I love.

written and illustrated

by

Margaret Elizabeth Hulse

Mpulse Studio | Charlotte St. Charles A Narrative from the Adventurous Heart Literature Collection Dallas | New Orleans | San Pedro



This is a work of fiction.

Names, characters, businesses, places, events and incidents are either the products of the author's imagination or used in a fictitious manner.

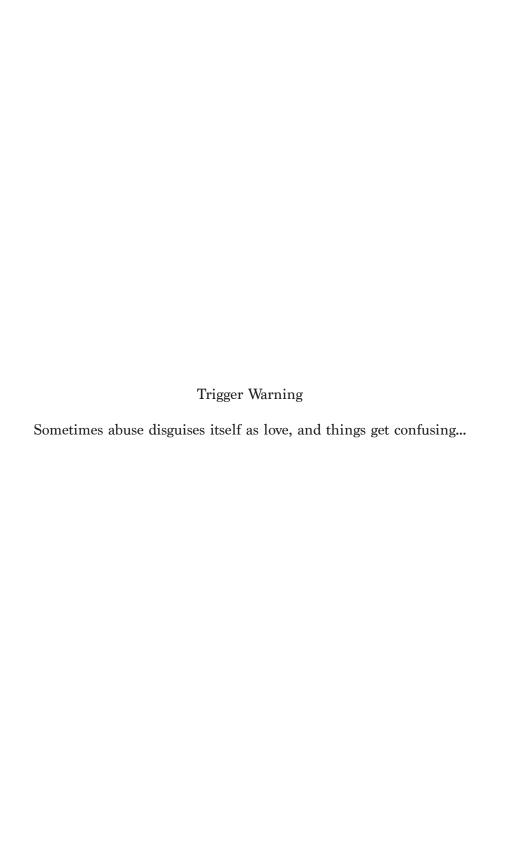
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INTRODUCTION

I started writing this book several years before I knew I was writing a book. I was writing literary vignettes, or musings, as I often refer to them, about love and romance in the Caribbean. Inspired by the trade winds and the endless sapphire waters, reflections of moonlight on the midnight water and lustful vibrations fueling passion drenched nights.

San Pedro is infused with inspiration and I started breathing it all in and letting it flow through my words. But I didn't want the book to be solely romantic poetry. I wanted to peel back layers and illustrate the realities of *love* on a small Caribbean island. It's sexy, but its also deep and dark and sordid. It's easy to get lost in fantasies, but the tide may turn if you decide to dive into the sea of vulnerability.

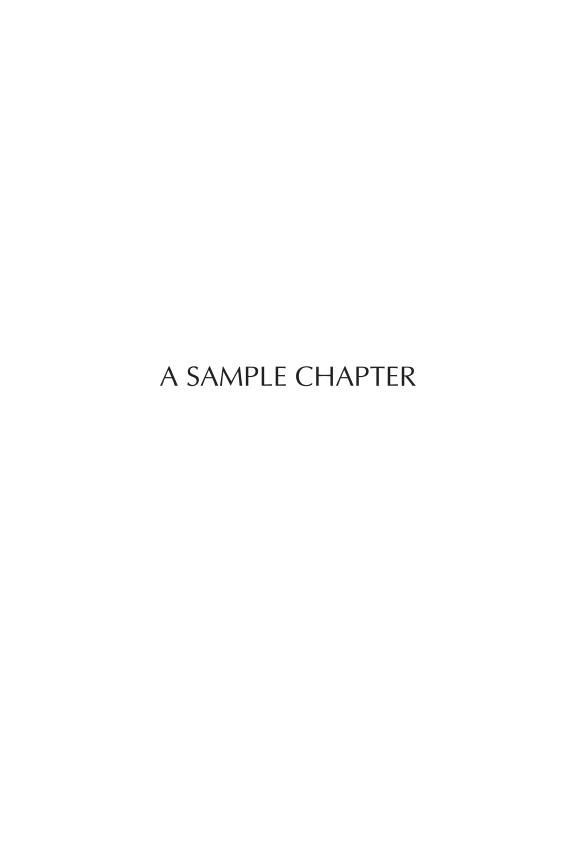
I chose to write this book from the perspective of Mona Lamar, an alter ego that I created for my first novel, *Sketches from the Heart of a Texas Artist.* She's this super visceral character—I created her at a time when I needed to live vicariously through her. . . and. . . I still do, sometimes. She is unapologetically—messy, but her passion is unwavering.

She's an artist, raised as Texas royalty: strong and resilient, but it's her passion that is her Achilles heel. It's a double edged sword because it is where her creativity lies, but it is also what sometimes leads her into darkness.

I moved to San Pedro around the same time that *Sketches* was published and I began authoring a series of short stories illustrating Mona's life with her love interest, Antoine, whom she met in *Sketches*.

Writing from her perspective allows me to reach beyond my personal experiences and weave in stories I've gathered from countless women whom I've met on the island, whether they reside full time, visited for an extended vacation, or were just passing through.

This book is fiction. Mona's thoughts and actions and fantasies belong to her. This is her story, illustrating love and intimacy in the Caribbean.



THE BEGINNING OF THE END

The sun began to set on the lagoon and the sky faded from azure to hues of violet and candy pink.

I hadn't heard from him.

The blood orange moon began to rise from behind the eastern horizon and I still hadn't heard from him.

You okay? I texted as anxiety ensued.

nothing-

The moon, now sitting a quarter from the midnight sky, no longer orange, cast a golden glow that glittered in the black night waters of the sea.

I'm getting worried. . . please let me know you're okay.

nothing-

I scanned the streets and the other men who worked on the water gathered in nearby bars, well into their third or fourth beer after a day on the sea, and I still hadn't heard from him.

I started calling—voicemail.

I called again-voicemail again. . . straight to voicemail.

I called his deck hand. No answer.

I called again. I got an answer. I was told a story about how they were repairing the bilge pump on his boat.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END

"Okay, cool." I thought. Except every other time he works on boat maintenance, I got a phone call that he would be running late. And if his phone had lost charge, then he would use his deck hand's phone to call me.

But not tonight.

He was distracted by something.

Under the starlit sky, in the soft island breeze, I breathed in what I understood was really happening.

The next day I stepped into a cabin on his boat and that's when I saw it. The evidence that he had been with another woman, tossed away in a waste basket that I had cleaned out the night before, and no excuse in the world was going to convince me that it wasn't his.

I love you, Allie He finally texted me.

But, I responded—
my name is... Mona
Who is Allie?

Chaw, I don't know anyone named Allie. It was auto correct

???
You just texted me
'I love you, Allie.'
Who is Allie?

Gyal, you lost.
There is no one named Allie.

It's the same story, different season.
We go through highs and lows down here—
ebbs and flows—
as the tide rises and falls and we feast then we're mawga.

It's the same story, different season. It started with me, but it really didn't because it started with another woman.

Season after season—

and I'm not special and neither was she and neither are you.

This is temptation island and the devil is laughing at the expense of our souls our tears our pain our jealousy our arrogance our desire for that

passion soaked kiss on a moonlit night.

There is a saying in Belize— 'If you don't listen, You're going to feel.'

The wind was heavy and the sky and the sea were void of color -black. The horizon didn't seem to exist and I brushed my hair from my face and tied it back because the wind was heavy and I sat alone and listened to the reef roar and I reminisced on the days before the island became a part of my soul.

The days when
the island was a fantasy,
a tropical vibration,
a vacation
a photoshoot,
a story to tell my friends in the
city.

I reminisced on the days when the island was a novelty

—on the days when I was a novelty.