

“Air turbulence can’t compete with ocean waves.” Olivia Stone held her hair back to lose her lunch over the bow of the old ferry as they neared the coast of Zanzibar. When she attempted to focus on the horizon, the noonday sun glistening on the waves caused her to heave all the more.

“You okay, miss?” An elderly Tanzanian woman leaned close, offering her a couple of tissues.

“I will be when I get my feet on solid ground.” She wiped her mouth and moved toward the gangplank with her luggage in tow. Letting pedestrians disembark first before vehicles drove off the ferry allowed Olivia to get off as soon as they reached the wide dock.

Seeking a change in her future, a place to make a difference, she was eager to explore this exotic port. As a flight attendant, she flew the African skies taking passengers to amazing places for adventures. But it was getting routine. As she contemplated a major employment shift, a life change, to live and work somewhere on the continent, Zanzibar seemed like a great place to consider.

As the ferry passengers dispersed, all eyes focused on Olivia, the only white foreigner in a sea of Africans. The slapping of the ferry's wake against the bulkhead caused her stomach to roil in protest. She hurried through the bustling throng toward dry land, bringing her face-to-face with a turbaned Indian ruler who blocked her path.

"Joy Deckland, you were not to return! I demand you depart!" he hissed toward Olivia's ear as he leaned close to her body.

"Back up, Ali Baba, if you don't want me to puke all over your robes." She rushed around him with her suitcase, bumping behind her on the uneven, weathered boardwalk.

"You cannot ignore Aga Kahn!" He was right behind her.

As she stepped on the sand, she turned left. Hurrying to the water's edge, she bent over and lost the last of her lunch.

The enraged Indian paced a few feet away, yelling, "Usama!" into his cell phone.

Olivia wiped her mouth and took a deep breath. She pivoted, searching for the angry man, who had crossed the road, still engrossed in his call. What's his problem? "Keep your distance, Buster. I may be petite, but dynamite comes in small packages." *That's telling him, Olivia.*

She blew out a breath and relaxed, perusing Zanzibar for the first time. The beach displayed dirty white sand with a rocky mixture, but thankfully, it wasn't moving. Solid ground. Olivia pulled at the waist of her skinny jeans, straightened her cold-shoulder, floral-print blouse, put her long hair behind her ear, and hoped the humidity hadn't messed with her makeup. With her grip tightened on the raised handle of her suitcase, she smiled, scanning the coastal scene. A change of pace was just the ticket, as this flight attendant became the tourist. *I'll find a place for me, for my future, with my toes in this sand. I'm sure of it.*

The port served as a market place for the locals. Kiosks lined the area with merchandise—clothes to raw meat,

charcoal to flashlights, fruit to flip-flops. They offered everything except a cold bottle of water. She put her hand into her pocket and pulled out a cellophane-covered mint and popped it into her mouth.

Among the colorful chaos, dogs scrounged around for a meal, competing with seagulls swooping in to steal their find. Palm trees danced in the ocean breeze as the locals sold to residents in the bustling market. Fish were being tossed to shop owners. Women with babies tied on their backs grilled shrimp kebabs over charcoal. Live roosters with their feet tied together crowed in protest of pending sales. Olivia closed her eyes momentarily and took a deep breath, which made her shudder, as an array of fishy smells assaulted her senses. Her stomach growled a threat.

Amid the throng, Muslim women hidden behind flowing black robes bustled about in the business of buying and selling. Old men struggled to push carts of pineapples, selling them along the road. Pungent body odors rivaled the strong aroma of the juicy fruit. Donkeys brayed in the distance. Straining nets of fresh catch was being off-loaded from old boats tied to the rickety pier. A mixture of languages competed with crashing waves slapping the bulkhead and the cries of ibis circling overhead. Colorful prints of women's attire on this Swahili coast stood out in front of the off-white stucco buildings of Stone Town, definitely a mixture of Africans and Asians vying for a few measly shillings.

"Mama, Mama." A cute little boy ran toward Olivia. His short legs carried him across the sand. He lifted his arms for her to pick him up. "Mama." His white skin and big brown eyes, framed by his reddish-blond hair, singled him out in the crowd of Zanzibaris.

Olivia picked him up, straining at his weight. "Hey, little guy. You're a heavy dude. Where's your mommy and daddy?"

He smiled and patted her cheek. "Mama." He put his arm

around her neck and laid his head on her shoulder and kept patting her back. His wrinkled khaki pants had a matchbox car in the pocket.

*What an adorable child.* Olivia rubbed his back as she searched the area. *Someone will be looking for him and probably suspect me of taking the boy.*

“Judah! Where are you? Come to Mama Frances. Judah!” An African woman rushed toward Olivia and stopped short when she saw her cradling him. The woman stood statuesque, with one hand over her mouth, while she held bags of fruits and veggies in the other as a salty breeze fanned her long skirt and apron. Her graying hair was in a tight bun at her nape. Wrinkles around her eyes showed her concern for the boy.

An American man hurried from the market, heading toward their direction, carrying a fish wrapped in newsprint. “Frances, have you found Judah?”

“Ndio, Bwana. Yes. He is here.” She pointed to Olivia holding Judah.

He stopped short, sending dust flying around his boots. He grabbed a cart by the road as if to keep from falling. “Joy?” He stared at Olivia as the color drained from his face.

Olivia watched him. He could have stepped off a page of a Bass Pro catalog spread. That type of angler shirt was popular with rugged men, and he fit that category to a tee. “Is this adorable boy your son? I’m not trying to take him. Please believe me. I was seasick on the ferry, so I stayed right here, allowing my stomach to settle. Your son ran to me with his arms up, wanting me to hold him. I hope that’s all right. He was getting close to the water...” Olivia watched the man bend over at the waist with his hands on his knees. He took a deep breath and sighed, wiped his perspiring brow, then stood and eased her direction.

“Yes. That’s Judah, my son. Who...who are you?” He stood a few feet from her.

“I’m Olivia Stone. I’ve just got off the ferry for a two-week vacation. I needed a change of scenery. I know a bit of Swahili, so Zanzibar seemed the logical place to explore.” She babbled info to fill the uncomfortable silence stalled between them while she rubbed the boy’s back as he relaxed in slumber.

“I’m Eli Deckland, a missionary here in Zanzibar. Forgive my hesitation, but you look like my late wife, Joy. Judah must have thought you were her.”

“Bless his heart. He must miss his mother. I’m sorry for your loss.”

“Thanks, Ms. Stone.” Eli moved toward Olivia. “He can get heavy. Let me take him.” Eli gave the fish he’d purchased to Mama Frances, then stepped into Olivia’s personal space to take his son.

As he reached for the boy, his hand rubbed against her arm, sending a shiver through her. Their eyes met. She sucked in a deep breath and held it as if frozen under the hot tropical sun. Her dry throat got drier. Parched.

“Thanks for being understanding about Judah.” He cradled his son, pulling him close.

Olivia eased back a few inches as the breeze sent his woody cologne in her direction. “No harm done. He just took me by surprise.”

“It’s a pleasure to meet you, Olivia Stone. I hope you enjoy your stay in Zanzibar.” He stepped toward his SUV parked about twenty feet away. Pausing, he turned back and stared at Olivia again while giving directions to his worker.

“Frances, let’s get Judah home.”

Olivia watched as he fastened his son into a car seat while his worker loaded their purchases in the back of the SUV.

Not to be caught staring, Olivia searched for a cab. A hair-raising feeling tightened her gut; she scanned her surroundings, her senses alert. When she locked eyes with the Indian man across the rocky road, he stared daggers in her

direction. Goosebumps marched down her arms. She hugged herself, then waved for a taxi as smoke from burning trash wafted in her direction.

A four-door taxi that had seen better days slowed in front of her. The engine back-fired when he stopped, causing her to jerk slightly.

Inhaling exhaust, she opened the back door. "Ocean Paradise Resort and Spa, Bwana."

She reached for her suitcase but didn't move fast enough. The Indian man grabbed her arm, restricting any movement. Pulling her close, he spoke in hushed, angry tones, his acrid breath making it difficult for her to breathe.

"The Sahar of Zanzibar...have you returned from the grave to haunt me? You will not win. It is perilous for you to be on my island. I warned you before. Hear me now! Leave on the ferry within two days or meet my wrath. Understand?"

Captive in his grasp, she jerked back with wide eyes as he spat his threats. In her peripheral vision, she spied the missionary rushing in her direction. "Let me go!" Olivia pulled her arm out of the Indian's grip.

"Olivia, let me give you a ride to your hotel." Eli forced himself between the Indian and Olivia to retrieve her luggage. "We're always glad to have tourists on our island."

Olivia wiped drops of perspiration from her forehead as she followed the missionary. Trembling, she slid into the front seat of his SUV and fumbled her attempts to fasten the seat belt.

Eli watched her, locked the doors, and offered assistance with her seat belt before he plunged them into the traffic flow, leaving the angry Indian in the dust. "You okay?"

Olivia saw the Indian in the side mirror as she massaged her arm where he'd grabbed her. "I think I'll have a bruise. But I'm okay." She took some deep breaths in an attempt to get her heart rate back on an even keel. "Thanks for coming to my

rescue. Ali Baba was furious.” Her voice rose to a soprano level as she spoke. She laughed nervously.

“What did he say to you?” He glanced in her direction, then returned his focus to the road.

“He called me the Sahar of Zanzibar and asked if I’d come back from the grave to torment him. He demanded I leave on the ferry within two days or else. Who does he think he is?”

“Ali Baba?” The corner of Eli’s mouth lifted in a slight smile.

“Yeah, like Ali Baba and the forty thieves.”

“It’s almost comical how close you are in your assessment. His name is Aga Kahn. I think he gave himself that title so people would assume he’s a relative of His Highness Prince Karim Aga Kahn IV, but there’s no relation. He thinks he rules Zanzibar and demands to be treated like royalty. He doesn’t want Christianity to spread in this Muslim stronghold.”

“Sounds like you’ve faced him before.” She perused the handsome missionary, probably six feet tall, very toned, and tan, truly a commanding presence with a strong jaw and calloused, worker-man hands.

Eli downshifted the Land Rover SUV as they neared a traffic jam. “I have many times. He’s dangerous. Proceed with caution, Ms. Stone.”

“Since you rescued me, you can call me Olivia.”

He took a detour to the side of the road. “Which resort are you staying at?”

“Ocean Paradise Resort and Spa. You know where it is?”

“Yeah, on a great strip of beach. Good choice.” He dodged a goat meandering across the road and stole a look at her. “You don’t have a twin, do you?”

“No, I’m an only child. Why?” She caught a look at his profile. Are all rescuers this good-looking? Clean cut, well-built, with amber eyes. His brown hair had just enough curl to rebel against being styled. Too bad he was a grieving widower and a missionary on assignment. He could put her heart in a tug-of-

war. *I'm a Christian, but missionary work takes commitment to a whole other level. So, nix that idea, Olivia.*

He downshifted the SUV as they circled a roundabout. "You're a replica of my wife until I hear your voice or look into your eyes."

"No wonder you looked as if you'd seen a ghost. I've read there are six degrees of separation and everyone has a twin somewhere, but there is a minute chance you'd ever meet them." Her nervousness had her chatting excessively. *Maybe I'm more upset than I thought.* She braced herself for a pothole on the tarmac. "You think that's why Aga Kahn said

I'd returned from the grave to torment him, don't you?" He didn't answer.

She watched the scene of the locals laboring and children playing with handmade toys. "He called me a Sahar. What's a Sahar?"

"*Sahar* has several meanings. It's that special moment just before dawn. A *Sahar* is also a special person who is known to be enchanting, gifted, and happy. She's called a falcon."

"A falcon flying over Africa—I'm a flight attendant who flies the African skies. But how would he know that?"

He hesitated again. "He probably doesn't. He thinks you're my late wife. *Sahar* also refers to a finder of truth. Which is probably the meaning he was using."

"I don't understand."

He pulled the truck into the entrance of Ocean Paradise Resort and put it in Park then faced Olivia. "My wife was overly bold in her witnessing. She loved to 'share the truth of the gospel' with anyone who would listen. Many Muslims have converted to Christianity because of Joy. She angered Aga Kahn repeatedly, and after several warnings, she was stabbed and left bleeding at my gate. Twenty-four hours later, she died."

Tears filled Olivia's eyes. "That had to be devastating. Why are you still here?"



“I can’t leave until I prove who took Joy’s life. I owe her that much. I’ve been gathering clues for almost a year but can’t prove it yet. It’s like I’m chasing the wind. My replacement on this mission assignment is in language school, learning Swahili as we speak, so my time left here is limited.”

“I understand. Is Judah at risk?” She glanced back at the sleeping child.

“I thought he could have been taken today, then I saw you.”

“Tough afternoon. Sorry.” She started to touch his arm, then pulled back.

“Just be careful, Olivia.”

He took her phone and put his number in it and called his phone to capture her number. “Call if you need anything. I’ll text you my address. Zanzibar is an amazing place, but it can be dangerous for a woman traveling alone.” He got out and retrieved her suitcase from the back of the SUV.

The touch of his hand, as she took her luggage, sent warmth up her arm. She met his eyes and bit her bottom lip. Staring for a long moment, she held his gaze. “I’m sorry for your pain, Eli. You be careful. You’ve got some precious cargo in that car seat.” She rolled her bag toward the registration desk but looked back once more. He was still where she’d left him. “Thanks for the ride.”

He lifted his hand in a wave and turned to leave.

Olivia waited in line at the reception desk while contemplating her strange afternoon. It was a weird day. A little boy thought she was his mother, then she was threatened by a terrorist and rescued by a hero. All she wanted was to explore her options about a future on this island, not to come face to face with the man of her dreams with mesmerizing eyes. She was not looking for romance, like in those fairy-tale novels that passengers leave on airplanes. She needed sand and sun, and some peace and quiet, then several job interviews. Now she was in the middle of drama,

drama, drama. What was it about her that brought out the crazies?

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Aga Kahn perched his hands on his hips and watched the American's vehicle speed away. If his piercing gaze obeyed the wishes of his mind, the Sahar would have turned to salt on the spot. She should have stayed dead. Now she must experience my wrath again. Dust billowed at Aga Kahn's feet as the missionary drove away. Doesn't their Bible say ashes to ashes and dust to dust? They need a stern reminder.

Aga Kahn pulled out his cell phone and spoke loudly, competing with the traffic noise. "Fahad, meet me at my office in ten minutes. Bring Zubair with you. We have a problem."

He texted his driver, slammed the phone shut, then put it in the hidden pocket of his robe. Within minutes, his luxury sedan pulled to the side of the road. The driver hurried to open the door for him before returning to the driver's seat.

"To my home office, Asim." Aga Kahn plotted possibilities during the drive. The streets, bustling with people, animals, and vehicles, hindered their progress, irritating him all the more.

When his building came into view, he admired the arched entry with his ornate door. When the Sahar was off Zanzibar Island, he planned to add additional adornments to his door. People needed to be reminded of his importance.

Fahad opened his door for him when he arrived. "Zubair will be here within five minutes."

"Good. Have my chefs prepare masala tea and serve it in the conference room. Tell them to bring nans or bread. And hurry. I'll be waiting." Aga Kahn allowed his houseworker to dust the edge of his robe and his sandaled feet before he stomped into the building. He paced the conference room several times

before he took his seat at the head of the lacquered table and banged his fist on its surface. Breathing deep several times, he replayed the encounter at the port.

With a furrowed brow and clenched jaw, he stared at one of the ornate chandeliers that hung over the gleaming table hosting twenty high-back chairs. Persian rugs to cushion their steps were made in burgundy and deep-blue designs that matched the velvet of the ornate seats. But the grandeur of the room didn't temper Aga Kahn's anger at this recent turn of events.

Zubair apologized for being late. "I came with haste, Aga Kahn. Sorry for your distress."

"Have tea." Aga Kahn motioned for them to be seated, then sipped his brew. Fahad and Zubair drank their tea and ate a nan until the moment Aga Kahn finished his drink. Then teatime had ended.

Kahn stood and paced. "When I give an order, I expect it to be carried out as I have instructed. Without exception. When it doesn't happen, I get angry. Very angry." He stared at the wide-eyed men.

"I must inform you that Joy Deckland lives. I spoke with her today. She arrived from Dar es Salaam on the ferry this afternoon. I commanded Usama to end her life. But he failed me. What do you know of this?" He looked from one man to the other. "I called him, but his phone went directly to voice mail."

Fahad stood to speak. "Aga Kahn, I know he stabbed her and left her body at the missionary's gate. When Deckland found her, he took her to the hospital. I heard the guard at his compound say she died the next day, but I do not have proof of her demise." Fahad took his seat.

Zubair stood. "The missionary and his small son went to the mainland the next day to take her body to the United

States. Could she have lived and they are deceiving us?" Zubair sat again.

"I do not know, but her return infuriates me. Usama's name means lion, but he didn't complete the job as I instructed. Is he a coward? A liar? I want you men to question him. We will have to deal with his failure. Zubair, check with your contacts at the hospital. Confirm her death. Fahad, get me a copy of Joy Deckland's photo from the Visa Office. I told the Sahar to leave Zanzibar. If she isn't on the ferry when it departs within two days, we will take extreme measures. I will watch her tonight and tomorrow night if she risks staying on the island. Be back at this same time tomorrow. We may have to make strategic plans to clean up Usama's mess."

The two men stood and bowed before backing out of the conference room on quiet feet. Aga Kahn lifted a bell and rang it. A servant entered. "Yes, Bwana."

"I am stressed. Prepare some entertainment for me. Are the dancers here?"

"Yes, Bwana. I will summon them. Should I dismiss your driver for the day?" The worker was careful not to make eye contact.

"No. I'll be going out again."

"I will inform him, Bwana." He bowed and backed out of the room.

Aga Kahn drank another cup of his inky brew as he contemplated the fate of the Sahar. *Death will come swiftly for her this time. I keep my promises.*

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Judah slept while Frances hummed an old worship song that had been written by Africans, "God Is so Good," as Eli maneuvered the afternoon traffic with its stops and starts and near misses. He'd had too many conflicting emotions for one

afternoon. His heart had skipped a beat when Frances yelled at him across the market.

“Bwana, I cannot find Judah!”

Panic gripped him as he searched for his little boy, the only bright spot in his life. He’d checked the area where they sold live chickens. But no Judah. He looked under the tables, hide-and-seek—his favorite game—but no Judah. He stood on some crates, elevating himself to scan the area. But no Judah. *Has he been kidnapped? O God, please no!* He hurried toward the water, a parent’s worst fear pushing him forward.

Then he saw Frances—and Judah—in *Joy’s* arms and nearly fainted.

Frances hadn’t moved, apparently shocked to see Olivia holding Judah. She waited quietly and allowed Eli to handle the situation.

His chest squeezed as sweat dotted his brow reliving the experience.

“Bwana, my heart beat so fast when I couldn’t find baby Judah,” Frances spoke quietly so Judah wouldn’t wake up. “I searched and searched. When my eyes found our boy in her arms, I thought Mama Joy had returned to us. But she does not speak like Mama Joy. Did the Lord send her?”

*Oh, I couldn’t be that lucky.* “I don’t know, but God is faithful and has seen our tears. Maybe the Lord sent her for Judah. He’s sleeping so peacefully now.”

Frances checked on the boy. “This is the first time he isn’t crying while sleeping like he usually does.”

When they arrived at the missionary compound, Eli waited for the guard to open their gate. “I hope it gave him peace, Frances. Losing his mother has been rough on him.” Eli parked the SUV in front of their mission house made of cement blocks, metal doors, and a tin roof. Not an attractive dwelling, but large enough and very secure. He carried Judah to his bed to finish his nap. Before leaving the room, Eli moved the boy’s hair off