

**YOU'RE
SO
DEAD**

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**YOU'RE
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**On the island of Little
Esau, the final day of
Pyre Festival . . .**



Plum Winter never expected it to end this way. “It” being both her life and Pyre Festival.

The festival was supposed to end with a celebrity-packed booze cruise.



As for her life’s end, Plum didn’t like to think about it, but when she did, she always imagined being a really old lady who died peacefully in her sleep.

But here she was at the end of it all, and there were absolutely no boats, booze, or beds.

Instead, Plum had to decide which of two extremely unattractive deaths she would rather have.

There was death by jumping off the cliff at her back, or death by stabby-stabby. *Stabbing*, that was actually the word, though her brain was slow in supplying it. Plum blamed the cliff at her back and the demented killer standing about twenty feet away.

Holding a very big, very sharp, very scary stabber.

Knife.





So, this was it. The end. Which way would she choose?

Maybe Plum could save someone, or several someones, on her way to her own death? If she could—well, that had to count for something, right? Maybe it would be enough to get her into the really good party in the afterlife. Get her through those exclusive pearly gates.

Plum could feel the wind sweeping up from the cliff at her back, almost like nature was trying to remind her of the sheer drop to the rocks and ocean far below.

In front of her, the killer slashed the knife in terrifying arcs.

This was where all her schemes had led her.

With no one to witness her last—some would say only—act of courage.



No one other than the killer . . . and the goats.



As if on cue, the black-and-white billy goat munching on the bush to Plum's right let out an annoyed-sounding bleat.

It sounded like a heckler in a comedy club, like the goat was yelling "Meh!"

No doubt the billy goat was annoyed at the humans trampling his favorite grazing patch.

"Yeah, buddy," Plum breathed, taking a tiny step back, feeling the wind from the cliff edge grabbing at her hair, snatching it up. "You and me both," she muttered.

There was nowhere else to go. She had to do something.

Maybe she could take the killer with her.

Plum took a deep breath and screamed.





The killer smiled, rushing at her with the knife outstretched.
So. This was how it was all going to end.
Plum Winter desperately hoped there would be a heaven
for clueless kids who just wanted to have a good time.









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They couldn't find it.






It wasn't going as well as she'd hoped: her big chance to break out of Normal Town, Ordinaryville. But damn it, Plum wasn't going to let a little thing like ride-share logistics stop her.



Besides, they'd already come so far. All the way to the island of Saint Vitus in the Caribbean. It was a whole other world from Huntington, Alabama.

If someone were to ask Plum, *What's it like in Huntington, Alabama?* she'd start by saying, *It's fine*. Her family had moved to Huntington when Plum was in the seventh grade and her dad left the army. Next she'd say that Huntington *wasn't like the rest of Alabama*. It was reflexive, saying that, because while she knew Alabama had so many beautiful regions—it also had a lot of shortcomings. A lot.

But Huntington was different, mainly because of the university, which added a lot of diversity to the town, with faculty







from all over, international students, and so on.

Was it still boring? Especially if you'd been there since seventh grade, were a senior in high school, and had an itching desire to have an adventure, to chase something, to become someone, to *go places*?

Yes. Yes, it was.



So Plum and her two best friends were here, on Saint Vitus. Just a little more time and distance to go, and they'd *arrive*. Both metaphorically and literally. They'd get to a private island, a luxurious villa resort, attending the most amazing event ever put on in the history of music and art and new media. Pyre Festival was so exclusive that it even promised not only that the performers would be famous, but that *all* the attendees would be celebrities and influencers as well. There would be hundreds of stars, and they would be with them.

Not that Plum and her two best friends were celebrities. Or influencers.

But Plum's sister was.

"It says it's right here." Marlowe Blake, Plum's best friend, stopped and lowered her cat's-eye sunglasses. Her blue-green eyes glanced out to the street. She was white, like Plum, but where Plum tanned easily Marlowe burned, so the minute they'd stepped outside the airport Marlowe had put on a floppy sun hat. She looked impossibly elegant even as she craned her neck to peer around the people lingering at the curb.

Some of the elegance was just inherent to Marlowe. The rest

of it was because she dressed like she was a movie star from a bygone age. Her mother, Elizabeth, was a theater professor at the university, and she had gotten Marlowe sewing lessons the minute she had shown an interest.

Plum remembered the day she'd met Marlowe. The memory ran in her head like a flickering movie reel in one of those old-fashioned film archives. It had been the first day of their freshman year of high school. Plum and her other best friend, Sofia Torres, were sitting on the brick bench in the courtyard at break, and Marlowe had walked out of the double doors, dressed in a gorgeous navy suit-dress, perfectly elegant, deliberately retro. Making matters worse for Plum's instant crush, Marlowe was built like a movie star from yesteryear, too. She was completely curvy in a way that made Plum think of words like *lush* and *plush* and other *-ush* words, probably.

"You're staring." Sofia had hissed the warning. But Marlowe had already spotted them and headed over to the bench.



"Hi, I'm new," Marlowe had said. "Can I hang out with you?"

She'd smiled a little, whether at the rhyme or in friendliness Plum hadn't known, but it was a swerve-y bit of crooked perfection that made Plum's heart skip a beat. Or several.

So confident. So *real*. So ready to put it out there.

Can I hang out with you?



Today, standing outside the Saint Vitus airport, in addition to the floppy hat, Marlowe was wearing an eggshell-white



linen suit with wide-leg trousers and a black camisole under her double-breasted coat.

“Shouldn’t there be a sign for attendees?” Marlowe asked. She pulled a hand down her sideswept sheet of wavy blonde hair.

“Did we pass it?” Sofia asked. She looked anxious but also adorable, as always. Sofia was Puerto Rican and short—at least, she seemed short to Plum—with a small face and a cute, pointy chin. Sofia paused to adjust the shoulder straps of both her favorite olive-green romper and the pink-sequined tank top peeking out underneath. The warm beige skin of her arms had a golden tone in the island’s bright sunlight.






Sofia was a worrier. Her family was incredibly close and involved in Sofia’s life in a way that Plum’s family wasn’t involved in hers. On one hand, that could sometimes make things harder for Sofia, Plum thought. But on the other hand Plum often wished her own family was more like that—both that her family was larger and that her parents were more . . . well . . . *observant*. That’d be the nicer word to use.

Attentive. That would be the one she really felt.



It wasn’t Plum’s parents’ fault that they really loved their jobs. And each other. And going out to stuff. And they loved Plum, she knew it.

They just liked being alone more than Plum did.

Her parents were just two only children who had an only child who wasn’t actually an only child, because of her older half sister.






Meanwhile Sofia had two sisters: a younger sister, Mia, in tenth grade, and an older sister, Krystal, a sophomore in college in Atlanta. Sofia's parents always wanted to know everything about each of their children. They seriously wanted to know where Sofia was at all times. They wanted her and her friends to hang out at their house instead of anywhere else. Sofia's mom, Linda, was white, with piercing brown eyes and long brown hair shot through with gray. She was honestly a bit intimidating. She was a research librarian at the university, and she'd stop whatever she was doing to greet Plum whenever she'd arrive. She was nice but also intense. When Plum talked to her, she always felt like she was getting subtly interrogated.



Hector, Sofia's dad, was second-generation Puerto Rican, and he loved everyone, especially if you loved one of his daughters. Plum was his favorite of all of Sofia's friends, a fact that absolutely delighted Plum. Sofia and her sisters would lovingly tease Plum about being tall and skinny (too tall and too skinny, in Plum's opinion. She'd heard all the jokes about ironing boards and stick insects and being bony, and she agreed with them, sadly). But when Sofia's family called her "flaca" she'd feel the affection in it. It wasn't a criticism but instead a term of endearment. A normal and good part of who she was.

Hector was a geologist at the university, but his second passion was feeding people. He loved cooking dishes that his mother had taught him. Whenever Sofia had friends over,





Hector would always carry down plates stacked with tostones or empanadillas.

The year before Sofia moved to Huntington had been the loneliest year in Plum's life. And that was saying something, because as a former army brat, Plum had moved around, been uprooted from friends, been lonely, and started over again and again.

But seventh grade in Huntington had been the worst. There was no familiar army base, no old friends or acquaintances who showed up halfway through the year (as had happened with previous deployments), no connections.

The whole entire year, Plum hadn't made a single friend.



Well, not a true friend. Not the lifelong kind. It was a feeling Plum thought everyone knew, even if no one ever talked about it. She'd had temporary friends, the kind who look at you like, *You'll do*. Who "let" you spend time with them, but who don't really like who you are, in the end.

Thank God Sofia had arrived a few months into eighth grade. When Plum got sent to the principal's office and made a true friend all in one day.

But that wasn't how they'd ended up here on Saint Vitus—for the spring break to end all spring breaks.