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## Chapter 4

### THE ISLAND

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*Trick*

*Morning, Monday, June 16*

Trick arose from the depths of sleep like a diver ascending to a roundlet of light on the surface of the sea. Even after waking, he lay unmoving in bed for several moments...until he jerked as if he'd been shocked in the foot and sat up convulsively, throwing off a coverlet and scanning the unfamiliar room. He sat in a canopy bed made from dark wood. Across the room stood a wardrobe and a dresser holding a bowl of fruit. His clothes from yesterday lay scattered across the floor from bedroom door to bed. A fan spun silently overhead, rippling the bed linen. Between the slats of the plantation shutters green somethings slid back and forth outside the window.

He remembered now.

The day before, Trick had taken three progressively smaller aircraft, from Omaha to Miami, from Miami to St. John's, Antigua, and from St. John's to Independence City, Antillia, arriving long after dark. He'd fallen asleep in the back seat of the van that had transported him along the coast to Antillia Inn & Bungalows, where he'd groggily checked in and then gone straight

to bungalow four (reserved by his father's company) and fallen into bed. That is, he'd arrived on a West Indies island, far from home, and he'd seen almost nothing of the place yet. He would have to change that.

But first there was something else he'd remembered: his father was supposed to be here by morning. He should be here *now*.

Trick got out of bed, pulled on yesterday's shorts, and went to peek into the other bedroom; it was as empty and neat as house-keeping had left it. Disappointment without surprise—a familiar reaction. Trick turned away.

Placed in the center of the dining table was a telephone answering machine with its message light blinking red. He pushed Play and dropped into a chair to listen.

"Hi, Trick." Dad's voice. "I can't wait to see you, but I've been detained, maybe two or three days—work, you know. We'll have great times when I get there. In the meantime, you go ahead and get started with your job you-know-where and get those documents that are wanted as soon as you can, and then you can be done there. Letty's made sure you have all the information you'll need. It's in the safe in the wardrobe of the corner bedroom. Miracle's birthday." First a click and then a solid red light.

So that was it. You're on your own. Unless I decide to join you sometime. Get to work, boy. Trick wasn't sure his dad was ever going to show up on the island; maybe he'd never intended to leave New York at all. How was Trick going to make his dad hurt like *he* was hurting if Richard never came near?

He crossed to the picture window in the living room and opened the shutters. There, framed like a dream of tropical Eden: palm trees nodding and fluttering! blue sky with cotton puffs! a bay and farther-out islands! water birds wheeling! dockside with boats! bougainvillea and hibiscus! swimming pool! lounge chairs and shade umbrellas! a strip of beach! Even the boy mowing the grass appeared to be giving the last perfection to paradise.

Here was a new world to Trick. All he wanted now was to get out into it.

*Trick*

A YELLOW YAMAHA FS1 motorbike leaned against its kickstand outside the bungalow door. Trick was used to riding dirt bikes that had more power than this moped, but still, it looked like it could be fun transportation in a place like this. Trick had already thrown on some clothes. The key was in the Fizzy. Should he? Why not! His dad had left him alone, and maybe that wasn't entirely a bad thing, because he was on a Caribbean island and there was no one to tell him what to do.

He hopped on, looped in the parking lot to familiarize himself with the motorbike, then shot out onto Highway 1, leaving a cloud of blue smoke behind him. He felt fantastically free, driving along the paved road in the sunshine, the engine whining, his hair blustering, the wind parting his unbuttoned shirt to bare his chest.

Just his luck that the first car to come along was driving on the wrong side of the road and heading straight for him. Trick held up a hand to make sure he was seen. A blare came from the Mercedes-Benz with the elderly man at the wheel. Trick couldn't understand why the old guy didn't move over to the side of the road where he belonged. At the last moment, Trick had to swerve to the left just as the Mercedes driver laid on the horn again and Dopplered past him. Getting a better look at which side of the car the man was steering from, Trick understood: this island must be one of those places he'd heard about where people drive on the left. Okay then. He settled into the left lane. It felt wrong and fun, like sin.

The road never ceased curving on this sprawling island with its volcanic humps in the middle, its rivers cascading through jungle, and its fingers reaching into the sea, edged with lace. Every turn revealed another view of the Caribbean on one side or the Atlantic on the other. Once, he spotted a crocodile, watchful,

motionless, in a water-filled roadside ditch. Later, he stopped for a pair of green monkeys crossing the road ahead of him and holding hands. *Green monkeys?*

After a while, he descended into a small town—Bishops Bay, according to the sign. All the buildings were painted in such bright colors (blues, oranges, pinks, yellows) they would get a homeowner in Fremont snubbed by the neighbors. Many of them had balconies jutting over the street. All the shops had their doors open to the breeze. People sat at umbrella tables on the sidewalks. Some people (more whites than blacks) were wearing shorts and T-shirts, and he presumed these were tourists. Others (more blacks than whites) were fully dressed, even wearing long-sleeved shirts, and were probably residents of Antillia. How could these locals not be too hot, dressed like that?

He found a shop offering convenience items as well as imported shells and plastic gifts and cheap printed clothing made in Japan or Mexico. The other shoppers in this store were all of the white, lightly dressed, probable-tourist type. Trick bought a pair of reflective sunglasses and a stack of postcards but passed over the suntan lotion. A rack by the cash register held flyers advertising boat trips, bus tours, and “the real island experience” of this or that.

It was lunchtime, and Trick hadn’t eaten since yesterday, in another country, and so he was ravenous. He parked in the lot of a restaurant, called Dairy Kween, that closely resembled a place where he liked to eat back home, and he ordered two loaded burgers, extra fries, and the shop’s soft ice cream, exactly like at home, from an expat American at the counter. He’d already caught on that air conditioning was rare here, but this restaurant had it, and it felt good.

Back outside, Trick looked around for a while and then followed an iguana that strutted proud as a rooster and even sort of had a comb and wattle like a rooster. Crouch-walking behind a bench, Trick overheard an exchange between an older American couple.

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Her. "It's pretty here, but I think Bora Bora was nicer."

Him, jaded. "One tropical island is much like any other."

Was that true? Were all tropical islands basically the same? When he'd drawn Zabiluski, had he drawn every tropical island in the world? He wouldn't mind if all the others were like the one he was on right now.

Abandoning the iguana, he proceeded to the shore, where he admired the boats in the slips or cruising—he'd always liked boats. Surprise: a red telephone box that would have been at home in fog-bound London stood in the sand, leaning slightly, beside a palm tree. A line of feathery pines held their arms out over the water. He walked along a stretch of beach, kicking sea wrack like he might kick leaves in a street back home. He strolled to the end of the pier and looked toward the horizon, taking a deep breath of marine air. How relaxed he was! It seemed to him that he'd already adjusted to island ways.

Back on the road, he rounded the mostly unpopulated southern end of the island. At one point he decided, in his new free, spontaneous way, to take a side road toward an attractive peninsula soaking in the sunshine and bathed in ocean waves. Turning short of a dilapidated tavern at the intersection, he continued along an isthmus that was sandy on the windward side and planted with palms on the lee, until he was confronted with a wall crossing the entire neck of land and extending into the water on both sides. The wall—with a row of sharp-edged shells embedded along the top—was made of gray lava rock thickly daubed with mortar and had a wrought-iron double gate, painted black over salt rust. There was no sign, but the wall and gate themselves plainly declared, "Only if permitted." Trick understood who this compound at the end of the world belonged to. Pivoting his Fizzy, he sent up shell fragments and headed back the way he'd come.

He hadn't seen all of the island, but he'd gotten a sampling of it and was feeling pleased with his first foray when he returned to the inn.

In bungalow four, he went to the phone and made a call, with a fun +1, to the Willis house in Fremont. Danny's mother greeted him with obvious pleasure and said she'd get Danny for him. A couple of minutes later, when she came back to the phone, her tone had changed to one of pitying. "I'm sorry, Trick honey. Danny says he's not available."

After changing into his swimsuit, Trick headed back outside to the inn's swimming pool. The water felt too warm for real swimming, so he just paddled back and forth, looking around at the inn's meticulous grounds and the guests passing by. He put his face into the water and watched his own shadow gliding through the wobbling white film of light that overspread the pool bottom.

Following the swim, he took over a lounge chair beside the pool and wrote postcards to his mother and sister. Afterward, he closed his eyes and soon was dozing in the poolside shade and palm rustle.

Dark came earlier than it seemed to him it should. He ate a room-service meal (steak and fries and ginger ale) while watching a suspense movie on TV. He ate so much that, by the time the movie was over, he felt sick to his stomach. Best to ignore it. The way his face and ears and forearms were radiating heat, it had to be sunburn. How could this place have gotten so messy so fast? Grains of sand stuck annoyingly to his bare feet when he crossed the tile floor. He stood at the open door listening to people talking and laughing over dinner at the inn restaurant, and then he closed the door and listened to the silence within the bungalow.

He took a closer look around and found the liquor supply in the kitchen. Trick had snuck beer and wine before but had never tried hard liquor; now he decided to sample some Antillia's Own rum. He poured a little in a tumbler and drank it off neat. Taken like that, it was burning to his throat and awful tasting. Maybe if he mixed some with ginger ale. That was much better, went down fine. A little stiffer next time. In his mind he kept going over and

over again the message from his father he'd listened to earlier. *Just a delay of two or three days*—the more he thought about it, the more it seemed to him like an excuse. The rum was also good with this tonic water stuff. If Dad wasn't going to be joining him, there wasn't any reason to show up for the job on that forbidding-looking compound. Interesting; he found he could now tolerate the rum in sips straight from the bottle. After a while, his head pained him on one side. His stomach went into a state of upheaval. He stumbled outside to the grass....

Early the next morning, as the day was dawning and birds were beginning to call, Trick felt his arm being shaken. A voice filtered into his consciousness. "Mr. Horngold, Mr. Horngold."

Trick opened his eyes and immediately regretted it—the low-slanting sunlight set off a devastating ache in his head. He emitted a puppy whine.

Before reclosing his eyes, he saw enough to realize he was filthy and sprawled on a lounge chair outside his bungalow, beside a row of banana trees. Leaning over him was an older man with a thick gray mustache.

"I am the manager, Anibal Curtiz," came a voice with a Mexican accent. "Please, Mr. Horngold, let's get you inside your accommodation."

Clearly the man was going to help Trick to his feet whether Trick wanted it or not.

"Oh, oh," moaned Trick.

"Señorita Leticia Gonzalez called me from New York yesterday. She wanted me to look in on you from time to time, since your father's arrival has been delayed. I explained that I am not a child minder, nor do we employ such at this inn. You would do best, I think, to call her if you are in need of anything. Judging by your appearance, you could bear with some looking after."

Curtiz opened the door to the bungalow and helped Trick lie down on a sofa.

"Permit me to say, Mr. Horngold, that Antillia Inn and Bungalows is *not* the kind of place where boys get drunk."

Antillia

Mom,

I got here fine. This place is amazing, even nicer than the picture on the other side. I just got done swimming in the pool. Of course I really wish I was sweating it up on the farm! Your ex-husband seems to have gotten lost on the way. Oh, well. Have you heard anything from Danny?

T

ANTILLIA 13c  
NEW ARDEN ANTILLIA  
17 JUN 80

Mrs. Sharon Horngold  
111 River Bluff Road  
Fremont, Nebr. 68025 USA

Hi, Mir,

How are you? Still having fun with summer vacation? It's really nice here. Today I saw a dolphin just like the one on the other side of this card. Also two monkeys, like you and me! I left something for you in your window box!!

Your brother, Trick

ANTILLIA 13c  
NEW ARDEN ANTILLIA  
17 JUN 80

Miss Miracle Horngold  
111 River Bluff Road  
Fremont, Nebr. 68025 USA



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*Trick*

*A little later*

SHOWING SOLID RED, the message light on the answering machine stared at Trick when he'd finished his shower and returned, towel clad, to the living area of the bungalow. He exhaled. Maybe he *should* try out that job Letty had arranged for him. He'd swallowed aspirin before his shower, and he was feeling something resembling human again, but he knew he couldn't spend another day like the last one.

After a brief further hesitation, he headed into the corner bedroom, opened the safe on the first try with 10-5-67, and pulled out its lone object: a well-stuffed string-tie envelope. At the dining table, he opened it and spilled the contents.

The first thing to catch his eye was a stack of money, bound by a rubber band; he grabbed it and thumbed through the bills. Their denominations were low, coming to a hundred dollars in US currency and five hundred in Eastern Caribbean banknotes with Queen Elizabeth's picture on one side and a palm tree on the other. So here was less than a fortune, but still it was fun to have the cash. The EC bills seemed like play money to him, and he wondered what he would spend them on.

The envelope had disgorged many other items as well.

A mini cassette had his name written on the label. He inserted it into the answering machine, hit Play, and listened while he sifted through the envelope's other contents. A voice spoke to him:

"So there you are, after all, eh, *mi amigo*? Ready for a little adventure?"

"Robinson's peninsula is on the southeast corner of the island, just a few miles from the town where the company bungalow is located. I've had a motorbike left for you to get to and from."

"Thanks, Letty," Trick said while spreading out a map of the island.

Then his attention was caught by an aerial photo of the peninsula, with key sites labeled as if this were military recon: "Main House," "Cottages," "Airstrip," "Hangar," "Office."

Letty was going on: "They fired their gardener a little while ago, and I pulled a few strings to get you hired on to take his place. I said you had experience in taking care of landscaping. A resourceful boy like you, you should be able to bluff your way through it long enough to do what you're really there for. Your hours are one to five, Tuesday through Saturday."

Trick looked at the wall clock. It was 11:35 a.m.

"As far as you're concerned, all that really matters is Robinson's office. It's on the eastern side of the peninsula. He works there with at most a few employees who live on the island. There are probably a lot of times when it's empty or near empty, so I'm hoping it's not a big deal for you—" Trick paused the tape.

He started looking through a lot of information about Robinson.

A blow-up photo of Robinson, taken from a distance as he stood on a balcony of some kind, showed a black man in his forties, wearing a straw fedora, a wide-collared shirt with broad vertical stripes, and dark slacks. He had a stubbly beard and deep-set eyes. There was something about that face, those eyes. *Intense* was the word. A man not to be taken lightly.

Another picture revealed a plain-looking woman who seemed oddly familiar to Trick. She had pale skin, pale-colored hair, pale blue eyes, and small features. The photo was labeled on the back "Miss Bird."

Trick skimmed articles from business magazines profiling Ike Robinson. They told a story of a man whose life started out seemingly charmed: top student at Xavier University, ace fighter pilot in the Vietnam War, founder of an aeronautical electronics manufacturing company in his hometown of Huntsville, Alabama. A man who surprised many white Americans and inspired many black Americans. Then in 1969 things changed. The magazines were vague about it, but they made it seem that he'd stepped

down from leadership of his company in favor of his younger brother, Edward. Around the same time, his wife died and he bought an Englishman's estate on the island of Antillia. So far as was known, he'd never left his compound since arriving. He was an "exile," a "hermit," a "recluse," the stories said. But he'd started a new company—watercraft builder Rob-Go. The company's primary location was in Tampa Bay, but most of his employees knew Robinson only as a voice on a speakerphone. Although he frequently had his top leaders or other business contacts to the island for meetings, he never left home himself. His COO, Davina Bird, went everywhere for him. Together, they'd racked up a remarkable record of success in only a decade. Rob-Go was known for its fearless innovation, making products that were widely sought after in North America and Europe. Its new products were not only well engineered but also beautifully designed, with a sort of late 1950s/early 1960s chic—the "Robinson look." Whenever Robinson brought out a new product, the competitors quailed. One of the articles called him a "magician"; most of the others reported his nickname "King Robinson"; an inventive headline writer had come up with "Rob-God." He was believed to have amassed an enormous personal fortune, yet he still lived relatively simply on his island property.

Trick pushed Play. "—to find the trade plans. We're talking about blueprint designs in a cardboard tube. They're reportedly for a submarine that is also a helicopter, which I don't even understand but which would probably be in violation of his noncompete. See, kiddo, when he sold his company, he legally bound himself not to build anything in any way aeronautical, so possibly these designs would be helpful to have as proof against him. Anyway, you'll recognize the designs because they'll be marked by the code name Proteus on the outside of the cardboard tube. They're undoubtedly in the room Robinson calls 'the chart room,' the place where he does his creative work, next to his office. There should be a copy machine nearby. Make copies of everything you find in the tube and then put the original paperwork

back where you found it. Then get the colorful analogy out of there.

“We’ve got a cover for you that should hold up as long as you need it to. You’ll see that we’ve provided a false Antillian ID card, just in case. Your name is Richard James, you’re sixteen, and your supposed address is on the card. Let’s say your parents are divorced and you’re living with your dad in Antillia. You have family back in Nebraska. So you can see, there isn’t much you have to remember that isn’t true. Keep a low profile. You’re just a teenager who’s new to the island and wanting a part-time job. Do *not* mention the name Horngold, because remember, Robinson knows and mistrusts your dad. Understand?”

Oh, I understand.

“Now, Mr. Richard James, don’t you do anything dangerous. Just show up for work at the compound, pull a few weeds, and look out for the first moment when you can sneak into the office and copy Proteus. When you’ve got the plans, give them to your dad.”

So apparently Dad really was coming to the island. If that were the case, then Trick definitely should take the job, because according to his scheme in coming here, his dad had to know he could copy the plans but refused to.

“Put the packet back in the safe after you’ve familiarized yourself with the contents. Good luck, my young spy friend.”

Trick fingered the false ID card. He had to admit, this could be fun!

*Trick*

*A little later*

THE SAME ENTRANCE in the lava-rock wall Trick had approached before faced him again. He spoke into a two-way speaker mounted beside it: “Richard James, the new gardener.”

“Yes, Mr. James. You’ll find me waiting for you at Robinson House.” A woman’s voice, British.

The gates parted.

Wearing light coveralls and boots he’d found in a closet of the bungalow, along with his farm hat, Trick putted his motorbike into the compound, came to a post with signs labeled “Office” and “Residence” pointing in opposite directions, and followed the rightward lane among trees and flowering bushes. The estate’s single-story main house, half hidden by heavy plantings and shaded by a generous roof overhang, was made of the same gray lava rock as the compound wall, along with turquoise-painted wood trim around the windows and doors. Trick looped around the circle drive with a fountain and fish pool in the middle and came to a stop beside a woman standing in the shade of a tree. The natural peace of the place, with the fountain spatter registering as the loudest noise, took over the moment he shut down the Fizzy.

There was nothing unusual about the woman’s appearance, except that she was so pale it seemed impossible she lived in the tropics. She wore a skirt and a jacket over a floral blouse, with a large bag hanging from one arm. With her other hand, she reached out to shake hands with him. “Davina Bird,” she introduced herself in the British voice he was expecting.

“People call me Trick.”

While they shook hands, her eyes scrutinized him, taking in his face and his sweat-stained Drylands Farm cap. “If I might just see your ID.”

Trick handed over his falsified card and glanced about while Miss Bird examined the card. This place was lush and luxurious, for sure.

Returning the card, Miss Bird said, “You’ll be responsible for all the gardening. Cutting the grass. Fertilizing the trees. Taking care of the flower beds and hedges. I may assume you know how to do the lot?”

“Oh, sure. Well, I mean—”

“Some light cleaning comes with it. You’ll be expected to tidy up the hangar and the office building once each week, on Saturday. They’re on the other side. There are two cottages round here, but they are unoccupied at present, so you will leave them alone. You have no responsibilities at the main house. You are not to enter it.”

“All right.”

“The gardening shed is beside the garridge.” A feminine finger lifted in the direction of the garage. “Start with cutting the grass all through the park here—it’s overgrown considerably since we’ve been without gardening help. Also, the previous young man had begun uprooting a dead tree beside the lagoon when he ceased being employed here. You can finish that task when you get a chance. And then the beds, alone, will keep you for days, I should think. Now, questions?”

Minutes later, as Trick was riding the lawn mower out of the shed, he couldn’t help thinking, What am I doing here? He even considered jumping back on his motorbike and leaving the compound. But then he figured that, now he was here, he should play out his role, just for the day.

Much of the peninsula was left in its wild state, yet the part that was turfed and landscaped still occupied several acres. Someone had planted tropical trees, bushes, and flowers from around the world, specimens labeled with little brass signs. Trick tried to memorize them as he passed on the lawn mower, in case his knowledge should be called upon. “Blue Latan Palm,” “Frangipani,” “Rainbow Eucalyptus,” “Flamboyant,” “Bird of Paradise.” ... Even the names here were exotic.

Trick had a rough plan of the peninsula in his head, thanks to Letty’s recon photos. He made large circuits with the lawn mower so he could get a view of the landmarks before winding back through the plantings.

On the higher, rockier windward side, he found the airstrip and a hangar with the nose cone of a business jet visible through the open doors. How cool it would be to have a private jet! He

looked down the runway and saw that it crossed a bridge over a chasm before coming to an end seemingly out over the sea. The pilot had better be good.

A short distance down the coast from the airstrip, he spotted his objective—Robinson's office building. The information he'd received from Letty said that its official name was Rob-Go International Headquarters but everyone called it Topside. Now he knew why: it resembled the upper deck of a sleek ocean liner, with rounded corners, windows of green-tinted glass, and a prow-shaped balcony protruding over a cliff and pointing out to sea. A short distance away, at the base of the cliff, was a long dock with no boats presently moored. Directly below the office building were floats holding up a net and a wooden walkway to form a large rectangular pen with a dolphin swimming inside.

Two vehicles were parked in the lot behind the building, one of them presumably Miss Bird's, so evidently it wasn't a good time to go reconnoitering inside. That didn't bother him. He was curious about the product designs his dad wanted, but the whole point was that he wasn't going to disturb them.

He turned the mower. Man, beauty in every direction here. Colorful birds dipped and flew. A pair of great tortoises, like self-transporting rocks, were making their laborious way from somewhere to somewhere else. "Heaven Lotus," "Golden Rain," "Bromeliad," "Jasmine," "Jacaranda...." The plant names he repeated in his head made a kind of singsong as he mowed.

The lagoon side of the peninsula was lower and greener than the other. He found an abandoned tennis court and a croquet lawn. Near the garage sat a golf cart with a loopy R monogram on the canopy. Peeking through the garage window, Trick recognized a two-toned (black, silver) Stutz Blackhawk sedan as well as a mystery car up on blocks and covered by a tarp. The main house, old-fashioned and discreet, was more sprawling than he'd realized at first. The two wooden cottages, one yellow, one greenish-blue, both with porches on posts, were situated on a slope among palms a short distance from the house.

“Mango,” “Heliconia,” “Lime”—in fact, an entire grove of limes and lemons and oranges.

It took most of the afternoon, circling trees and flower beds, to cut all the overgrown grass. When he returned the mower to its shed, he still had half an hour left before quitting time, so he decided to take a look at the tree Miss Bird had mentioned.

### *Trick*

THE DEAD TREE was easy to find beside the terrace at the rear of the house, near the lagoon. It was leaning and had a hole dug around its roots and a steel spike lodged underneath where someone had attempted pushing it over. He walked around it once, then hopped down in the hole, squatted in the dirt, and tried using his whole body to lever the tree over. He was sure it would go, but even after pushing again and again, he couldn't budge it. He climbed out of the hole and stopped to catch his breath, remove his hat, and think about how else to approach this problem. Or maybe he should just give up and leave. He asked himself, *Why am I doing this?*

Just then, Trick heard a motor thwupping and gargling on the lagoon. The sunlight skittered in scales across the waves, and he shaded his eyes with his forearm, the better to peer into the brilliance. Out of the dazzle there appeared a wooden skiff with a figure seated inside, one hand on the outboard tiller. As the person cut the motor and the boat glided toward the dock, Trick got his first good look at her.

She was a dark-skinned girl, with a round face and a mass of afro-textured hair caught up behind her head. As she mounted the dock, he saw that her clothing consisted of a red bikini top, denim shorts, and black-and-white high-top sneakers with ivory lace socks peeking out above them. Trick went into respiratory distress. *She was the most beautiful girl he had ever seen.*

In a panic now, he realized she was coming toward him. Soon



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she was standing close and looking up at him with her head tilted. Her gaze slid all over his face like she was reading him. She was smiling.

“Hi, I’m Nikki.”

Trick suddenly realized how sweaty and grass stained and streaked with dirt he was. He looked down at himself, then senselessly rubbed his hair from back to front, leaving it mussed.

“Nikki Robinson,” the girl expanded.

Oh yes, right, he was expected to answer. “Trick.”

“‘Trick?’”

“For Richard. Richard...James.”

“I see. Welcome, Trick.” She was smiling more broadly at him now.

He’d exhausted his ability to speak in the presence of such loveliness and only stared idiotically. Breathing was still a labor.

“Nikki. Nikki!” A woman’s call carried from an open window at the back of the terrace.

“I guess you’re American?” Nikki said. “I guess you work here now? I guess I’ll see you again? If you want, I mean.”

He nodded.

She slowly backed up, turned, gave a last look at him over her shoulder, then put her head down to jog into the house. If she’d been looking at any other guy, he would have said it was an admiring look she’d sent his way.

He repositioned the spike and tipped over the tree, hardly knowing he did it.