lily led the way.

“You knew all along, didn’t you?” she asked, when they were seated opposite each other. “You knew Maria owned the shop and you kept it from me. Even when I asked you outright if you knew anything about the owner.”

“I’m sorry. I wanted to tell you, but it wasn’t my secret to tell.”

“Didn’t you feel bad spending so much time here? Or did you only come here to spy on me and report back to Maria?”

“Absolutely not. To start with, I was just intrigued to meet you, but then...” She reached over and placed her hand over Lily’s. “I’m very fond of you, and Flynn too.”

A lump formed in Lily’s throat at the sound of her name and Flynn’s so casually put together.

“And if I ever reported back to Maria it was because I was trying to convince her to introduce herself to you. I thought if I told her things about the shop, she might get curious enough to make herself known to you.”

“She doesn’t seem at all interested in the shop,” Lily said.

“No.” Glynis squeezed Lily’s hand and released it. “It’s a shame. I thought she’d come around eventually. I can’t figure out if she’s worried about it being stressful to be involved in running a business, or if she doesn’t want to be reminded of the past. She won’t speak about it much.”

Lily inhaled through her nose. “I thought she might have known my parents, but she says she doesn’t.”

“I’m sorry you were disappointed when you spoke to her,” Glynis said. “And I really hope you’ll forgive me for keeping quiet.”

“I’m sure I’ll get over it.” It was the best Lily could manage, and it was the truth. The reason she felt so betrayed was because she was so fond of Glynis. Which also meant she was unlikely to hold a grudge for long.

“I saw Flynn earlier,” Glynis said.

Curiosity sparked in Lily. “Did you?”

“Just walking up from the harbour. He seemed a little out of sorts. Especially when I mentioned you confronting Maria about the shop.”

“I hadn’t told him,” Lily said, chewing on her bottom lip.

“I gathered that. He implied that you and he had had a falling out of some sort.”

Lily scrunched her nose. “Did you say he was at the harbour?”

“Walking back from there, yes.”

“Was he working?”

“He was in uniform. Why?”

“I just wonder why he was at the harbour. Was it something to do with the man who died?”

“I’ve no idea.”

“Where was Flynn going when he left you?”

Glynis blinked slowly. “He didn’t say.”

“Back to the station?”

“He didn’t look as though he was going in that direction, but I really couldn’t say. Why don’t you call him and find out his whereabouts for yourself?”

“I can’t,” Lily uttered.

“Why not?”

“Because I’m angry with him.”

“Talk to him. I’m sure you can sort things out if you just chat everything through and are honest with each other about your feelings.”

“I was,” Lily practically growled. “I told him I wanted to go on a proper date.”

Glynis’s eyebrows shot up. “Oh.”

“Yeah. He stood me up and doesn’t want to rearrange. He only wants to be friends.” She jutted her chin out. “Do you have any handy advice for me now?”

“I don’t.” Her forehead tightened in a frown. “I’d probably continue being angry if I were you. In fact, I’m angry now too.”

Lily released a breath. “Do you want an ice cream?”

“I’m still being careful with what I eat. Nothing too rich.” She stood and wrapped

Lily in a hug. "I'm sorry again about Maria."

"It's okay," Lily said, her annoyance at Glynis dissipating quickly. "Are you feeling better?"

"I'm a little stronger every day."

"That's good to hear." Lily walked her to the door and stepped out into the sunshine with her.

She stayed there as Glynis ambled away, basking in the warm rays and fixing her attention to the beach where families played on the sand. A boy and his dad threw a frisbee between them and the simple joy on the boy's face was infectious.

"You're looking cheerful!"

The voice drew Lily's gaze to Seren, striding towards her.

"Just enjoying the sunshine." Her smile faltered. "I have a bone to pick with you."

Seren winced. "What have I done now?"

"Flynn was lurking outside my place when I got home from dinner last night."

Surprise flashed in Seren's eyes. "I told him to give you space. He promised he only wanted to know you were okay."

Lily glanced into the shop, eyes landing on Jessica chatting with a family at the counter. Then she tipped her head and wandered towards the beach with Seren.

"I should have known you were asking where I was for him. I'd been ignoring his

calls and messages.”

“And I should have known he would have ignored me and gone to track you down.”

“It’s okay.” Lily paused to remove her shoes and socks when Seren slipped her sandals off. “I’m not actually annoyed with you. We can both be annoyed at Flynn instead.”

Seren gave a non-committal grunt. “I’m struggling to be annoyed with him in this instance.”

Lily cast Seren a sidelong glance – an action that sent strands of hair whipping across her face as the wind caught it. “I thought you’d told him to give me space. I assume you hadn’t intended him to track me down when you told him where I was?”

“No, but it’s also hard to be angry with him about it.”

“Why?”

Seren slowed her steps. “He was really concerned about you last night. It totally freaked him out, not knowing where you were and if you were okay?”

“I’m an adult. There wasn’t any need for him to worry just because I ignored his calls for a day.”

A rumble of laughter erupted from Seren. “That may be true for most adults, but you going off radar is definitely cause for concern. I’m not sure if you’ve noticed, but you’re pretty good at getting yourself into dubious situations.”

“Yeah, okay, maybe. But it’s not like it’s dangerous or anything.”

“Not so far. But you can see why Flynn would worry.” Seren stopped and turned to Lily. “He was so worried.”

Lily glanced up and down the beach, focusing for a moment on the salty air. “I should probably have just messaged him and told him I was okay, but I was annoyed with him.”

“I think you have every right to be annoyed with him,” Seren said as they set off back the way they’d come.

“But after seeing him last night, I really don’t think he called off your date because he doesn’t have feelings for you.

I think the guy is genuinely terrified of getting his heart broken by you. ”

Lily shifted her shoes from one hand to the other. She’d said the same to Flynn – that he was a coward.

“I feel the same,” she said eventually. “And I think he made things easier for me when he cancelled our date.”

“How so?”

“It’s easier to be angry with him than to think about him leaving. I don’t want to think about that.”

“Because you’re terrified too?”

Lily nodded. “I feel sick whenever I think about it. So I just avoid thinking about it.”

“Maybe he’ll decide to extend his stay here,” Seren said eagerly. “I’d actually be

amazed if he doesn't. He probably just needs a bit of time to make that decision. I guess it's a big deal for him career-wise."

"Can we change the subject, please?" It really was making her feel queasy. "How come you're not at work?"

"Because once or twice a week I get a day off," she said mockingly. "Today is one of them."

"Got anything nice planned?"

"We're having dinner with Mirren later. That's about it." She dropped her sandals at the top of the beach and pushed her feet back into them. "How was your sailing trip yesterday, by the way?"

"Fine."

"You didn't find out anything interesting about the friends of the dead guy?"

"I found out some interesting stuff, but I'm not sure any of it is relevant to Joseph's death.

" She took a seat outside the shop and brushed the sand from her feet.

"There is something that I can't work out...

can you think of a reason it would be financially beneficial for the rest of them to sell Joseph's share in the boat? "

"I don't think so. Unless they were selling part of their share in it, too."

Lily shook her head. “I don’t think that’s the case. And from what I can gather, the guy who wants to buy the boat was trying to buy it for less than it’s worth. Could that benefit the others?”

“I can’t see how.”

“It’s probably nothing,” Lily said, putting her socks on.

“And they’re leaving tomorrow, so I guess I won’t find out anything else.

” She pushed her feet into her shoes. “There’s also a possibility I was only looking into it as a distraction from all this stuff with Flynn.

” An image of Joseph came into her head.

“No, it wasn’t only that,” she said, correcting herself.

“He was a nice guy, and I just wanted to be sure there was nothing more to his death.”

“And?” Seren said, taking a seat too. “You’re sure it was an accident?”

“I guess we can’t ever be sure,” she replied, while probing her insides for her gut reaction. “I wish I’d spoken to Joseph’s son. That was mostly why I went for dinner with them last night. I thought I might get to meet him.”

“Has he left again already?”

“No, but I also don’t want to thrust myself on him.”

“That’s not like you,” Seren said.

Lily rolled her eyes, but her voice was serious when she spoke. “I was actually desperate to speak to him, but if it turns out that Joseph’s death was just an accident, then suggesting otherwise with no evidence would be incredibly insensitive.”

“I was only teasing.” Seren gave Lily’s arm a squeeze. “Of course you don’t want to cause him any unnecessary upset.”

“I wish there was a way I could speak to him though.” She genuinely couldn’t think of a way to approach him which wouldn’t seem intrusive. A shadow fell over them, breaking her from her thoughts. She looked up at Sean. “You’re exceptionally good at sneaking up on people.”

“I can’t help it.” His smile was part smirk. “Next to two beauties like you, I’m practically invisible, I’m sure.”

“You need to update your chat up lines,” Seren said. “I swear you’ve been using the same ones since we were fourteen.”

“Do you know each other?” Lily asked.

Seren nodded. “We went to school together.”

“I’ve got something for you,” he told Lily, then drew his hand from behind his back to produce a bottle of wine.

“Thanks,” she said, a quizzical lilt to her voice.

“At three hundred quid for the bottle you may want to save it for a special occasion.”

“No!” Lily’s eyes widened. “Did you steal this?”

“You drank it last night, remember?”

“Except I didn’t.” She stared at him. “Why did you put such expensive wine on the bill?”

“It’s what he’d been ordering during his stay. He expected me to give you that.”

“What were you actually drinking?” Seren asked, peering at the bottle when he set it on the table.

“Non-alcoholic wine. I wanted to stay sober while Russell got drunk.”

“You’re sneaky,” Seren said. “I like it.”

“Thanks again for walking me home,” Lily said to Sean.

“No worries.” His eyes sparkled as his lips stretched into a smile. “You do owe me a drink, though, remember?”

She twisted her lips, then reached for the bottle on the table and held it out to him. “There you go.”

“No!” Seren hissed. “That’s a crazy expensive bottle of wine.”

“Save it for a special occasion,” Lily said to Sean.

“Not sure when I’ll have one of those.” His lips twitched at the corners. “Although, if someone as lovely as you would agree to go on a date with me, I’d call that a special occasion.”

“I’d call it a miracle,” Seren muttered.

Lily frowned, taken aback.

“Come on,” Sean coaxed. “We’d have fun.”

“You’re asking me on a date?”

“Yeah. I think we have chemistry.”

“Oh.” Lily didn’t dare catch Seren’s eye. “I’m flattered, but I’m not dating at the moment.”

“Seeing someone?”

Her stomach dropped. “No, but ... it’s complicated.”

“Got it.” He pointed a finger at her and held her gaze. “If it’s ever not complicated, just let me know.”

“I will.”

He set the wine back down. “You should keep that.”

“Thanks,” she said as he backed away.

“That was interesting,” Seren said once he was out of earshot.

“He’s not the friend you’ve been wanting to set me up with, is he?”

“No.” She grimaced. “Give me more credit than that.”

“Sean seems okay.”

“He’s a good guy at heart, I guess. But he’s kind of an acquired taste.” Seren lifted her face to the sun. “So what’s your next move with the yacht people? Will you track down the guy’s son?”

“And say what?”

“I don’t know. Just do your investigating thing...”

“I think I’ve hit a dead end with this one.” Lily stood and glanced inside. “Besides, Jessica is probably sick of me dashing off and leaving her alone.”

“That’s what you’re paying her for.” Seren stood too. “Don’t forget your wine.”

“Do you want it?”

“It’d be wasted on me.” She put it in Lily’s hand.

“Me too. I’m more likely to drown my sorrows with it than save it for a special occasion.”

“At least you’ll be drowning your sorrows in style.” Seren smiled and called goodbye as she wandered away.

Looking down at the bottle, Lily felt an overwhelming surge of self-pity. What with the situation with Flynn, and the disappointing conversation with Maria, things definitely hadn’t been going her way recently.

There was also her fruitless investigation.

She had no shortage of reasons to drown her sorrows.

Chapter Thirty

As hard as she tried, Lily couldn't put Joseph's son out of her mind.

It felt like the one piece of the puzzle she hadn't tried, and she knew it would niggle at her if she didn't take one last stab at figuring out if there was more to Joseph's death than an unfortunate accident.

James would be on the boat clearing out his dad's things and she could easily make an excuse to stop by.

Jessica had already said she enjoyed the extra responsibility, and didn't bat an eyelid when Lily asked her if she'd be okay alone again.

When she had a twinge of unease at leaving Jessica alone so much, she told herself she'd never worked a job where she'd preferred it when the boss was around.

Leaving Jessica to manage things was probably doing her a favour.

At the top of the harbour steps, she looked down at the boat tied up at the end of the floating jetty. She'd expected someone to be on deck. Surely, while James was clearing out his dad's things, the rest of the boat's occupants would be around for moral support.

Or maybe he'd wanted to be left alone.

A memory of clearing out her uncle's flat came back to her. When he'd died, Lily

hadn't told any of her friends, so there'd been no offers of moral support. Not that she'd have taken them up on it, anyway. It felt like a job she'd had to do on her own.

Her stomach tightened as she thought of the paperwork she'd uncovered while going through his things. It was a good thing she had been alone – she had no idea how she'd have explained it all.

Shaking the unhelpful thoughts away, she walked slowly along the jetty while rehearsing what she might say to James.

She wanted to tell him she'd met his dad and see where the conversation went.

In her head, James was as warm as Joseph had been, but maybe he'd have a less open personality, and striking up conversation wouldn't be so easy.

Especially given that he was grieving. Maybe he wouldn't be keen on chatting with a stranger.

“Hello!” Lily called when she reached the boat.

The lack of reply wasn't overly surprising. Nor did it deter Lily. She stepped aboard and headed down the few steps into the galley, where she shouted hello again.

All was silent as she ventured further into the boat.

Joseph's door was open and Lily frowned when she looked inside. Several cardboard boxes and a suitcase sat beside the vanity table. Every surface was bare and the bed stripped.

Lily must have missed James.

She cursed herself for not coming sooner.

Glancing further along the hall, she made a split-second decision.

The door to Kerry and Vic's cabin opened soundlessly when Lily pressed the handle.

A sequinned cream blouse hung on a cupboard door, and a few more items of clothing were strewn on the bed. The small vanity table was bursting with perfume bottles and various lotions.

Her heart rate increased as she craned her neck to check the coast was clear in the hallway.

All was silent.

She'd surely hear if anyone came back to the boat.

Opening the cupboard with the blouse hanging on it, she faced a solid wall of clothing. For a small space, Kerry really knew how to pack a lot in.

Closing the door quietly, Lily pulled the door of a slim cupboard.

Her eyes darted over the selection of hats – mostly men's – each on their own shelf.

At the bottom was a bundle of washing. Quickly, she moved to the drawers.

She didn't know what she was looking for, but closed each drawer again immediately when all she found was clothes.

A drawer below the vanity table held a couple of small, velvet-covered jewellery boxes.

Instinct had Lily opening them each in turn.

One held a gold necklace with a large sapphire. The other had matching earrings.

Sliding the small drawer closed, she scanned the room before lifting the pillows, then feeling stupid. What was she expecting to find under the pillows?

She was contemplating moving to have a look around the other cabins when she opened the drawer of the tiny bedside table. A pair of reading glasses were nestled between a packet of tissues and a pack of indigestion tablets. She lifted the pill packet, but only found a phone charger beneath it.

“What are you doing?” Kerry’s voice was loud and demanding. She stared at Lily from the doorway.

“Oh, my god!” Instinct had her whipping her hand behind her back, hiding the tablets as she forced her features to a smile. “You scared the life out of me.”

“One of the risks of sneaking around in places you’re not supposed to be, I imagine.”

“Oh.” Lily aimed for a light-hearted laugh, but it came out a little manic. “I wasn’t sneaking around. I called out, but there was no one here.”

“So you thought you’d just come in?”

“Sorry,” she said breathlessly. “I think I left my sunglasses behind yesterday. I didn’t think anyone would mind me having a quick look for them.”

“I don’t suppose anyone would mind. I’m not sure why you thought you might have left them in my husband’s bedside table, though.” Her gaze drifted to the open drawer.

Lily shook her head and opened her mouth to protest, but Kerry strode over and snatched the box of tablets from behind her back.

“What on earth are you up to?” Kerry asked, sounding more bored than annoyed.

“I can’t figure it out. Why would you want to spend your time with a bunch of old people?”

It makes no sense. And I don’t believe for a moment you’re in any way attracted to Russell.

You don’t seem the type to chase a man for his money. ”

“I’m not,” Lily blurted out.

“What are you doing, then? And what’s so interesting about Vic’s indigestion tablets?”

“Nothing.” Lily shook her head. “I saw a pair of glasses sticking out of the drawer and I thought maybe they’d been put in there by mistake.”

“They’re Vic’s glasses,” Kerry said.

“I know that now. I’m sorry, I shouldn’t be in here. I’ll just go.”

“That’s probably best,” Kerry agreed curtly. As she went to return the tablets to the drawer, the blister packs fell from the box.

With a wrinkled brow, Kerry bent to scoop them up.

Lily really should leave, but her eyes were fixed on the blister packs – clearly two

different tablets.

“That’s odd,” Kerry muttered, staring at the packets in her hand.

Before Lily could question her, Vic appeared in the doorway.

“What’s going on?” he asked, looking quizzically at Lily.

“I lost my sunglasses,” she mumbled, but her gaze flicked quickly back to Kerry.

“What’s this?” Her voice was high-pitched as she held up one of the blister packs to her husband.

He stepped into the room. “What’s what? ”

“Zopiclone,” she said, reading the packet.

Vic frowned. “Sleeping pills,” he said, taking them from her. “Where did you find these?”

“In with your indigestion tablets.”

“Weird.” After a moment, he smiled and shook his head.

“I bet I know what happened. When I was packing to leave, a bunch of stuff fell out of the bathroom cupboard. I picked things up in a rush. I’ll bet they got mixed up.

” Pushing them back into the box, he returned the packet to the drawer. “I see you found your sunglasses.”

It took Lily a moment to realise he was speaking to her. He thrust his chin towards

her head and she reached up to her sunglasses.

“Different pair,” she muttered. “I probably left them somewhere else.”

“If we find them we’ll drop them into the shop,” Vic said. “It’d be a good excuse to go for another ice cream, wouldn’t it, Kerry?”

She smiled tightly. “Yes.”

“Sorry to have bothered you.” Lily called goodbye over her shoulder as she strode from the cabin. In the hallway, she glanced longingly at the other doors before continuing on her way.

On the short walk back to the shop she couldn’t help but feel defeated. Not only had she failed to track down Joseph’s son, but her spontaneous reconnaissance mission had been futile too. Maybe she was losing her touch with this investigating thing.

At the door to the ice cream shop, she stopped and pulled her phone out. The urge to call Flynn was almost overwhelming.

Almost.

Until she remembered she’d told him she needed space.

Chapter Thirty-One

On autopilot, Lily worked alongside Jessica for the rest of the afternoon, then she sent her eager employee home early and tackled the cleaning up alone.

She'd flipped the sign on the door to closed and was looking forward to a couple of hours of ice cream making – which always felt therapeutic.

When the bell jangled just as she was heading into the back room, she cursed herself for not locking the front door.

"I'm already closed," she told the guy in jeans and a black polo shirt. "I haven't put the ice cream away yet so I suppose I can grab you something quickly."

"Thanks," he muttered, moving to the counter and peering at the glass display.

"What can I get you?" Lily asked, reaching for a cone and then the scoop.

"I'm not sure."

"People often say they're spoiled for choice," she said, willing him to hurry up and choose. "If you want to try a couple first, you're welcome to some samples." Anything to get him on his way so she could get on with cleaning up.

"Sorry," he said, seeming to come out of a trance and lifting his face to meet her gaze. "I don't actually want ice cream."

“Oh.” Her forced smile slipped. “What can I get you then? I’m afraid I’m out of coffee for the day.”

He shook his head. “Do you own this place?”

“Yes,” she replied hesitantly. “I don’t own the building, but I run the shop.”

“I think you spoke to my dad a few nights ago.” His eyes flashed with sorrow and he shifted his gaze.

Lily’s heart clenched and she looked him over more carefully. He was younger than she’d expected. Maybe thirty – possibly not even that.

“You’re James?” she asked.

“Yes.” Sorrow filled his eyes. “It was you who Dad spoke to?”

She nodded and put the cone and scoop down. “We had a really nice chat.”

“He called me afterwards and told me about it.”

Walking around the counter, Lily gestured to a table and they both took a seat.

“I’m so sorry for your loss. It must have come as such a shock.”

He nodded, and the deep bob of his Adam’s apple told her he was struggling to keep his emotions in check.

“He seemed like a really lovely man. He talked about you.”

James pressed his lips together. “What did he say?”

“That he wanted to be close to you and his grandson, not sailing the world. He was talking about how much he was looking forward to playing with your son and his train set.”

“We haven’t told Thomas yet. I don’t know how I’m going to break it to him.

He’s only five, and he dotes on his grandad.

” He paused and dragged in a breath. “Dad called me that night, right after he spoke to you. He was excited about spending more time with Thomas. He asked if he could pick him up from school a couple of times a week.”

He wiped tears away from his cheeks. “The previous few times we’d spoken he didn’t sound great.

He’s not been the same since my mum died, but there’s been all this stress about the boat.

” Pausing again, he caught Lily’s eye. “He mentioned that he’d talked to you about it.

He was slightly concerned that he’d overshared, but he said you were easy to talk to.
”

“I was happy to listen. It sounded stressful.”

“It was. But when he called me that evening he sounded different. He said he was going to sell his share of the boat to Russell for cheap. The money didn’t matter that much – it was the principle of it.

He didn’t like the idea of someone taking advantage.

But he said it was stupid to make himself miserable because of the principle of it.

It sounded like a relief to have made the decision.

He seemed positive for the first time in a long time. ”

James’s bottom lip quivered and Lily’s heart squeezed at his grief.

“It’s been a tough time for all of us since my mum died, but it felt like we were turning a corner.

And then the next morning Joyce called me...

” He trailed off and sucked in a lungful of air.

“I’m sorry. I don’t even know why I came here – it’s just that dad said such nice things about you.

And your ice cream. He raved about your ice cream. ”

“I’m glad you came. I just wish there was something I could do to help.”

“Unfortunately, there’s nothing anyone can do.” He sat a little straighter. “I spent the day organising his belongings on the boat. I’ll take what I want back with me. The rest is boxed up to be donated whenever they get back to the mainland. I’m flying back home tomorrow.”

“I’m so sorry,” Lily said again, feeling useless. “What will happen with his share of the boat?”

“I told the rest of them I don’t care about it. Once I’ve dealt with probate, Russell can

buy it from me. I honestly don't want anything to do with it." He ran a hand through his hair. "It's not entirely logical, but I can't help but think that if it weren't for that boat, Dad would still be here."

"That's understandable."

"The whole issue with Russell is weird," he said wistfully.

Lily squinted. "Him wanting to buy the boat?"

"No, that doesn't surprise me. I think he was always a little put out that he hadn't been asked to go in on it from the start.

At least from what my mum said." He shook his head dismissively.

"Anyway, Russell was being pretty aggressive with dad about how much he'd pay for the boat.

He claimed the boat needed work and the price should reflect that. "

Lily didn't know Russell well, but she couldn't imagine him haggling – not if the price was fair.

"He spent three hundred quid on a bottle of wine as though it was nothing," she blurted out, then caught James looking at her intently.

"I've spent a bit of time with them over the last few days.

Russell doesn't seem like someone to quibble over money.

He doesn't seem to have any shortage of it either. "

“You’re right,” James said, eyes brightening. “I don’t understand it. This morning he took me aside and told me he’d pay what dad initially wanted for his share of the boat.”

“I guess he feels guilty now and wants to make amends.”

“Maybe,” James said.

Lily’s mind went to Russell talking about his feelings for Lisa. Maybe this was his way of looking out for her son as a tribute to her memory.

Another thought hit Lily. “Do you know if there would be any advantage for the other owners when your dad’s share is sold?” she asked hesitantly.

“No.” His features scrunched in confusion. “Not that I can think of. Why?”

“I don’t know. I overheard something I didn’t understand.”

“What?”

She frowned, thinking back on it. “Keith said something about it being financially good for them if Russell bought the boat.”

“Strange,” James murmured, then smiled sadly. “It only makes me more keen to sell the boat and be done with it. Whatever they’re up to, I don’t want anything to do with it.” Standing, he extended his hand. “Thank you for chatting with me. Dad was right that you’re easy to talk to.”

“It was nice to meet you. I’m only sorry for the circumstances.”

Following him outside, she got to work bringing in the tables and chairs. Then she set

about making new batches of ice cream. The task wasn't as calming as usual since her mind was firmly fixed on Joseph and the other owners of the boat.

She was missing something – she was sure of it.

And she knew she couldn't let them leave tomorrow without figuring out what.

Chapter Thirty-Two

After a fitful night, Lily cursed herself for sleeping longer than she intended.

The hotel check-out was ten o'clock, so she hoped she still had plenty of time before the group was at the boat.

After pulling on a pair of denim shorts and a T-shirt, she left her flat and the shop, intent on finishing the search of the boat that she'd started yesterday.

Maybe it was because she was still half asleep, but the sun dazzled her as she rushed along the promenade. At the top of the harbour steps, it felt especially blinding as the bright rays reflected off the tips of waves like a million blinking lights.

Swiftly but carefully, she made her way down the steps to the jetty. Her eyes scanned the boat as she approached it, but there were no signs of life. Nor was there anyone in the immediate vicinity.

Being caught snooping for the second time in two days would be hard to explain away. She couldn't worry about that though. Time was ticking and this was her last chance to uncover anything untoward.

Slipping below deck, she moved stealthily along the corridor to Keith and Joyce's room.

With a sense of urgency, she began blindly searching through every drawer and cupboard.

Like Kerry's room, it was mostly clothes, toiletries and assorted trinkets.

Trying not to cause too much of a disturbance, she moved quickly and methodically.

Finally, she found a binder of paperwork at the bottom of the wardrobe and felt a brief stab of hope. It was quickly dashed as she skimmed through the documents – passports, and copies of birth certificates, bank records and vaccine certificates.

Nothing of interest to Lily.

There must be something. That became her mantra as she moved to search Russell's room. If there was anything sinister going on she needed to find evidence.

And quickly.

Waking early, Flynn felt unsettled from the moment he opened his eyes.

He wasn't entirely sure why he ended up at the harbour when he set off for a walk before work.

Probably because he couldn't visit Lily.

Apart from anything else, he was dying to know if she'd found out anything more about the boat owners.

They'd be leaving today.

Apparently not anytime soon since there didn't seem to be any sign of them on the boat. He contemplated stepping aboard to check if any of them were down below, but he hesitated.

There was no reason for him to be there, and he couldn't even think of an excuse for his visit.

Maybe once they'd left and that whole situation was out of the way, Lily would be ready to speak to him again.

Not being around her felt like a constant ache, and he couldn't help but wonder whether he was making a mistake by insisting they should only be friends.

For once in his life, he wasn't being impulsive, and he wasn't thinking only of himself.

Why did it still feel as though he was getting everything wrong?

A noise from the boat snapped him from his thoughts and he whipped his head towards the sound – a muffled bump. There was someone on board after all. Not that it mattered. He needed to get back home and change for his shift.

After a couple of steps, his attention was drawn to the group of people descending the harbour steps.

The three men carried a collection of small suitcases while Kerry and Joyce walked ahead with only handbags.

Apparently the noise on the boat hadn't come from a person.

Something had probably shifted with the swell of the waves.

“Hello,” Joyce said as they approached him. “Is everything okay?”

“Yes.” He smiled warmly. “You’re gearing up to leave, are you?”

Kerry nodded. "At least the weather is on our side, even if not a lot else has gone right for our trip."

"Heading straight back to St Ives?"

"Yes," Joyce said, glancing at her husband, who arrived at her side. "It'll be good to get home."

"I'm sure. How long's the trip?"

"We'll be home by dinnertime," Vic said. "If we get going soon, anyway. Was there anything else you needed from us?"

"No. I was just out for a walk." He glanced around, hoping no one would point out that the jetty was an odd place for a stroll.

"We'll say goodbye then," Vic said, stepping around him with a suitcase in each hand.

"If there's nothing else?" Joyce asked, her upper lip twitching as she smiled. "I mean, everything with Joseph is... umm... you don't need anything from us? We can just go?"

"Of course," Flynn said. "We have your details if anything else comes up."

"Yes," Joyce said. "And I just wanted to say thank you for everything. It's been a difficult trip. I still can't believe what happened. You don't think about such terrible accidents happening to people you know, do you? But everyone has been so nice. We really appreciate everything you've done."

"You're welcome," Flynn said while Kerry took Joyce by the elbow and ushered her

onto the boat. After wishing them a safe trip, he wandered back along the jetty.

He ignored the urge to look back until he was halfway up the harbour steps. Then he stared at the boat.

Leaving with one person less than they arrived with must be hard to deal with.

That was probably the reason for the weird vibes Flynn had got from them.

Even if there was more to it, they were about to leave.

Lily clearly hadn't found anything of any substance, or she'd have been in touch – with the sergeant if not with him.

There was nothing more to do other than get on with his shift and hope they hadn't overlooked anything suspicious about Joseph Whittaker's death.

Lily had felt pretty stealthy until she'd snagged a cable opening a drawer in Russell's room and knocked a small lamp to the floor.

Thankfully, it hadn't broken. Setting it back in its place on the vanity table, her eyes landed on a scrunched-up receipt.

Carefully, she unfurled it and her eyes widened at the price he'd paid for a couple of items of jewellery.

Presumably, a gift for Kerry. Possibly what she'd found in her room.

The thought of the two of them sneaking around behind her husband's back gave Lily a feeling of deep despair over how deceitful people could be.

With her eyes on the receipt, she considered again how odd it was for Russell to bargain so hard over the price of Joseph's share of the boat. It didn't make sense, especially after what James had said about him paying the full amount.

Folding the scrap of paper again, Lily replaced it and contemplated her next move. As well as being fruitless, her search felt desperate and risky.

The group could arrive at the boat at any moment. She should really leave and avoid awkward questions.

She'd tried her best. At least she could say that much.

Stepping into the corridor, she walked automatically to Kerry and Vic's room.

After opening the door, she paused. She'd already searched it so she felt as though she was clutching at straws.

As she debated whether it was time to give up, her eyes landed on the door at the corner of their room. The en suite, presumably.

Swiftly, she crossed the room. The bathroom was compact with a toilet and sink and a cubicle shower. A quick search of the cupboard under the sink didn't reveal anything and there was nowhere else to look unless she wanted to root through their washing.

Briefly, Lily stared at the washing basket.

Then she was back in the bedroom, opening the slim cupboard with the hats. Her eyes went to the bundle of washing at the bottom. Except it wasn't really a bundle.

Lily pulled the white shirt out and gave it a quick shake out. Why was one shirt

scrunched at the bottom of the cupboard?

It took a few second for her to notice the stains. Just a few spots along the chest.

Squinting, Lily took a closer look.

Maybe it was nothing.

But if it was nothing why wasn't it in the wash basket with the rest of the laundry?

A chill went all the way down Lily's spine. She needed to get off the boat and hand the shirt over to the police. They could check to see if the stains were as dubious as she suspected.

Out in the hallway, voices from the dock had her freezing in place. Despite not being able to hear anything clearly, she would swear one of the voices was Flynn's.

She couldn't tell if her increased heart rate was caused by his proximity, or the thought that she was about to be caught trespassing.

It would probably be a good time to pop out and make her presence known.

She could say she'd just ducked inside to look for them and she'd have Flynn around for support if any of them took issue with it.

On the steps up to the galley, she instinctively flattened herself against the wall when someone entered from the other side. Her slightly lower position kept her out of sight.

Except she shouldn't be out of sight. She was supposed to give up with the sneaking around and get herself off the boat before she made herself even more suspicious. The stairs didn't make a sound when she ascended a step. Her eyes dropped to the

shirt in her hands.

How would she explain that?

Briefly, it crossed her mind to put it on. She could knot it at the waist and they may not think anything of it. On second thoughts, she hastily tied it around her waist while trying not to dwell on the fact that it may well have Joseph's blood on it.

She was all set to reveal herself when Joyce's voice reached her loud and clear from the galley.

"My heart can't take this! I just lied to a police officer."

Instinct had Lily backtracking into the hallway without making a sound. What had she just heard?

"I can't believe it," Joyce went on in her shrill, manic tone. "I lied to his face. What's happened to me?"

"Don't be so dramatic," Kerry said. "Let's just get out of here and put this miserable time behind us."

"But I lied," Joyce said, an air of disbelief in her tone. "Do you think he knew I was lying?"

"Let's put it this way," Vic said. "I don't think you should get any ideas about a career in acting."

"Kerry's right," Keith said. "We should get out of here. We'll all feel better when we're away from this place."

“I’ll put my luggage away,” Russell said. “Then we’ll set off.”

Panicking, Lily began walking backwards. If they were about to set sail, she really needed to get off the boat, but she couldn’t bring herself to give up on her investigations when she felt so close to a breakthrough.

“Why don’t you put your things in Joseph’s cabin?” Kerry said, just as Lily slipped into the nearest cabin – Joseph’s.

Leaving the door slightly ajar, Lily glanced around the bare room while her brain tried to come up with a plan to get her out of this situation.

When nothing came to mind, it seemed her only option was to face them. She could still claim she’d been looking for them, even if it was entirely unbelievable. It didn’t really matter what they thought as long as she got herself off the boat.

Surely they wouldn’t call the police on her. Especially not with Joyce so distraught about just having lied to the police.

What had she lied about? Lily needed more time to figure it out.

She was out of time, though, and psyching herself up to reveal herself when Joyce’s distressed voice reached her ears.

“Please don’t,” she said desperately, while a bustle of footsteps increased in volume. “Not so soon. It feels all wrong to take his room.”

They were heading right for Lily. Her heart felt as though it might burst from her chest.

“But it’s the biggest room,” Kerry grumbled. “Russell is our skipper now. You don’t

seriously expect him to stay in that tiny box of a cabin when the captain's room is free."

"It seems disrespectful," Joyce said.

"Maybe you could just hold off for a few days," Keith put in. "When things aren't so raw."

"It's also not fair for Russell to get the biggest room." Joyce's voice was quieter now. "There's only one of him."

"You already have a double cabin," Kerry retorted, the shape of her visible through the crack in the door.

"A very small double cabin!"

"Please don't start this again," Kerry said. "You've been gunning for that room since Lisa died. You're very selfish sometimes. Also, why do you want all the hassle of moving rooms? Keith likes your room as it is, don't you, Keith?"

"It's fine," Keith mumbled. "Joyce would really like the bigger room, though."

"She's made that very clear," Kerry said. "But it's disrespectful to Russell. You realise we wouldn't be able to keep the boat if it weren't for him?"

"I actually don't care," Russell said dully. "If Joyce and Keith take the bigger room, I can have theirs."

"Nonsense." Kerry's tone was firm. "You're the captain, you get the bigger cabin, that's all there is to it. Wouldn't that be better for you anyway, Joyce? You can kick Keith out into the single room when he's snoring."

“The snoring isn’t so bad,” Joyce said.

“Anyway,” Kerry went on, talking over her. “Let’s put the luggage away and set sail. All hands on deck in ten minutes. How about that?”

As the door began to open, Lily panicked and took a step back into the empty wardrobe. If they were sailing in ten minutes, that gave her ten more minutes before she needed to be off the boat. She’d figure out how to go about that when the time came.

Thankfully, the sliding door of the wardrobe didn’t creak when she pulled it to conceal herself.

Chapter Thirty-Three

Through the wardrobe door, Russell's voice hit Lily's ears, soft but distinct.

"You could have let Joyce have the room."

Cautiously, Lily shifted her weight and squinted through the tiny slit at the edge of the door.

Kerry draped her arms around Russell's neck. "You deserve the bigger room. It would be nice if you'd just say thank you."

"Thanks," he said begrudgingly.

"You can thank me properly the next time we reach port. We'll slip away from Vic for a little shopping spree. I always think a proper thank you involves diamonds."

He sighed. "More jewellery to add to your collection of items you can't wear – and have to keep hidden from your husband."

"I still love it. And I love thinking about the day I'll be able to wear it without having to worry about Vic asking questions." She sagged against him. "I do appreciate your generosity. It makes me feel loved."

He took a subtle step away from her. "I spoke to James this morning."

"Oh? What about?"

“About me buying his share of the boat. I told him I’d pay him the full amount that his dad wanted.”

“Why?” Kerry pulled back from him. “You insisted the price you offered Joseph was fair.”

“It was...”

Kerry’s eyes flashed with anger. “Don’t tell me this is about Lisa?”

“Why would it be anything to do with Lisa? She’s dead.”

“I thought you’d put that photo on your phone to annoy me, but you still have a stupid crush on her, don’t you?”

Russell exhaled loudly but didn’t say anything.

“That’s why you told James you’d give him more money for the boat. Because of your feelings for his mum. I can’t see why else since he’d already agreed to sell for less. He just wanted a quick sale.”

“I felt bad for him, that’s all.” He walked across the room and out of Lily’s field of vision. “And maybe I felt a little guilty about the way I left things with Joseph.”

“You always said he wanted too much for his share.”

“Even so, it left a bad taste in my mouth.”

“So you’re not still pining for Lisa?”

The silence went a beat too long, and even without being able to see him, Lily was

sure he was thinking carefully about his reply.

“Let’s stop dwelling on the past, shall we? Time to look to the future.”

The sound of the door opening was followed by Vic’s voice.

“Trying to steal my wife,” he said, making Lily cringe at his jokey tone.

If only he knew.

“Just thanking her for bullying Joyce into letting me have the bigger cabin,” Russell said, tension clear in his tone.

“Oh, yes.” Vic chuckled. “If there’s one thing Kerry’s good at it’s brow beating poor Joyce.”

“Thanks,” Kerry said sarcastically. “Glad to know you think so highly of me.”

“I’m going to check the weather reports one more time before we leave,” Russell said, before the door to the cabin clicked.

Through the crack, Lily watched Vic take a seat on the bed.

“What are you grinning about?” Kerry snapped. “Sometimes I’d swear you enjoy swindling him.”

Vic barked out a laugh. “I’m swindling him? He’s the one sleeping with my wife.”

Shock almost had Lily blowing her cover. She pressed her hand over her mouth to ensure no sound escaped. Vic already knew that Kerry was cheating on him. And apparently he wasn’t overly concerned by it.

“He’s actually a sweet man,” Kerry said defensively. “Don’t you feel bad at all?”

“Do I feel bad about fleecing the guy who’s sleeping with my wife? No, I can’t say I lose a lot of sleep over that.”

Through the silence, Lily could almost feel the tension in the room.

“Listen,” Vic said calmly. “Just get a couple more pieces of jewellery from him, then let him down gently. Tell him you feel too guilty or something. You’ll need to be careful because we don’t want to lose him as captain. Not now we’ll finally be able to do all the travelling we planned.”

“What if I don’t want to break things off?” Kerry said quietly.

Lily turned her ear to the door at the unbearable silence.

“You’re serious?” Vic asked, then paused before speaking again in an oddly calm tone. “So that’s why you were so keen for him to get the bigger cabin.”

“Well, we haven’t been intimate for years. It’s...” She stumbled over her words before giving up on the sentence.

“For god’s sake,” Vic spat. “Do what you want as long as you’re discreet. And make sure he never finds out I know.”

“I’d hardly let that slip. I wouldn’t look very good in that conversation either, would I?”

“Come on.” Vic stood and strode towards the door. “We need to go up on deck. Russell’s keen to get going.”

“Hang on,” Kerry said when he was beside her. “There’s something I need to ask you...”

“Get on with it then,” he said impatiently.

Kerry cast her eyes to the floor. “Why do you have sleeping pills with you?”

“What?”

“The sleeping pills in your bedside table.”

“Oh, those. I told you I must have picked up the wrong ones.”

“But why do you have sleeping pills at all?”

“They’re old ones. From my knee surgery. Do you remember I didn’t end up needing them?”

“Yes, but...” Her voice was suddenly brittle, all trace of confidence gone. “You also told the police you’d taken a sleeping pill the night Joseph died...”

“Yes, that was just because I knew you’d been telling Russell I take them when you sneak off with him. I thought it best to cover our tracks in case he mentioned it.”

“Right. But you didn’t take any?”

“No. I didn’t even know I had them with me.” He took a step towards the door, but Kerry stopped him with a hand on his arm.

“Why are there three missing from the pack?”

His reply was a quizzical grunt.

“There are three missing from the packet but you said you never took any.”

“Not now,” he said. “After the surgery I took some...”

“But you just said you hadn’t needed them.”

“I just didn’t need them for very long,” he said, his voice chillingly calm. “Let’s get up on deck and wave goodbye to this place, shall we?”

Certain he was lying, Lily waited with her heart lodged somewhere near her wind pipe. After a moment the room fell silent. The intense thudding of her heart filled her ears. Somehow, she needed to get off the boat unnoticed. Then she’d get to the police station and report what she’d found.

The police could take things from there.

Her mind drifted to Joseph and James but she pushed away the wave of sadness at his needless death. She’d have time to deal with that later.

For now, she needed to figure out how to get herself off the boat and away from the man who she was certain was a murderer.

Chapter Thirty-Four

With one foot out of the wardrobe, the boat pitched, causing Lily to stumble. They were moving already.

Creeping out from her hiding place, she leaned across the bed and moved the flimsy curtain aside to look out of the tiny window.

They were definitely moving – manoeuvring through the other boats in the harbour. If Lily was going to leave stealthily now, her escape would include a swim. That was assuming no one would be keen to turn around and take her back to the jetty.

She grimaced, wondering how Vic would react to finding her hiding on the boat. What if he figured out she was on to him?

At the sound of voices in the hallway, Lily's heart rate went wild and she retreated hastily to the wardrobe, closing the sliding door quietly behind her.

"I'm so angry with you," Joyce was saying when she walked into the cabin. "This room is so much bigger than ours. It's completely unfair that Russell gets it. Why didn't you say anything before?"

"Because Kerry might be forceful in her opinions, but what she said made sense: Russell is the captain. And it would be a hassle to move our things."

"It would be worth it. There's so much storage space in here. The wardrobe is twice the size of ours for a start."

Lily's breath hitched in the darkness. If they decided to check out the wardrobe, there was nowhere for her to hide. She slid down the wall and sat hugging her knees, as though making herself small might also make her invisible.

"The drawers under the bed are bigger too," Joyce said.

"Is storage really the issue?" Keith asked.

"No," Joyce huffed. "I don't like Kerry getting her own way all the time.

She gives out orders and everyone goes along with them.

"She fell quiet and Lily peered through the crack to see her standing directly in front of Keith.

"And I'm also feeling terrible about lying to that police officer. Everything feels a bit much."

Keith's voice turned quieter and Lily strained to hear. "It's not as though it was a terrible lie, and it doesn't matter. It's no one's business where we're sailing to. For all they know, we might have just changed our minds at the last moment."

"There wasn't even any reason to lie, was there?" Joyce said. "I could have just explained we were continuing on with the trip we'd originally planned, but it felt so disrespectful to say we're heading off on holiday when our friend has just died."

Lily rested her forehead on her knees. Presumably, if she didn't find a way off the boat soon, she'd end up in France or Spain with no ID and no money. That would be an interesting situation.

"Sweetheart," Keith said, taking Joyce's hand. "Everything is going to be fine. A

couple of weeks in the Mediterranean will do you the world of good. Maybe we'll head to the Greek Islands too. Haven't you always wanted to sail around the Greek Islands?"

"Yes," she said, sniffing loudly. "But what about Joseph's funeral? We can't miss it."

"When we have the details, we'll book a flight back for it. You need to stop feeling guilty – I'm sure Joseph and Lisa would want us to continue with our travel plans."

"I suppose you're right." She paused. "It was so much easier to deal with Kerry when they were around."

"Do you know what we could do?" Keith said excitedly. "We should switch rooms. We can start moving our things while the rest of them are busy on deck. If we already have most of our stuff in here, there won't be so much of a battle about it."

"Do you think so?" Joyce said. "Won't it cause a lot of bother?"

"You keep saying we need to stand up to Kerry. And Russell didn't even seem bothered about the room, so I can't imagine he'll mind."

"Go on then." There was a girlish giggle to Joyce's words. "Let's start moving things now."

Lily pressed her fingers against her temples.

How on earth did she get herself into these situations?

And more to the point, how was she going to get out of it? The idea of strolling out with some vague excuse now felt like a terrible idea.

She also might only have moments before Joyce and Keith returned.

Frantically, she pulled out her phone, happy to see she still had a signal. With shaky fingers she tapped on the screen, then put the phone to her ear and held her breath while she waited for the call to be answered.

Chapter Thirty-Five

The phone was ringing in the station when Flynn arrived at the start of his shift. PC Hill paused with his hand hovering over it.

“Morning,” he said to Flynn. “You okay? You look annoyed.”

“I’m fine.” He pointed to the door at the back. “Is the sergeant in his office?”

“Yes.”

Flynn nodded and continued back there, leaving Jeff to answer the phone. Outside the sergeant’s office, he glanced at his mobile.

The radio silence from Lily was something he should get used to, he supposed.

“What’s going on?” the sergeant asked, when Flynn entered without knocking.

“Something doesn’t feel right,” he said, sinking onto the chair. “I can’t put my finger on it, but I have a feeling that we missed something...”

“Regarding Mr Whittaker?”

“Yeah.” Flynn straightened his spine and stretched his neck. “What if Lily was right and there was more to it?”

“There was no evidence of foul play. Sometimes all we can do is follow up on leads

and hope that we find the truth. If we don't have leads to follow, there's not a lot we can do."

Flynn rubbed his neck, unsure whether his emotional turmoil was really to do with the case, or with the situation with Lily. "I got weird vibes from them this morning," he said. "Mr Whittaker's friends."

"You've seen them this morning?"

He nodded curtly. "At the harbour. They were loading up, getting ready to leave."

"Why were you down there?"

"Just out for a walk."

"And you ended up at their boat?"

"Yes. And that quiet woman, Joyce, was acting incredibly cagey."

"Possibly because there was a police officer hanging around for no reason. It does have the effect of putting people on edge sometimes."

"It was more than that. I'm sure of it."

The sergeant tilted his head, but was distracted from saying anything by his phone ringing. His brow wrinkled as he peered at the screen. "Colin," he stated with a pointed look at Flynn. "The forensic pathologist."

Flynn leaned forward, resting his forearms on his knees while the sergeant answered the call. Given the sharp rise of his boss's eyebrows, he gathered something had come up on the post-mortem.

“What is it?” he asked, the moment the call ended.

“He doesn’t have his full report yet, but he wanted to give me a heads up that he’ll be recommending further investigation.”

“Why?” Flynn asked eagerly.

“The angle of the skull fracture isn’t consistent with a fall.” He lifted an eyebrow. “Also there are particles embedded in his skull which don’t match the stonework on the harbour steps.”

“What kind of particles?”

“Like a brick,” the sergeant said with a frown.

“Someone killed him,” Flynn whispered.

“It’s looking likely. We need to get his friends in for more questioning.”

Flynn blew out a breath, then snapped his head to the door as PC Hill walked in.

“I just had a weird phone call,” his colleague said, looking at Flynn and then the sergeant.

“A woman said she was walking home from the pub on Sunday evening and heard raised voices at the harbour. She thought it was probably teenagers messing around... but since she heard about Mr Whittaker, it’s been playing on her mind.

She wasn’t even sure it was worth mentioning since she didn’t see anything...

just heard arguing. Pretty loud, apparently. ”

The sergeant met Flynn's gaze as the room fell silent.

Flynn swore quietly.

"Did she say what time?" the sergeant asked.

"Around ten. Maybe shortly after."

Flynn growled. "That's not long after the Coopers and the Hugheses claimed they went back to the boat.

And they said they sat and had a drink in the galley before they headed to bed.

Even if they did go to bed soon after they arrived back, what are the chances that none of them heard arguing at the harbour? "

"Something's not right," PC Hill said.

"The post-mortem also raised questions," Sergeant Proctor told him. "We definitely need to bring Mr Whittaker's friends back in for more questions."

Flynn tilted his head back. "If you can find them."

"How do you mean?" the sarge asked.

"When I saw them half an hour ago, they were gearing up to sail. If they do have something to hide, I can't imagine they hung around long. I'd say they're on their way by now."

"I can try and find out," the sergeant said, plucking his phone from his desk.

Flynn's phone rang at the same time, and his eyebrows rose when he saw it was Lily. She had great timing – he'd give her that.

"I'm just going to take this quickly," he said, but the sergeant was busy with his phone and didn't acknowledge him.

Slipping past PC Hill, he answered the phone in the hallway.

"Thank god!" Lily hissed quietly. "I thought you weren't going to answer."

"I'm in the middle of something at work. It's about—"

"Shh! Just listen to me, because I don't know how long I've got..."

He started to ask her what on earth she was talking about, but she didn't stop talking.

"I think Vic killed Joseph," she said in a rush.

"I found a shirt and it has stains on it. I think it's blood splatter.

And there's something not right about his sleeping pills.

I don't have time to explain everything now, but I need you to trust me.

I'm on their boat and they're sailing to the Mediterranean like they originally planned..."

Now when she paused, Flynn couldn't even find words.

"You're where?" he muttered.

“It’s the stupidest thing, but I sneaked onto their boat looking for clues, and they came back.

I hid in the wardrobe and now I’m stuck here and I’m certain Vic is a murderer so I’d really rather he didn’t catch me and I’m sorry for avoiding you but it doesn’t matter what happened between us, I need you to find me.

I sent you my locat—” Her voice cut out and Flynn looked down at his phone to find the call had been lost.

Instinct had him calling her back, but it wouldn’t connect.

He swore again as he strode back into the sergeant’s office.

“I spoke to the harbourmaster,” Sergeant Proctor said, ending his own phone call. “The boat already left. Five minutes ago, apparently. And we don’t know which way they were heading.”

“Lily has them,” Flynn said in a panic.

“What?” PC Hill said incredulously.

“Or they have Lily,” he said as a jolt of fear shot up his spine. “She’s on their boat and she thinks Vic killed Joseph.”

“Bloody hell.” The sergeant rose quickly from his chair. “Where’s the boat?”

“I have her last known location, but she just lost her phone signal.” With his finger scrolling through his contact list, he moved towards the door. “We need a boat,” he said, glancing up at his colleagues.

“Who are you calling?” the sergeant asked.

“Kit Treneary. Can you call the coastguard? And anyone else you know with a boat.”

Chapter Thirty-Six

“No, no, no!” Frantically, Lily whacked the side of her phone, as though that might make the signal magically come back.

Since she hadn’t left room for Flynn to get much of a word in, she wasn’t even sure when she’d been disconnected.

Had he understood her predicament? The police on Scilly didn’t even have a boat, which seemed more ridiculous now than it ever had.

How could you police an archipelago without a boat, for goodness’ sake?

How was he going to reach her without a boat? Her breathing was uneven and panic elevated her heart rate.

Flynn would come, she told herself. Of course he would. She just needed to sit tight until he turned up.

Noises in the room had her peering through the crack again.

Keith deposited a bunch of clothes onto the bed.

“Not there!” Joyce hissed. “We can hang them straight in the wardrobe.”

Lily pulled her chin to her chest, swearing to herself wildly.

In an awkward shuffle, she scrabbled to the far side of the wardrobe, curling herself as small as possible.

“We’ll bring the chair from our room as well,” Joyce said as the wardrobe door slid open and light flooded in.

“It’s handy to have a chair even if it takes up space...”

Lily glanced up, holding her breath while she waited to be discovered.

“Bring the bedding over as well.” Joyce craned her neck to look behind her while she deposited the clothes onto the rack and slid them in Lily’s direction. “We should make up the bed first.”

As Joyce moved away from the wardrobe, Lily let out a quiet, controlled breath. When the coast was clear, she pulled the clothes closer to hide herself, and pushed the door so it wasn’t so wide open.

While Joyce and Keith came and went from the room, Lily focussed on her breathing while checking her phone often, hoping the signal might return.

Fifteen minutes passed with Lily constantly panicking that she was about to be discovered. After that, Joyce and Keith must have decided they’d done enough moving. With no sounds from them, she suspected they’d gone up on deck.

Even if Flynn had received her location, he’d have lost it as soon as her phone cut out.

And if he was coming after them, shouldn’t he have been there by now? They hadn’t long left the harbour when she’d called him.

Turning her head, she rested her cheek on her knees and sighed heavily. How long until they docked somewhere? Could she manage to stay hidden until they reached land? And what would she do then, with no money, no identification, nothing.

A distant shout had her head snapping up and her ears pricked. She was fairly certain they were arguing up on deck, though she couldn't make out anything clearly.

The noise continued for a few minutes.

There was a bump, as though the boat hit something. Please let it be another boat knocking into them.

Shouting continued, as did Lily's fruitless attempt to hear what was going on.

"Lily!"

The familiar voice had her shoulders sagging in relief. A moment later the wardrobe door slid open and the clothes above her shifted.

Flynn crouched down and beamed at her. "Sorry to cut your Mediterranean trip short."

She didn't get up, but pushed her palm against her forehead. "I was starting to think you weren't coming."

"Of course I was coming,"

"I think Vic killed Joseph," she said. "You can do forensic testing on his shirt, right? See if it really is blood and if it's Joseph's blood?"

"Yes. It looks as though the post-mortem report will confirm that his death wasn't an

accident too.”

“Really?”

“Yes. The angle of the skull fracture isn’t consistent with a fall. We also have a witness saying she heard arguing at the harbour on the evening of Joseph’s death. If nothing else, it’s highly suspicious that no one on the boat reported hearing anything.”

“Because Vic drugged them all with sleeping pills.”

“Seriously?”

“I think so.” She smiled sadly. “How did you get here?”

“I commandeered a couple of boats.” His eyes sparkled with amusement.

“What’s so funny?” she asked.

“I’ve never been in a boat chase before.” He bit down on his lower lip. “It’s so much fun! Also, you’re a stowaway. This is a great day!”

“I’m glad you’re enjoying it.” She extended her hand and he pulled her out.

It took her by surprise when he immediately wrapped his arms around her, but she didn’t complain.

“You had me a little worried there,” he muttered into her hair.

She sagged against him, nestling her face against his neck and inhaling the scent of him. “I was more than a little worried.”

After a moment, she peeled herself off him.

“Where’s the shirt?” he asked. “With the blood stains.”

“Oh.” She grimaced and looked down at her waist. “I thought I’d need to get past them and I didn’t have anywhere to put it so I hid it in plain sight.”

“That’s the shirt?” Flynn pointed.

“Yeah.” She undid it and held it out.

He pulled an evidence bag from a pocket and opened it up for her to drop it in.

“Is the sergeant going to be having a word with me about the improper handling of evidence?”

“I don’t think the sergeant will be at all upset with you today.

” He tilted his head at the sound of arguing overhead.

“We should see what’s happening,” he said, taking her hand and leading the way.

At the galley steps, he released her hand and looked back at her with a joyful glint in his eyes.

“You’re not going to believe the sight out there...”

Lily frowned. “What do you mean?”

“I may have been downplaying it when I said I commandeered a couple of boats...”

She didn't have a chance to speak before he took off up the steps.

Following him onto the deck, she blinked in the bright sunshine and her eyes landed on the sergeant and PC Hill, surrounded by Keith, Joyce and Russell.

The voices were all raised over each other, and Lily couldn't make out any of it.

"Look," Flynn said, nudging her elbow.

She clocked Kit standing in the lifeboat alongside the yacht and returned his smile, but another sight drew her attention – a ring of boats surrounding them.

"Where did everyone come from?" she muttered while raising a hand to wave at Ted and Rhys in their fishing boat. More familiar faces occupied the other assorted boats.

"They heard you needed help," Flynn whispered in her ear.

Chapter Thirty-Seven

Emotions rushed up to squeeze Lily's lungs and clog her throat.

Heat rushed to her cheeks when a volley of cheerful shouts emanated from the boats bobbing in a circle around the yacht.

Bashfully, she waved, then felt Flynn's hand on her back ushering her closer to Sergeant Proctor and the small huddle around him.

Apparently they believed the boat had been stopped because they weren't heading home as they'd said.

"I wanted to go home," Joyce was saying frantically.

"But everyone insisted we needed a holiday after everything. Since James has agreed to sell the boat to Russell we didn't think it would be a problem.

Though now I can see we should have got his permission first. I don't know why I let them persuade me otherwise. "

"If you'll listen for a moment," Sergeant Proctor said sharply.

"That's not the issue I was referring to.

The questions I have are regarding a witness who claims to have heard people arguing at the harbour on the evening of Joseph Whittaker's death.

Along with the pathologist's indication that Mr Whittaker's head injury wasn't sustained from falling down the harbour steps. "

"Of course he fell." Keith shook his head. "And we already told you that we didn't hear anything."

"It was fairly early in the evening," the sergeant said. "So it seems a little odd that none of you heard anything."

Lily cleared her throat, drawing everyone's attention. "I think Vic drugged them. That's why they didn't hear anything. There's a packet of sleeping pills in his cabin with three tablets missing."

"Where did you come from?" Kerry asked, glaring at Lily with her mouth agape as she sat on the seat beside Vic.

Lily eyed the pair of them as a hush descended on deck. "I was hiding in a wardrobe in Joseph's cabin. I heard you talking about the sleeping pills."

"Then you must have heard Vic say that it's just an old prescription that he brought by mistake."

"Or he stashed them with his indigestion tablets so you wouldn't notice them..."

Kerry paled and shifted in her seat to stare at her husband. "That's not right, is it, Vic?"

When the sergeant cast Lily a questioning look, she kept talking, comforted by Flynn's hand, which remained on her back.

"Here's what I think happened. On the evening Joseph died, Russell went back to the

hotel.

The rest of them came back to the boat and sat in the galley for a nightcap.

Vic poured the drinks and spiked them with sleeping pills.

When Joyce, Keith and Kerry had gone to bed, he went out to confront Joseph about the issue with the sale of the boat. ”

Lily’s eyes went to Vic. He stared back at her with an odd flicker of amusement in his eyes.

“No.” Joyce drew in a sharp breath. “That can’t be right.”

“We did both sleep unusually well.” Keith rubbed at his jaw. “Vic wouldn’t do something like that, though.”

“Bloody hell,” Russell muttered. “He was running out of time and thought there was nothing left to lose.”

“Excuse me?” Sergeant Proctor said, eyes on Russell.

“He’s dying,” Russell explained. “Vic has cancer. He doesn’t have long left.

” He rubbed a hand across his forehead and turned to Vic.

“You should have told Joseph the real reason you were desperate to get on with travelling. He’d have agreed to us taking the boat even without selling it.

He’d have understood. Why did you have to be so stubborn? ”

“He’s not dying,” Kerry said, her voice quiet as she moved away from her husband. She stopped and pressed a hand over her mouth. “You really drugged us, didn’t you? You drugged us and then you killed Joseph...”

Vic held her gaze and slowly shook his head.

“You were so annoyed at not being able to go on the trips we’d planned,” Kerry went on. “It was your idea to sell to Russell so we could make proper use of the boat. Oh my god. You really killed him. Just because you weren’t getting to enjoy your retirement the way you wanted.”

“I didn’t kill him,” Vic said, with icy calm. “No one can prove otherwise.”

“I found your shirt with blood stains on it.” Lily’s heart pounded while she waited for Vic to react. Maybe it wasn’t blood stains at all.

Beside her Flynn held up the evidence bag. “Are the stains on this Joseph’s blood?”

Finally, Vic shifted in his seat. Then he puffed out his chest. “I’m not saying anything until I’ve spoken to my lawyer.”

“I know you did it,” Lily growled, a swell of anger rising in her.

“You won’t get away with it. Between the missing sleeping pills and the stains on the shirt and the post-mortem report, there’ll be plenty of evidence.

Plus, you brought old sleeping pills from home, so clearly you were planning this for a while. ”

The calm behind Vic’s eyes finally snapped. “I wasn’t planning anything,” he shouted. “I only brought them in case. And if Joseph had been reasonable about

selling his share of the boat I wouldn't have needed to take such drastic action.”

The boat fell silent and Vic's gaze darted around his companions who stared at him with varying degrees of horror.

“You should be thanking me,” he roared. “I did it for all of us. So we could spend our retirement traveling like we'd planned, without him holding us back.”

When he stopped talking, no one said a word.

All the colour drained from Vic's face as the sergeant stepped towards him, unclipping his handcuffs from his belt as he went.

Chapter Thirty-Eight

Vic closed his eyes while the sergeant arrested him. He didn't speak, nor resist. Calmly, he peeled his eyelids open and remained still as the handcuffs clicked into place.

That ominous sound seemed to snap the others from their shocked silence.

"Did you say he's not dying?" Russell asked, his accusing gaze on Kerry. "You told me he has cancer and he doesn't have long to live."

"I'm so sorry." Kerry shuffled towards Russell. "I really am."

"They've been having an affair." Lily aimed the comment at Sergeant Proctor but spoke loudly enough for everyone to hear.

Vic eyed his restraints with agitation as he spoke. "I don't think you can really call it an affair when I knew all about it."

"What?" Russell said through gritted teeth.

"It was my idea." Vic's voice held a note of pride. "She was only stringing you along. I thought it would be a good way to encourage you to go along with our plan for you to buy Joseph's share of the boat, so we could finally make use of it."

Russell shrugged Kerry off and paced away from her.

“It all got out of hand,” Kerry said, following him. “I’m so sorry.”

Vic released a surly laugh. “You weren’t sorry when he started showering you with expensive jewellery. Thanks for that, by the way. That was an unexpected boost for my finances.”

“You sold the jewellery?” Russell asked, glaring at Kerry. “All those excuses about not being able to wear it around Vic and the real reason was because you didn’t have it any more?”

“It’s true that I’m not dying,” Vic said. “So you won’t be getting my wife to yourself anytime soon.”

Joyce let out a yelp of surprise and pressed her hand to her chest while mumbling her disbelief.

“You’ve been lying to me about everything,” Russell snarled at Kerry. “You said you loved me and the only reason you wouldn’t leave him was because he was dying. You must think me an absolute fool.”

“There’s no fool like a gullible, rich fool,” Vic said. “I’m surprised you fell for her story about me dying, though. I did tell her she may have gone a bit far there.”

“You just made it up?” Joyce asked, staring at Kerry with disbelief.

“He wanted me to leave Vic. I don’t know why I said it. I just panicked.” Tears sprang from Kerry’s eyes as she inched back towards Russell. “I’ve been an idiot. We just wanted to be able to travel the world like we’d planned, but I shouldn’t have used you like that.”

Russell shook his head while his entire body radiated tension. “You knew you

wouldn't find anyone else to buy a third share of the yacht. I can't believe I fell for all the lies. I really thought we had a future together."

"I might have been using you to start with," Kerry said tearfully. "But not any more. And we can be together properly now. Vic will be in prison."

"You really think I want to be with you now?" Russell shot.

"You can figure out your personal drama later," Sergeant Proctor said testily. "For now, I'd like to get back to the station to formally interview Mr Cooper." He turned to Russell. "Would you mind returning us to St Mary's?"

"With pleasure," Russell said, brushing Kerry off again. "From there, I think I'll get a plane home."

"Don't say that," Kerry whined. "We can work all this out."

"I'm just happy I didn't sign any papers and I don't actually own any part of this boat." He stalked back to the wheel.

At the back of the boat, Joyce cuddled up to Keith and sobbed against his shoulder.

After firmly telling Vic not to move a muscle, the sergeant approached Lily and rested a hand on her shoulder.

"Are you okay?"

"I think so," she said, but she was shivering despite the warmth of the sunshine, and her stomach felt vaguely queasy.

The sergeant smiled. "Thanks for all your help with this."

“Thank you for coming after me. I thought I was going to end up in a foreign country. Or possibly dumped overboard if Vic had found me.” She felt even more queasy remembering the fear she’d felt while hiding in the wardrobe.

“It seems you have a lot of friends on the islands.” The sergeant looked out at the boats surrounding them. “I’ve never had such an easy time rounding up support. As soon as your name was mentioned, people fell over each other to help.”

Lily smiled nervously as she glanced around.

“Hey!” Kit shouted. “Do you want to get a ride home with us?”

After a quick nod, Lily looked questioningly at the sergeant.

“Whatever you want,” he told her, patting her shoulder.

She’d only taken one step when she swung back and caught Keith’s eye. “What would you gain from Joseph selling his share of the boat to Russell?”

“What?” Keith pushed his glasses further up the bridge of his nose. “How do you mean?”

“I overheard you saying it would be financially beneficial for you if Russell bought the boat. I don’t understand why.”

“Oh.” He glanced nervously at his wife who let out a dainty sob. “It’s only that Joseph could be a bit of a stickler when it came to money.”

“He always insisted all costs should be shared equally,” Joyce said while dabbing at her eyes. “It wasn’t as bad when Lisa was around. He wasn’t as uptight about everything.”

“We used to split the cost between three couples,” Keith said, scratching at his jaw.

“But after Lisa died, each couple had to pay two-fifths and he’d pay one-fifth.

Which I realise is technically fair, but it felt petty.

” His lips stretched to a sheepish smile.

“Whenever Russell was out with us, he’d just pay for everything. ”

From behind the wheel, Russell let out a laugh that was entirely humourless.

Lily stared at Keith and Joyce for a moment. Speechless, she turned on her heel and headed for the lifeboat.

Passing Flynn, she gave him a grateful smile, then felt an undeniable sense of loss as she moved away from him.

Watching Kit help Lily onto the boat, Flynn felt a sting of panic at letting her out of his sight.

“Go with her if you want,” the sergeant said, beside him. “PC Hill and I can handle things here. I don’t think Vic will cause any problems on the way in.”

“Thanks, Sarge. If you’re sure?”

He gave a nod. “Tell Kit to stick close, just in case. And I’ll need you to meet us back at the harbour. I guess we’re going to have a busy afternoon.”

“Of course. I’ll see you back there.”

He moved quickly, sharing a relieved look with Kit as he held the boat steady for him to board.

“Well that was fun,” Kit said, sitting beside Lily and slinging an arm around her shoulders.

At the helm, the lifeboat volunteer who’s name Flynn hadn’t caught was quietly cheerful as he steered them towards St Mary’s along with the convoy of other boats – all of them sticking close to the yacht in case the sergeant and PC Hill needed assistance.

“Are you okay?” Flynn asked Lily from his place opposite her.

She nodded, but he could see her teeth were chattering and moved to shrug his jacket off for her.

Kit got there first, giving her his hoodie, then keeping an arm around her shoulders. When she leaned into him, Flynn’s chest tightened. It wasn’t as though he thought there was anything more than friendship between them, but even so, the jealousy was intense.

He kept his eyes on Lily as the boat skipped gently over waves – only occasionally glancing away to catch the sergeant’s eye and confirm that everything was under control. Lily didn’t look at him the whole way back. Most of the time she kept her eyes closed as she shivered by Kit’s side.

Kit, who usually talked incessantly, remained quiet and exchanged a worried glance with Flynn once or twice.

“I think she’s in shock,” Kit said as they stood on the jetty together, waiting for the yacht which was arriving just behind them.

“I’m okay,” Lily said through chattering teeth. “I just need to get home.”

“I have to help the sergeant,” Flynn said, directing the words at Kit. “Can you stay with her and make sure she’s okay?”

“Of course,” Kit said.

It was a worrying sign that Lily didn’t complain about them fussing over her.

“Come on,” Kit said. “Let’s get you home.”

She nodded and finally looked up at Flynn. Her lips parted, but she closed her mouth again and swallowed hard. “Thank you for coming to get me.”

He shook his head – her gratitude both unwanted and unwarranted. In what world wouldn’t he start running if he thought she was in trouble?

“I’ll come over after work,” he said.

“You don’t need to.” She sniffed and wiped her knuckle under her nose. “I’ll be all right.”

“I want to.”

She didn’t object, just shrugged and turned away.

Kit stayed close by her as they walked along the jetty and up the harbour steps.

At the top, Seren was waiting and wrapped Lily in a prolonged hug.

When they set off again, with Kit and Seren flanking Lily protectively, Flynn felt

another stab of jealousy.

While he was happy that Lily had people looking after her, he couldn't help but wish it was him who got to take care of her.

Chapter Thirty-Nine

With so much going on at the station, the afternoon flew by. As busy as he was, Flynn still spent an inordinate amount of time with his thoughts on Lily. As soon as the sergeant told him he could leave for the day, all he could think about was checking on her.

After nipping home for a speedy shower and change, he headed out again. He should never have agreed when Lily had asked for space. Not without explaining everything properly.

Maybe a bit of Dutch courage would be useful before that conversation. At the Mermaid Inn, he found Seren chatting to Noah Treneary on the street outside.

Before he could even say hello, Seren held up a finger to silence him, then continued speaking to Noah in an unnecessarily loud voice.

“Do you know tall Sean who works at the hotel?”

Noah scrunched his features up, apparently as confused by Seren’s odd behaviour as Flynn was. “Sean who we went to school with?”

“Yep. That’s the one. He asked Lily out on a date.”

“Right.” Noah pursed his lips and cast a bemused glance in Flynn’s direction before responding to Seren. “Thank you for the information.”

“You’re welcome,” she replied. “She turned him down. Maybe she’ll change her mind, though.”

“Keep me updated.” Noah gave her two sarcastic thumbs up. “I’ll be on the edge of my seat.” He looked at Flynn and shrugged before entering the pub.

With a comically insincere smile, Seren turned to Flynn.

“Was that conversation for my benefit, by any chance?” he asked.

She pressed a hand to her chest and sucked in a breath in a show of mock surprise. “Oh, did you hear that?”

“What’s your point?” he asked wearily.

“I thought I was pretty clear – my point is that Lily is a catch and if you’re not careful someone else will swoop in and you’ll miss your chance.”

“Thanks for the warning.” He glanced behind her, the idea of a drink less appealing now. “How’s Lily doing?”

“She was a little shaken up.” Seren’s features turned earnest. “I was worried about her. I’ve never seen her like that.”

She’s okay, though,” she added quickly. “Kit and I stayed with her for a couple of hours and she perked up in that time. I offered to get someone to cover my shift so I could stay with her but she seemed to want to be alone.”

“I was going to call over and check on her,” Flynn said.

“You should.”

He shifted his weight. “Do you think she’ll want to see me? She was avoiding me most of the week.”

“I think she’ll want to see you.” She smiled sadly. “You need to at least try.”

“Yeah.” And he didn’t need to put it off with a trip to the pub. He needed to get on with it and tell her exactly what was going on in his head.

On the promenade, the ice cream shop was all closed up. He rang the bell, then took a step back and craned his neck to look up at the living room window.

Lily’s lips formed the smallest of smiles when she appeared. Opening the window, she didn’t say a word, but dropped the keys down to him. Effortlessly, he plucked them from the air and let himself in.

He smiled sympathetically at the sight of her framed by the doorway at the top of the stairs.

“Are you feeling better?” he asked, fighting the urge to gather her in his arms.

“I suppose so.” Turning, she headed along the hall. “Do you want a drink?”

“Are you having one?”

She shook her head. “Seren kept making me tea. I think I’m severely over-hydrated.”

“Did you eat?”

“No. But I’m not hungry. I’m kind of tired. I was thinking of going to bed early.”

Following her into the living room, he ignored the hint that he couldn’t stay long.

“I want us to talk properly.”

“Can it wait until another day?” she asked, sinking onto the armchair. “I’m tired and I have a headache.”

He perched on the edge of the couch. “Just let me say what I need to say.”

“If it’s about you not wanting to date me, we already talked about it. I don’t think we need to keep going over it.”

“ You talked,” he said. “You didn’t let me talk.”

“Because I knew exactly what you were going to say,” she said, a rumble of anger in her words. “I’m humiliated enough without you spelling things out for me.”

“Why are you humiliated?” he asked, his eyebrows pulling together.

“Because I asked you on a date. And you stood me up. Clearly, we want different things.”

“Me standing you up only reflects badly on me. Not you.”

“It doesn’t even matter.” She rested her head against the wing of the chair. “Let’s just forget it.”

“Not until I explain.”

“You don’t need to explain,” she snapped. “I don’t want to hear your excuses about going back to London in a few months. I’m sure you have a big clichéd speech about how it’s nothing personal, but I’d rather just brush all of this under the rug and forget about it.”

Flynn stared at her while his chest felt as though it was being squeezed in a vice. "I'm leaving in seven weeks," he said quietly.

Her throat bobbed and when she spoke her voice came out as a raspy squeak. "What?"

"Seven weeks," he repeated. "And you were right when you said I'm a coward." Catching her eye, he held her gaze. "I'm already terrified of not seeing you every day, and that's when we're just friends."

"Seven weeks?" she whispered.

He nodded. "I didn't cancel our date because I don't want to be with you. I did it because the sergeant had checked whether there was a possibility of me keeping my job here for longer. But I can't. Which means in seven weeks I have to leave and go back to London."

A tear slipped from the corner of Lily's eye and it crushed him.

"I don't want to leave you," he went on. "But at the moment, I can't see a way around it."

A muscle in her jaw twitched. "I can't imagine you not being here. You were one of the first people I met here, and it feels like you're part of the place."

He smiled sadly. "The sergeant is still trying to make my position here permanent, but it really doesn't look promising."

Lily covered her face with her hands. "Seven weeks is nothing."

"I know," he said softly while his insides felt as though they were being squeezed.

“Please don’t ever think I cancelled our date because I didn’t want to go out with you.

I’m scared that if something happens between us, I won’t be able to bring myself to leave when the time comes.

” He scrubbed a hand over his face. “But I can’t be a police officer here and if I’m not a police officer...”

“You don’t know who you are?”

He nodded. “It’s the one thing I’m proud of. I don’t know if I’d even like myself if I wasn’t a police officer. I suspect you wouldn’t like me that much either.”

She blew out a breath and brushed away her tears. “I think I understand that. As weird as it is, my identity feels tied to the ice cream shop. I couldn’t leave it.”

“I’d never ask you to. I see how you thrive here. It’s like it’s where you’re meant to be.”

“So what do we do?”

“I thought about a long-distance relationship... but I’m not sure how realistic it is. My job is full on and I’m not sure how it would work long term.”

“I don’t think I’m cut out for a long-distance relationship,” she murmured.

“Leaving seems really surreal.” He paused and massaged the tension at the back of his neck. “I keep thinking something will change and I’ll be able to stay... If the situation were different...” He trailed off. “I really want us to stay friends, if you think that’s possible?”

She inhaled deeply, then her lips twitched in a hint of amusement. “You’re asking if I think I can contain myself around you?”

“It’s not you I’m worried about,” he said frankly. “Every time I look at you I want to kiss you. And every time I hang out here with you I have to force myself to leave at the end of the evening.”

“Don’t say nice things to me. It’s not helpful.”

“Sorry.”

She lifted her chin. “Can you start sleeping with random women again? It’ll make this easier if I can be annoyed with you.”

“I don’t want to be with anyone else.”

“Flynn!” she snapped. “Stop being nice.”

He laughed, and it changed the atmosphere in the room. “You need to sort your hair out,” he said, pointing an accusing finger. “It’s sticking up all over the place and you look crazy.”

“That’s better.” Flattening her wild hair, she sank back in the chair.

Flynn stood, deciding it would be a good point to leave, despite needing a lot of willpower to get away from her.

“Flynn?” she said, stopping him in his tracks.

“Yeah.”

She hesitated, staring at her hands in her lap. “I spoke to Maria.”

He sat back down. “Oh?”

“Don’t pretend you don’t already know.” She gave a gentle eye roll. “Glynis said she’d told you.”

“Yeah, she mentioned it.”

“Maria’s real name is Gail Greenwood and she owns the shop. Maria is her middle name. Apparently she’s been using it for a long time.”

“Right,” he murmured.

“But she doesn’t know anything about my parents.” Pausing, she took a deep breath. “She only offered to lease me the shop because I asked at the right time and she understood from Mr Greaves that I was interested in leasing it.”

“That’s weird.”

“Not really.” She pushed her hair from her face and straightened her spine. “Everything she said made sense. Way more sense than the wild theories I’d concocted.” She shook her head. “I’m such an idiot sometimes.”

“You’re not.”

“I am,” she insisted. “I wanted to find a connection to my parents, so I made up a story in my head where there was someone out there who knew my parents and who was somehow waiting to be reunited with me.” She wiped a stray tear from her cheek.

“All so I wouldn’t have to face the fact that I have no one. I am all alone in the world.”

“Don’t say that.” Flynn’s throat felt painfully tight. “It’s not true.”

“I have no family,” she said. “How can that be?”

“It doesn’t mean you’re alone.”

“Sorry,” she whispered, wiping frantically at the tears that rolled down her cheeks. “You had a long day and you probably want to get home.”

“I don’t have anywhere to be.” He frowned deeply. “I’m sorry you didn’t get the answers you wanted from Maria.”

“I think deep down I knew nothing would come of it. That’s why I put off speaking to her – because I knew it wasn’t going to lead to anything. I just didn’t want to face the reality.”

He bit down on his lower lip. “Do you think she was telling the truth?”

“Maria?” Her eyebrows lifted. “To be honest, it crossed my mind that she was lying, but that’s probably because I wanted her to be lying. I don’t know why she’d lie.”

“Neither do I,” Flynn said hesitantly. “I think she was lying though.”

Confusion wrinkled Lily’s features.

Flynn grimaced, worried he was about to give her a reason to stop speaking to him again. “I went to see her,” he confessed.

“You did what? ”

He held up his hands defensively. “After Glynis told me you’d spoken to Maria, I was worried about you. Since you weren’t talking to me, I thought I’d speak to Maria instead.”

“Flynn!” She glared at him and he couldn’t tell if she was annoyed or just surprised.

“I probably shouldn’t have,” he continued. “I’m sorry, but...” He trailed off, not even sure what to say.

“You thought she was lying?” Lily asked eventually.

“Yeah.” He thought back on the conversation. “She sounded so guarded. I think she’s hiding something.”

Lily blew out a breath. “I’ve been trying to convince myself that I need to leave it all alone.”

“You can if you want. Maybe I’m wrong anyway. She might have been telling the truth.” He attempted a smile. “Are you annoyed that I spoke to her?”

She shook her head. “No. But there’s not really anything more I can do. If Maria won’t talk, I can’t force her.”

“No,” he agreed.

“I also keep thinking about my uncle. He had his faults, but he always wanted the best for me. I came first in his eyes. So if there were things he kept from me, he did so with the best of intentions. He was keeping me safe. So maybe in this case, ignorance is bliss.”

“That’s not your usual attitude,” he said with a small smile.

“I know, but maybe it should be. I have the ice cream shop, and I’m part of a wonderful community. Things are pretty good.”

“That’s true. It was amazing to see all those boats today.”

“Yeah.” She let out a contented sigh. “I want to be grateful for everything I have. Even if I never find answers about my past, I found a home here. That’s a nice feeling.”

He nodded. Oddly enough, he felt the same about the islands.

He was relieved when Lily moved the conversation to a safer topic – quizzing him about what had happened with Vic at the station that afternoon.

She peppered him with questions as he explained how Vic had walked them through the events of the evening – how he’d drugged the others on the boat and had gone out to wait for Joseph.

After an argument about the sale of the boat, he’d waited until Joseph was on the steps before hitting him over the head with a brick.

It wasn’t a cheerful conversation, but it should have been an effective distraction.

Annoyingly, even as they rehashed the events of the previous days, he couldn’t shift the quiet feeling of dread at the thought of leaving in less than two months.

Chapter Forty

Seven weeks was less than fifty days. No time at all really.

Lily felt sick every time she thought about Flynn leaving. Considering she hadn't known him very long, it was strange that she struggled to imagine her life without him in it. As much as she wanted to bury her head in the sand, she also wanted to prepare herself for his leaving.

Not that she had any clue how to do that. They'd cleared the air at least, but it might have been easier if he'd just told her he didn't feel the same way about her. She supposed all she could do was make the most of having him around while he was still there.

The bell rang as she was setting up the shop the following morning and she inhaled a calming breath. Surely, if she ignored the way her stomach fluttered at the sight of him it would eventually go away.

Bracing for the physical reaction to him, she wasn't sure if it was relief or disappointment when it wasn't Flynn arriving.

Mostly what she felt was surprised.

"Sorry to disturb you," Russell said, lugging his suitcase over the threshold and abandoning it just inside the door.

"No problem." She deposited the tub of ice cream into the display case and smiled at

him. "How are you?"

"Great question," he said. "I have no idea how to answer it."

She glanced at his luggage. "Are you going home?"

"Yes. I'm on my way to the airport, but I wanted to stop by and say farewell, and thank you."

"Thank you for what?"

He slipped his hands casually into his trouser pockets. "Joseph and I were never the greatest of friends, but he was a decent guy. He didn't deserve what Vic did."

"No. He didn't."

"Have you ever thought about becoming a private investigator?"

"It's crossed my mind once or twice," she said with a small smile. "Are your friends going home too?"

"I think friends is entirely the wrong word. Vic's on his way to the mainland with a police escort.

As far as I can gather, he'll be held until trial.

I'm hoping he goes to jail for a very long time.

"He folded his arms across his chest. "Joyce is at the hotel, crying into Keith's shirt, and I imagine Kerry is frantically trying to find someone to skipper the boat back to St Ives.

They'll have to sell it now. Or she'll need to find some other mug to seduce. ”

“You won’t work things out with her?”

“She was using me all along. Honestly, we weren’t even well suited but I was lonely and liked the attention. I can’t believe I fell for her flattery.” He shook his head. “I’ve never had any luck with relationships. Lesson learned – apparently I’m destined to be alone.”

“I’m sorry if this is blunt, but why wouldn’t you pay Joseph the price he wanted for the yacht? James said you offered him more in the end...”

“I was being generous with the offer I made James because I felt bad for him.”

“But if you could afford it, why wouldn’t you offer Joseph the same?”

“Because he wanted to get out the same as he’d paid in.

Boats lose value, so in my opinion it wasn’t worth that and what I offered him was fair.

Especially considering the issues that come from owning a yacht with other people.

” He pulled his shoulders back. “There are times when I’m happy to throw money around, but in business I’m ruthless.

I was looking at it as a business transaction I guess. ”

“I suppose that makes sense,” Lily said. “Couldn’t you have just bought your own boat?”

“Yes, but I don’t like being alone. I enjoyed being part of their group. Seems stupid now.”

“I reckon you just picked the wrong group,” Lily said, feeling sorry for him, and also feeling bad that she’d used him too.

“Any chance of a scoop of your cherry chocolate ice cream to see me on my way?”

“Of course.” She loaded up a cone and passed it over. “On the house.”

“Thank you,” he said, winking. “If I’m ever back here, I’ll call in for an ice cream.”

“I’d be happy to see you,” she said and wished him safe travels.

The door had barely closed behind him when it opened again. Flynn was in uniform and his smile was full of mirth as he wandered in with a coffee for her.

“You’re the talk of the town again this morning. I suspect ice cream sales will be up today. People will be coming in just to hear about your latest adventure.”

“Lovely,” she said sarcastically.

“You should be proud. Vic might have got away with it if it weren’t for you.”

“I don’t think so. You weren’t far behind with the investigation. You’d have figured it out.”

“Not as quickly as you.”

She shrugged. “I heard Vic is on his way to the mainland.”

“Yes. PC Hill is escorting him.” He passed her takeaway mug over the counter.
“Who’ve you been fluttering your eyelashes at?”

“What?”

“The obscene amount of tips.” He pointed at the jar on the counter which was currently serving as a paper weight to a pile of crisp twenty-pound notes.

Lily put her coffee aside and reached for the money, flicking through the notes.
“There’s five hundred quid here! He must have only asked for ice cream to distract me.”

“Who?”

“Russell. He just called in on his way to the airport. He complimented me on my investigative skills.”

“That’s a very generous compliment,” Flynn said, eyes on the money.

“Flipping heck.” Lily shook her head. “I’ll give half to Jessica as a thanks for all her efforts.”

“I guess he wanted you to have the money.”

Lily shrugged. “Jessica will appreciate the bonus.”

“I’m sure she will.”

Lily shoved the money into her pocket as the bell sounded.

“Morning,” Lily said as Glynis walked in.

“Hello.” She had a healthy glow back in her cheeks. “I hear you’ve been up to your usual tricks?”

“Yes,” Lily said flatly.

Glynis cocked her head. “You’re still annoyed with me, aren’t you?”

“I’m not annoyed with you. Mostly, I’m just tired. And I’m annoyed because I don’t think Maria was honest with me.”

“About knowing your parents?” Glynis asked.

Lily chewed her bottom lip. “I think she’s hiding something. I don’t know what.”

“Maybe you could help with that,” Flynn said, cocking his head.

Glynis looked at Lily, but she was just as puzzled by the comment.

“Tell her everything you know about Maria,” Flynn went on. “You knew her when she first opened the shop, didn’t you? Tell Lily everything you can remember about her. Maybe you know something that could help.” His gaze fell to Lily and he winced. “Sorry...”

She shook her head, eyes locked with his. “You’re right. I do want to find out everything I can.”

Chapter Forty-One

For a moment Glynis merely frowned at the suggestion of spilling information about her friend. “I don’t know what there is to tell,” she said eventually. “And I’m not sure I’d feel comfortable telling you what I do know.”

“There must be something,” Lily said. “Why didn’t it work out for her with the shop? From what I hear, the ice cream shop did well back then. Why did she leave?”

Glynis pulled out the chair closest to her and folded her hands in her lap. “Personal reasons, which aren’t for me to speak about.”

“Please tell me.” Lily gazed pleadingly at Glynis as she hurriedly took the seat opposite her. “I know it sounds crazy, but I think there’s something she doesn’t want me to know and I need to know why.”

Glynis stared forlornly at her hands. “You have to understand that what I know about her situation back then is what I’ve pieced together from the odd comment or bits of cryptic conversations. She’s not someone who opens up. She’s never outright told me the whole story.”

“Just tell me what you do know.”

“It has to stay between us?” Glynis said.

While Flynn joined them at the table, Lily nodded readily.

“I think she was having an affair with a married man. Not that she’s ever said so, but it’s the conclusion I drew.”

“That’s why she closed the shop and left the island?” Flynn asked. “To be with him?”

“I think he’d told her he’d move here. He had kids...

” She closed her eyes briefly. “One kid, at least. I think they visited her here once or twice. As far as I can tell, he promised Maria they’d live happily ever after...

but I guess he ended up staying with his wife.

” She looked sadly at Lily. “I think when she left the islands it was to be with him. I remember her writing to me and saying that things hadn’t worked out as she’d thought they would, but she couldn’t bring herself to come back to St. Mary’s. ”

Lily’s mind raced as new theories developed at lightning speed. One idea in particular lodged itself in her brain.

“The man she was seeing... was his child a boy or a girl? And how old?”

“Maria never actually talked about them, but I remember walking past the shop one evening... Maria was standing out the front, staring at the beach. The weather was terrible – wet and windy, so the beach was deserted but there was a man, flying a kite with his kid. It was quite a striking scene since there was only the two of them on the beach... and there was something haunting about the look on Maria’s face as she watched them. ”

“Did you ask her about them?”

“Yes. She said he was an old friend. I didn’t think much of it at the time, but in the weeks after, it became clear she was having problems. I put two and two together, but

I couldn't tell you if I reached the right conclusion."

"The kid," Lily said, her breath catching in her throat. "Was it a boy or a girl?"

"I don't know. It was twenty years ago, and they were far away so I didn't get a good look."

"How old do you think they were? A young child, or a teenager?"

"Young. Three or four. Maybe five." Her eyebrows pulled together. "Why do you want to know?"

Lily shook her head, not daring to voice her thoughts. "Just wondering."

"Don't be taking anything I say as fact," Glynis said quickly. "Like I say, Maria is very closed off. I don't think she really opens up to anyone."

"That must make her difficult to be friends with," Flynn said gently.

Glynis nodded. "I'm the only person she stayed in touch with when she left. And that was only because I made most of the effort. Eventually she met someone else and was married for a decade, but from what I gather it wasn't an overly happy marriage."

Lily drummed her fingers against her coffee cup. "Why do you think she came back here after all this time?"

"She said she needed a change of scenery. And that she needed to make some decisions about the shop. I think she was contemplating selling it until you came along."

"I still don't understand why she wanted me to open it," Lily mused.

“I couldn’t tell you. All I know is that Mr Greaves got in touch to say someone was interested in the shop, and she said it seemed like a sign.”

Lily nodded. It was what Maria had said to her, too – just good timing. But Lily was struggling to believe that.

“I don’t like talking about her behind her back,” Glynis said.

“That’s all I know and I can’t see how it’s helpful.

I am sorry that I acted deceitfully in not telling you about Maria, especially as I knew you were looking for the owner, but I honestly didn’t have any ill intent.

I was hoping that with time, I could persuade Maria to reveal herself to you. ”

“I understand,” Lily said. “It’s okay.”

Glynis smiled and stood. “You know I’m very fond of you and I hate thinking there’s any bad feeling between us.”

“Concerned about losing your ice cream fix?” Lily said lightly, wanting to leave any tension behind them.

Glynis chuckled. “Absolutely.”

Lily walked her to the door, then went to the window and looked out at the beach and the calm sea beyond. Closing her eyes, she imagined it on an overcast day with the wind strong enough to fly a kite.

It hit her in a rush – the salty air in her nostrils and the feeling of the plastic kite handle digging into her palm. The gusts were so strong she was scared she would lose her grip on the kite, or be blown away with it.

It wasn't the only thing that scared her, either. Fear rooted itself deep in her stomach, and she felt it everywhere.

“Lily!”

Flynn's voice jolted her back to reality.

Her eyes filled with tears as she snapped them open. In front of her, Flynn's features were full of concern.

“Are you okay?”

Wildly, she shook her head. “It was me,” she said frantically. “I was the kid on the beach.”

“How do you know?”

“I remember it. I was on the beach, flying the kite. Everything was terrible.”

“How do you mean?”

Taking a deep breath, she moved away from Flynn and paced beside the large window.

“I don't have many photos of my parents,” she said slowly.

“But in the ones I have, we look happy. I always thought that at some point in my life I'd been part of a normal, happy family, but I think that's a lie.

I remember being on the beach and I was so scared. ”

“You just remembered it now?”

“Yes. It’s like something unlocked in my mind. I didn’t think I had memories of that time, except for the vague memory of being in the ice cream shop... but I guess...”

“What?”

She tried to smile through the pain in her chest. “There’s a psychological reason we sometimes don’t remember things, right?”

Slowly, Flynn nodded. “It’s a coping mechanism.”

“Your mind tries to protect you from traumatic events.” She stopped pacing. “I only remember flying the kite on the beach, but I know that no one was supposed to know I was here. My dad kept insisting it had to be a secret.”

“You remember him saying that?”

“Not exactly.” She couldn’t figure out how to explain it. “I just know ... it’s only a feeling, but it’s really clear.”

Flynn nodded.

“I think my dad was having an affair with Maria,” she said, hardly daring to say the words. “Which means we were never a happy family after all.”

“You don’t know that for sure,” Flynn said kindly.

“No. But it would explain Maria’s reluctance to speak to me. I can’t imagine it’s something she’s proud of.”

Flynn sighed. “And it would explain why she leased the shop to you. Maybe she’s trying to make amends.”

“Maybe.” Lily sank onto the nearest chair and dragged her hands through her hair.
“What if there’s more to it?”

“What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking about the fact that my parents died in a fire... and then there was a fire at the ice cream shop... I’ve always thought that was a strange coincidence. And I think that was probably around the same time that Maria started going by her middle name.”

Flynn stood in front of her. “What do you want to do?”

“I want to know the truth.” A surge of anger rippled through Lily. She was tired of feeling lost and confused. “I want answers. And I’m going to get them. Maria owes me that much, at least.”

To be continued ...