

*The Summer
of
Mushy Love*



*by
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by Alessa

Twelve-year-old Masha Sanson's father found a new location every year for the family vacation, and this year it was the never-before-heard of Eventide Island.

Masha wasn't given many options when it came to vacation itineraries. The only solace she had was that this would be the last year of required attendance. Next summer she'd be thirteen, and as a fully-fledged teenager, she would have more choices at her disposal, or so she hoped.

To get to Eventide Island, Masha had to sit in the backseat of her father's SUV with her annoying five-year-old sister Patty for the three-hour drive across boring countryside before catching the Eventide State Ferry out of Rainbow Harbour. An hour and ten minutes later, the ferry docked at Eventide Island's only port, fourteen miles away from the mainland.

Masha and her sister could see the island from miles away because it was a clear day. One of the ferry workers said that if there was fog, and there often was, Eventide Island could feel like a world unto itself adrift in the ocean.

"Sounds like Eventide Island is located on the way to nowhere," Masha grumbled as the sea breeze tousled her chin-length, coffee-coloured hair while the blue eyes scanned the horizon.

Her father told her that the island was once known for its rock, which was once extracted from quarries in massive chunks and shipped all over the country. Now most of the quarries are deserted, and nature has turned them into swimming holes.

On the sloping north side of the island, sprawling, expensive estates were situated, each equipped with private docks and tennis courts. On the south side was Eventide Village, one of the busiest fishing harbours in the state, featuring fishing boats with funny names such as Marlin Monroe, Reel Love, Snapperologist, and Grim Reefer.

A population of about 1200 regular residents lived on the six by eight mile island year-round, and that number virtually tripled in the summer when visitors like Masha and her family arrived. The meandering island roads were either dead-ends or circled back to where they started, often leading confused tourists to become hopelessly lost.

The Sansons' returned to their car as the ferry approached the wharf. A few minutes later, Masha's Dad was driving the SUV off the ramp and following his phone's GPS to the rented cottage.

The drive was short but exciting. The girls watched all the colourful boats and fishing nets drying in the harbour. There was even an art market and what looked like a parasailing camp on the beach. Masha's Dad drove less than a half mile from the village before pulling into a small side street with six fair sized cottages and houses on the strip that led to a dead end at the beach.

"Which one is ouws!?" Patty asked with an excited lisp.

"This one," her Dad turned into the small driveway of "The Cove Garden", a two-story white cottage with a front porch.

"Oh, look, kids!" Patty exclaimed, pointing to the cottage next door, which was almost a duplicate of their own except that it had green shutters instead of black.

"Are those two twins?" Patty wondered as two seven-year-olds walked to the edge of the property. "I'm going to have vacation fwends!"

Masha looked beyond them and noticed an older girl peering at the newcomers from her perch on the porch. She wondered if her vacation prospects had just improved.

"Hi!" the twins exclaimed in unison when the Sansons started piling out of the SUV.

"I'm Cassie," the first one said.

"I'm Carrie," the other one beamed.

"And that's our sister, Drew, over there," Cassie said, gesturing towards their cottage.

Masha squinted through the sun at Drew, who had no choice but to skip down the porch steps to greet her new, temporary neighbours.

"Hello," she said when she approached the Sansons.

Masha's Dad was already on the porch of The Cove Garden looking for the hidden key to get in, but her mom cheerfully said hello to all three girls.

The twins obviously looked alike—blonde hair, freckles, skinny legs—and Drew was an older version of them, only more mature.

"We're glad to have some kids next door," Carrie said. "A bunch of college kids just left your place."

"Our parents had to keep Drew under lock and key!" Cassie laughed.

"Shut up!" Drew protested.

Masha's Dad returned from opening the front door. "Okay, gang, let's unload!" he said.

"We'll see you girls later," Masha's mom said, watching as Drew and her kid sisters returned to their cottage.

There was no evidence of a college invasion when the Sansons explored the inside of their vacation home. The cottage was clean, orderly, and well-kept, with comfortable furniture and attractive décor.

Masha was assigned to the smallest of the three upstairs bedrooms, which contained a single bed and a bunk bed. Patty got the better view, a larger second room, and the parents, of course, took the master bedroom. There was also a modern, full second-floor bathroom.

Masha heard Patty running down the stairs. "Going to see my new fwends!" she yelled.

Masha wondered if it would be presumptuous of her to assume that maybe Drew could be her new friend. Her parents said they were heading to the village grocery store to stock up and would be gone for a while. She grabbed her notebook and explored the rest of the cottage before stepping out onto the side-screened porch. She could hear Patty laughing with the twins next door, and was about to take a seat on the porch couch when she heard a knock on the screened front door.

Masha went to the door and saw Drew on the other side.

"What, you're hiding out?" Drew wanted to know. The scent of strawberries wafted from her freshly washed hair.

"No, just exploring a little," Masha said.

"Let me explore with you," she winked, opening the door and surprising Masha with her confidence. "What, you shy?" she wanted to know.

"It's called introverted," Masha replied, her cheeks already blushing.

Drew laughed. "What's your name again?"

"Masha," she said. "Masha Sanson."

"Well, Mushy, I'm Drew," she smirked as she flew past her and took a look at the interior of the cottage.

"How long have you been here?"

"This is our second week. You can imagine that I'm starting to feel a little squirrely."

"You didn't explore with the college guys?" Masha asked.

Drew gave her an amused look. "Very good, Mushy," she said. "There were eight of them. A lot of partying. I don't really blame my parents for being paranoid on that one."

"But they're not paranoid about me?"

Drew laughed again. "That's a good one," she gave her a funny look. "Go look at yourself in the mirror," she said. "Would you be paranoid about you?"

"Is it because I'm a kid?"

"Let's just say you don't look like a college girl."

Masha couldn't argue with her on that one.

Drew stepped onto the side porch and fell into one of the chairs. Masha followed and sat in the chair next to her.

"We've been on this stupid island for a week, and it feels like a month," Drew groaned. "I'm going stir-crazy."

"Bored?"

"Out of my mind! My sisters are driving me crazy. My parents are keeping me on a tight leash. We've already been around the island twenty times. There's only so much to do."

"There's the beach," Masha shrugged.

"Yes, we're there all the time," she acknowledged. "Didn't you notice my tan?" She peeled down the elastic of her shorts to show her white skin underneath, compared to her browned exposed skin.

She laughed when she saw Masha blush.

"Want to see more, Mushy?" Drew grinned, toying with her by pulling the shorts down just a little bit more. "How old are you?"

"Twelve," she admitted. "You?"

"Ah," she said with understanding, letting the elastic snap back against her waist as she let go. "I'm sixteen," she let her know. "Don't be scared!"

Masha noticed how deep her eyes were, and her lips looked chapped, almost as if she had spent too much time at the beach. She tried not to look at her too much, but she couldn't help herself.

"Where are you guys from?" Drew asked.

"Western Everwood."

"We're from southern Florin," she said. "The money area."

Masha got the impression that Drew was fearless. She looked at her, and she couldn't help but feel stupid, and awkward, and self-conscious. She could handle her little sister Patty with ease, but she wasn't used to being one-on-one with a girl of Drew's age.

"Well," Drew said, standing. "I'm guessing I'll see you around," she squinted at her. "You *do* want to hang out, don't you, Mushy?"

"Sure," she said nervously. "That would be great."

"Yes, it will!" Drew replied, laughing as she left the porch.

Masha heard the slam of the front screen door, and she let out a deep breath of air.

Eventide Island suddenly felt smaller.



Masha's parents returned with food and other supplies for the week. Drew returned a while later with her parents so the adults could meet and make acquaintances, while Patty and the twins ran through the cottage laughing and yelling. A little later, the twins announced that they were going to show Patty the beach.

"Maybe I should go too," Masha said.

"The ocean isn't going anywhere, Mushy," Drew said, rolling her eyes. "Let them have their fun. I'll show you the beach later."

Drew and Masha hid out on the side porch while the parents continued their visit, and Drew gestured towards the notebook in Masha's hand.

"Every time I see you, you're carrying that," she observed.

Masha shrugged in reply.

"What's it for?" Drew wanted to know.

"I like to write," she admitted sheepishly.

"On summer vacation?" Drew asked.

"Anytime, anyplace," Masha said.

"Exactly what do you write, Mushy?"

"Mostly short stories," she revealed. "Observations. Overheard conversations."

"Nobody writes in notebooks anymore," she said.

"I didn't bring my laptop," Masha explained. "The old-fashioned way is just as good. I'll type it up when I get home."

"So, what's the current short story about?" Drew asked.

Masha hesitated, not sure if she trusted her new friend enough to confide in her. What if she laughed at her? Made fun of her story? Called her a dumb kid?

"Come on, Mushy!" she groaned. "Who else you got to talk to around here?"

"It's about some kids who come across an alien," she revealed.

"Oh, you mean like Earth to Echo with Teo Halm and Ella whats-her-name?" she asked.

"They don't go *looking* for the alien," Masha explained. "They just come across it when they're out goofing off in the woods."

"Who?"

"Three friends," Masha said. "Two boys and a girl."

"You didn't make the girl a wimp, did you?"

"No, she's the girlfriend of the one boy, but the other boy secretly likes her."

"Who's the alien?"

"Not sure yet," Masha admitted.

Drew thought about it for a moment. "Make her a girl. She's dangerous but friendly," she suggested. "Her spaceship crashed while on a mission to save the planet from an asteroid impact. The three kids help her by stealing spare parts from the local army base."

Masha considered her idea. "And they argue amongst themselves how to get away with it without being noticed."

"Yeah," Drew agreed. "They could sneak over the fence in the night, or they could pretend their Dad works at the base, and they have an important message for him."

"The boyfriend is kind of a jerk about it while the other guy is sensitive, and the girl starts to realise that her boyfriend isn't the kind of guy she wants to be with," Masha decided.

"Love has a way of bringing out the best and worst in people," Drew agreed. She studied her for a moment. "Have you ever been in love, Mushy?"

"No," she blushed and looked away. "I just read a lot and like to come up with ideas of my own, even though I saw *Earth To Echo*."

"You like movies?"

"Sure," Masha said.

"There's no movie house on the island," Drew said. "How dumb is that?"

"I guess you don't need one with all the cable and satellite and streaming and all the other stuff."

"There is a small theatre, though," Drew said. "Community theatre, I guess."

"Gives the locals something to do."

She nodded in agreement. "I'm not sure if I could live here year-round," she admitted.

"It must get cold in the winter with the wind off the water from all sides."

"Do you want to go see around the place now?" Drew asked.

"Okay," Masha agreed, hoping the anxiety in her voice didn't give her away.

They got permission from the parents and left the cottage together.

Masha and Drew strolled along the street, past the other cottages, to the main island road that took them past more houses, stores, and the occasional office on their way to the harbour-side community. There were more people on foot, bicycles, mopeds, and skateboards than cars, and one had to be careful walking, but the scenery was beautiful, with sailboats, fishing boats, and lobster boats out in the ocean on a clear day.

Drew was humming a song as they walked, and the lovely tune sounded beautiful coming from her lips. Masha realised that her heart was pounding in her chest, and she knew it wasn't from the walking. It wasn't the first time that she had experienced this feeling when being close to another girl, and it confused her endlessly.

Drew showed her some of the places she had been to during her first week on the island, and they walked back to the cottage along the beach, taking their shoes and sandals off and walking along the shore barefoot.

"This is our spot," Drew announced, and Masha noticed the twins and Patty sitting in the surf not far ahead.

Drew dropped down and sat in the sand, and Masha took a seat beside her.

"I love the smell of the ocean," she said.

"Clears the nostrils," Masha replied.

"When you guys get out and about, you'll see some of the mansions on the other side of the island. Carrie calls them the castles."

"I suppose you can tell who is a lot rich and who is just a little rich by how big the houses are here," Masha mused.

"And then those who aren't rich at all," Drew sighed. "Those who live in some of those run-down boarding houses behind the village. Some of the fishermen, and farmers, and other working people."

"I guess if you can afford to rent a cottage for a week or two, you're doing okay," Masha said.

"Your parents must be doing okay then," Drew looked at her.

"My father is a lawyer, and my mother is a real estate agent," Masha informed her. "I hope that doesn't make me a snob."

"You're talking to me," Drew replied with a smile. She gave her a curious look, but Masha was unable to return the gaze because it made her wince with self-doubt. She tried to think of something interesting to say, but she came up empty.

"I'm better at writing than talking," she confessed.

A kite in the sky caught Drew's attention, and she glanced that way. Masha was thankful for the distraction.

"My parents freaked out about all those college guys next door," Drew said.

"I don't blame them."

"It was the first time they overcame their indifference long enough to set some boundaries."

"My parents will be indifferent about you," Masha smirked, watching some people splash and jump in the small waves of the ocean. A few seagulls flew overhead.

"Why would you say that?"

"I'm just a kid, so nobody pays any attention to me," she told her.

"I'm sure there are boys at school who pay attention to you," Drew suggested.

"Not that I know of. Even girls don't pay much attention to me," Masha confessed.

"I'm a girl, and I'm paying attention to you, Mushy."

"I wonder why," she worried.

"Cos' you're a cute kid," Drew smiled and poked the blushing girl with her finger. "And a smart one, too."

"I'll put it in my story then—the author of this story is a cute kid." They both laughed.

"Will you let me read it?"

"Um... maybe."

They dug their toes in the sand and stared at the ocean. Patty and the twins ran up to them after a while.

"Our moms were here before," Cassie announced. "We're having a cookout at our cottage, Drew."

"They said to be back at six," Carrie said.

"What time is it now?" Drew asked.

"Six twenty-five," Cassie said. "We were having too much fun to leave."

"We'll leave now," Drew replied as she stood.

"But it's so great here!" Patty protested.

"The ocean's not going anywhere," Masha said lightly as she got to her feet too.

"I'm hungry," Drew said. "Let's go."

The five headed for the road behind them that led to the two cottages.



Masha liked Drew's parents, but what did she know? She didn't have to live with them. They treated Drew with respectful maturity, and she got along well with them, although all three could be putting on a show for their guests for all Masha knew.

Drew's Dad cooked some killer hamburgers and BBQ chicken for supper, and it was a fun evening for both families. Patty had made instant friends with the twins, while Masha still had a hard time believing Drew was paying any attention to her. Her parents were clearly happy and relieved that the two girls were getting along, and it occurred to Masha that her parents wouldn't have worried at all about her if there were eight college students staying next door. She was still at that age where college students weren't paying attention to her, nor was she expected to pay any attention to them.

The cookout lasted well into the evening. It was nice that the two families hit it off so easily, and Masha was feeling pretty good about how her first day on the island turned out. It *wasn't* what she expected.

In the morning, Masha's father took the family on a car ride tour of the island, stopping for breakfast at the village café and then heading for the beach soon after they returned to the cottage.

Drew's family had already set up their spot, and they happily welcomed the Sanson's to join them. Masha positioned her beach chair next to Drew. The sixteen-year-old was donning a pair of white shorts over her one-piece blue swimming suit and a sun hat, while Patty and the twins splashed in the water beside her.

Masha had also brought her notebook in the hope of continuing with her story, perhaps even with some advice from Drew, but she was distracted when she noticed her squirting on the sunscreen.

"All that does is damage your skin and ruin the environment," she said.

"Oh, I didn't know you were an Earther," Drew replied sarcastically. "It's better than burning like a lobster."

"I suppose," she reluctantly agreed.

"Let's take a walk," Drew suggested after a while.

Masha set her notebook under the towel on her chair and joined Drew for a stroll along the shore.

"You must have a boyfriend back home," Masha dared to say well into the walk.

"I have girl friends," Drew admitted.

"Girl friends?"

"Girls who are friends," she clarified. "You know, to hang out and study with, but I don't have a boyfriend."

"Why not?"

"I'm too busy for that stuff, Mushy," she explained. "I've got my studies to focus on, and I'm involved in all sorts of activities. Plus, I don't like answering to some guy."

"A modern, liberated woman," Masha grinned.

"Damn right!" she said.

But then Drew took her hand in hers, and Masha almost pulled away in surprise.

"Relax, Mushy," Drew smiled. "I don't bite," she rubbed her fingers against her and swayed their arms as they walked.

They looked for sand dollars, seashells, and other seashore discoveries while they strolled—Masha intrigued when they came upon a live crab scattering to beat the incoming surf.

"Am I your girl friend, too?" Masha asked as they continued the walk.

"Well, you're a girl," Drew answered. "Aren't you my friend?"

"Sure," Masha replied, trying not to sound disappointed.

Drew smiled and gave her hand a squeeze. "We're on an island, Mushy," she reminded her. "I'm all yours as long as we're here."

They returned to the family spot, tired from the walk, but still holding hands. After helping the girls build a sand castle, they had a late lunch of sandwiches and snacks their moms made at the cottage and brought to the beach. Sitting in the sun, they discussed Masha's story and tried to come up with ideas for the three characters—Emma, Jake, and Danny—Jake being the troublemaker among the group and Emma's love interest in the beginning, although his attitude and behaviour as the story goes on start to turn her off.

Drew eventually left with her family for a pre-arranged family event on the mainland, and Masha was surprised at how much she missed her after she was gone. Patty was bummed, missing the twins too. But the following day, the two families joined up to go out on a whale-watching adventure that proved to be very exciting and fun.

"That was a whale of an outing," Drew joked when the boat returned to the wharf.

For Masha, spending time with Drew felt more natural and relaxed now that she was comfortable being with her island vacation adventure mate. Late one afternoon, with the parents back at the cottages and the girls skylarking down at the water's edge, Masha and Drew sat close together in their beach chairs, keeping an eye on the kids while expanding on ideas for Masha's story.

Masha had a towel across her lap to help protect her bare thighs from the hot sun. Her notebook was on top of the towel, open on the last page of her notes, as they discussed the story. Then haltingly, almost imperceptibly, Drew turned her face towards Masha. Leaning over to look at the notebook, she planted a quick kiss on Masha's lips, giving the young girl the first unexpected thrill of her life.

Masha's eyes flew wide open, and looked around in terror to make sure nobody was watching.

"Relax," Drew said quietly. "Nobody will see."

But it was easy for her to say. Masha was afraid of this new feeling in her chest and of the uncontrollable beating of her heart. But most of all, she was afraid to look at Drew and see the source of her trepidation. And the touch of Drew's soft fingers on her skin certainly didn't help to calm her breath.

"It's okay," Drew said in a whisper. "Stay calm. This is vacation salvation", and then kissed her again, only longer this time and with more intensity, nibbling on Masha's lower lip as if savouring the rarest, sweetest, and tastiest of fruits."

It didn't take long for Masha to lose her breath and pull away, filling her lungs with much-needed air.

"Don't forget to breathe, Mushy," Drew giggled and took the younger girl's hand in hers. "We should go for a swim. Come on!" She laughed, bolting from the chair.

Masha sprinted after her, her legs weak, her head spinning, her breath laboured, and neither stopped running until they fell into the cold ocean surf as if to wash away all evidence of what had taken place between them.

Drew came up from the surf, spitting out water and screaming because it was so cold, but then she floated on her back for a moment while Masha dunked her head under the surface, trying to calm her chaotic thoughts in blissful silence.

When she finally came up for air, Drew floated next to her, and Masha put her hands under her back to help her stay afloat.

"The water is frigid," Masha complained, her lips already starting to turn blue.

Drew gave her a curious look. "First time?" she asked. "Back there?"

Masha nodded affirmatively, too embarrassed to talk about it. Even at her young age, she was painfully aware that the sensation of Drew's lips against her own would be with her forever.

Drew smiled and ruffled her hair. "Let's get out of this ice water before we turn into penguins."

Masha returned the smile and ran to the shore with her.



Drew acted as if nothing had changed between the girls, and they continued to enjoy their Eventide Summer of Secret Love. At night, Masha would peer out of her bedroom window towards Drew's cottage in hope of catching a glimpse of the older girl. Her own short story was suddenly put on hold, and a new, more exciting, and dangerous adventure preoccupied her mind every single day and most nights.

Watching the sun set was one of the routines the two girls enjoyed each evening. Drew was unable to get up early enough for the sunrises, but watching a sunset on an island was a whole new experience.

They often walked down to the beach to get the best view, sometimes sitting in the sand to watch the extended version until the sun was entirely gone from sight and the blue sky became dark.

The ocean breeze made one night cooler than usual, and Drew brought a blanket with them. While draping it over their legs, Masha wondered if that meant some secret kissing was going to take place. Her suspicion increased even more after their parents returned to the cottages.

"I've actually broken my device addiction being here," Drew bragged. "It's freeing not to be worried about all my phone apps and thinking about what I might be missing."

Masha felt Drew's arm against her. It was just an innocent brush of skin against skin, but she was hesitant to turn her head to look at Drew. Nervous and excited at the same time, she knew her face was so close to hers.

"I could watch the sunset forever," Drew said.

"Me too," Masha remarked.

"Oh yeah?" She said lightly. "Wouldn't you rather *kiss* someone?"

Drew finally reached beneath the covers and touched Masha's slender thigh. Masha remained completely still as they listened to the waves and watched the ocean gradually fade away in the twilight until all that remained visible was the white foam of the surf.

Fighting her indecision, Masha dared to tentatively slip her hand underneath the blanket and place it on Drew's thigh. It felt surprisingly warm. She caressed it cautiously with fascination. Drew's own hand was stroking up and down her thigh, too.

"Did you do this with your other girl friends?" Masha asked.

She shook her head no.

"Then why are you doing it now?"

Drew continued to stroke her thigh underneath the blanket. "It's supposed to come naturally," she said. "You're the right girl for me, Mushy."

"Thank you for being with me." Her hand felt clammy against her skin underneath the blanket.

"We'll have to go soon," Drew said. "We don't want them to come looking for us."

"I guess," Masha sighed with disappointment when Drew pulled her hand away, but not before planting her lips against Masha's.

The younger girl shivered and then watched as Drew pulled her hair back with her two hands and retied it behind her head.

"I didn't want to come here," she said.

"Me neither," Masha admitted.

"But now I'm glad I did."

"Me too," she smiled.

Drew stood and pulled the blanket from her lap. "I wish we could skinny-dip," she said freely. "But you can see from the cottages, and there are too many people around."

"And the water is freezing cold," Masha said.

"You'd let that stop you?" she asked with a smirk.

"Not if I was with you!" she smiled.

Drew leaned in and kissed the little girl again, slowly this time while prying her little lips open so she could taste her caramel mouth, and then she ran towards the cottages. It took Masha a moment to recover before she ran after her.



By day, they were two young girls sharing in their family's vacation routine, being dutiful siblings helping the younger kids, and forever attempting to impress their parents with mature behaviour and attitude. It was only when the bewitching sunset hour came that Drew and Masha reverted to their secret, youthful whims underneath the blanket that nobody knew about.

The sun set on this evening, and their family members returned to the cottages, leaving the two girls with their laps and legs underneath the blanket. A few couples and tourists remained out and about on the sand. Drew kicked off her sandals and rubbed her toes up and down Masha's legs. Then she brought her face close to her, playfully nudging Masha's round cheek with her nose.

"You smell like the beach," she smiled.

Masha dared to place her lips on Drew's cheek and give her a wet smooch. She worried that she'd be repulsed and push her away, but instead Drew took her hand and placed it under her shirt. "Your kisses tickle!" she laughed out, then placed her hand underneath the blanket on Masha's thigh, causing her breath to hitch. "I didn't wear a bra tonight," Drew informed her with a giggling smirk.

She took Masha's hand in hers and moved it up until she touched her breast. Drew let out a satisfied sigh as Masha felt her way in the dark, then leaned her head against the little girl's shoulder and closed her eyes.

"Oh, Mushy," Drew said happily.

Masha knew she'd never forget this night.

They heard voices from further down the beach, and they quickly removed their hands from beneath the blanket. They both stood up, expecting intrusion into their secret game, but the voices soon vanished, leaving them only slightly annoyed.

"Well, we should get going anyway," Drew said with a reluctant pout.

"We're running out of sunsets," Masha kicked the sand with her foot, as if it alone was responsible for their interrupted affection. Drew gave her a quick kiss goodnight, and then once again ran towards the cottages, forcing Masha to run after her.

Masha knew that the vacation would be ruined if their parents suspected anything between them or—worse—caught them in the act.

"They're not spying on us, Mushy," Drew reminded her the next day as they sat on the picnic table bench in the backyard of The Cove Garden, waiting on lunch.

"They expect stuff like this to happen at our age," Masha warned. "We're suspects all the time. It's assumed."

"My parents aren't like that."

"They kept you away from the college guys," she said.

She rolled her eyes. "They trust us," she assured her.

"Have they seen you kiss a girl before?" she asked.

"Of course not. Nothing's going to happen," Drew said. "Stop worrying."

"Have you kissed a girl before?"

Drew gave her a playful push. "You're my first, Mushy," she teased.

"I can't believe you like me."

"You need to work on your confidence," Drew advised. "Fill yourself with hope. And learn to keep secrets, you silly girl."



The two girls walked to the village together one afternoon in search of something different to do. The air was humid and warm, and Masha had been struggling with feelings of regret and embarrassment about the activities that had taken place underneath towels and blankets. Drew, however, was oblivious of her friend's worries.

"I don't believe it!" Drew exclaimed when her phone buzzed, and she glanced at the received text.

"What?" Masha wondered as they walked among the summer crowds on the village's main street.

"Our parents just left the island for a boat tour!" She said. "Come on! Let's get back to the cottage!"

"I thought we were going to have lunch."

Drew's eyes searched her face with disbelief. "Alone time, Mushy! We never have time alone!"

"What are we going to do?" Masha asked with confusion.

"You'll see!" Drew laughed, grabbing the younger girl's hand and pulling her along with her.

"Maybe it's a trap," Masha warned.

"You think our parents are trying to set us up?" Drew asked incredulously.

Masha's upper lip curled with tense embarrassment. Given the chance that was presented to them, she felt the natural excitement that comes with opportunity, but she was also frightened out of her socks. The situation hit her with such fear that she could hardly breathe, which was made worse by the fact that Drew was now running with her in tow.

There was no way to deny it. Masha felt a powerful, desirable temptation, but she also heard a little voice yelling inside her head: 'No, No, No.'

Drew decided her family's cottage was the better choice, and she ran up the stairs to the front porch and into the house, still dragging Masha behind her.

"Drew!" she yelled breathlessly, stopping in her tracks.

Drew turned and laughed at her. "Don't die on me now, Mushy!"

"Are you sure nobody's here?" she worried.

"Hello!?" She screamed.

"Guess not," Masha admitted.

"Be happy for us, Mushy," Drew said with a laugh that unsettled her. "Come on, let's go upstairs."

"But why?"

Drew rolled her eyes and then shook her head. "Well, how 'bout this for starters!?" She pulled off her shirt, tossed away her bra, peeled down her shorts and undies, did a quick twirl on her toes, and then ran up the stairs.

Masha swallowed hard and then slowly walked up the stairs, not sure what she was going to find, what was going to happen, or what they should do once she got there.

Drew was standing in her bedroom window, looking out at the sea, when Masha emerged from the doorway. For a split second, she admired her backside, before carefully crossing the room. She stood next to her and then placed one hand on her pale, naked back.

"Drew... you look so pretty," she told her, her voice shaky.

"Do you like my tan?" she giggled, turning so Masha could see all the white parts of her that didn't get browned from two weeks in the sun.

"Yes."

"Really? Show me yours!"

"I haven't been in the sun as long."

"So what?" She touched her lightly on her arm. "It's okay, Mushy. You are beautiful."

Masha accepted the inevitability of the moment—being seen by another girl. She undressed and stood naked beside her friend.

"Maybe your next story can be about an island vacation," Drew suggested, turning back to the window and staring out at the island in front of them.

"Two girls in love?"

"The mystery, the enchantment, the pleasure, the daring."

"The awkwardness, the confusion, the shame, the uncertainty..."

"You think too much, Mushy."

"What should we think about us?" Masha asked.

"That we experienced something special," she answered, her voice confident. "Sometimes the temptation of a crush is a beautiful, unspoken truth that usually ends in heartbreak we can't avoid. But still, we want to keep daring."

"Summer love," Masha sighed.

"On Eventide Island," Drew smiled and kissed her lips.

Masha wrapped her arms around Drew's waist, and they gazed out the window together in all their natural beauty and innocence.

"Will I ever see you again, Drew?" she asked in a whisper.

"In your stories, Mushy," she hugged the little girl closer to herself, "...we can always be together."

The End