

# SUSPICION

A NOVEL BY  
KATE BRIAN

SIMON PULSE

New York London Toronto Sydney

## SURVIVAL

*The important thing is not to panic.*

Like that was even possible. My heart pounded erratically in my chest, radiating terror through my veins. I had been treading water in the dark of night for maybe ten minutes, but it might as well have been ten hours. The floaty chiffon gown that had seemed so light and airy when I had selected it for the Ryans' Casino Night now clung to my skin and tangled around my legs, threatening to pull me down. Down into the deep, dark depths of the ocean where who-knew-what disgusting, slimy, razor-toothed things were waiting to nibble on my toes and fingers and—

*No.*

*No. No. No.* It was going to be okay. It was, it was, it was. If I could just keep my eye on the Ryans' boat, everything would be fine. I could still hear the piano music drifting across the Caribbean Sea, could still make out the cheers as a guest won big at the card tables. As long

as I could see the boat there was the possibility it might come back for me. I stared at the merrily twinkling lights on the deck as the vessel sailed back toward St. Barths and willed it to turn. Sent a silent panic signal to anyone who might care. Noelle. Upton. Kiran. Dash. Taylor. Tiffany. *Someone please just realize I'm not there. Someone go looking for me. Someone, anyone, hear me.*

I caught a stray shout and my heart leapt with hope. But the shout was followed by a peal of laughter. They were just obliviously going about their partying. Everyone I knew on the island was on that boat. And it was quickly floating out of reach.

*The important thing is not to panic.*

But the mantra wasn't working. Someone on that boat had tried to kill me. Someone had torn off the ridiculously expensive diamond necklace I'd been wearing—Noelle's necklace—and shoved me overboard into the frigid water. A slim, hooded figure. Average height. That was all I had seen after plunging into the sea and struggling to the surface. A hooded figure slinking away, the white trim on the black hood practically glowing in the moonlight. I couldn't tell if it was male or female, old or young, but I had my suspicions. Poppy Simon, Paige Ryan, or Sienna Marquez. They were all jealous of me. They all wanted Upton Giles, my new sort-of boyfriend. One of them clearly wanted him enough to murder me and get me out of the way.

And it looked like she was going to succeed.

No.

I was not going to let her win. Whichever one of those psychos had done this was going to be sorely disappointed. I couldn't wait until

she saw me alive. I was going to walk up to her and spit in her face. And right after I did that, I was getting the hell off of St. Barths. This place was pure evil. I would have been better off vacationing on the time-hopping torture island from *Lost*.

The skirt of my dress wrapped around my right ankle and held fast, restricting my movement. Without a second thought I reached for the zipper at the side of the gown and, my cold fingers trembling and slipping, managed to yank it down. After a brief struggle I was free of the thing. It floated off on the waves like a lazy sapphire blue cloud bobbing in the wind. Instantly, I felt twenty pounds lighter, and proud of myself for having made such a wise decision. I took a deep breath and realized that I was moving my arms much faster than I needed to, so I forced myself to slow down. Soon my heart rate calmed and my breathing stabilized. This was much better. I was strong. I was an athlete. I could tread water like this for hours.

Maybe. How long *could* a person tread water, technically? I had no idea. It wasn't a fact I'd ever thought I would need to know, hailing as I did from a landlocked state. But here I was, little Reed Brennan of Croton, Pennsylvania, treading for her life, half naked in the Caribbean Sea.

How the hell had I gotten here?

"I picked the wrong guy," I answered aloud. "Again."

My voice sounded odd and unbearably lonely. I resolved not to talk anymore. But now that I'd started thinking of Upton, I couldn't stop. If only I had stuck to my original instinct and steered clear of him, none of this would be happening. But how could I have resisted a

gorgeous, incredible, worldly British guy coming at me full force with all his talk of how different and amazing I was? I was only human. And yeah, maybe he had been with a lot of girls, but how was I supposed to know that one of them was going to turn out to be homicidal?

*Come on, Reed. Try learning from experience.*

I looked at the boat and my entire body jolted with terror. The lights were winking in and out on the horizon. Winking. Winking. Winking. And then they were gone.

I whirled around with a splash, searching the endless waterscape. There had to be another boat. A light. A buoy. Anything. But all I could see for miles was the deep blue of the ocean, lit by the thousands of stars overhead. No land, no vessels, nothing. Nothing but water. I was alone. Alone and adrift in the middle of nowhere.

No one was coming for me. I was going to drown out here. By myself. In the dark. They would never even find my body. I was going to drift out here forever at the bottom of the ocean.

*No. Stop. Just stop.*

I couldn't let myself go there. Couldn't think that way. No matter how true it felt in that moment, I could not start thinking the worst. I had survived so much. I could survive this. I just had to give my tired limbs a break. I took a deep breath and forced myself to lie back and float, even though it meant taking my eyes off the horizon. I would float for a few minutes, regain my strength, and then start treading again. It was going to be okay. It was all going to be okay.

The stars formed a close-knit blanket across the sky. I had never seen so many in my life. It was beautiful. If it was the last thing I saw,

it wouldn't be so bad. I wondered what it would be like to drown. Whether it would hurt. I thought of Thomas Pearson and the awful manner in which he had died, murdered by a girl who claimed to love him. A crazy girl with a baseball bat. I wished he were here with me now. If I only had the chance, I would tell him how sorry I was. I would tell him that I hoped Ariana Osgood had done the deed quickly. That he didn't have too much time to be scared. Like me. I was going to have a lot of time to be scared . . . terrified . . . desperate . . . before I finally went.

My heart seized in panic as the reality of the situation slammed into my chest, and for a brief moment, I went under. Salty water filled my mouth and nostrils, and my lungs exploded with pain. I fought my way to the surface again, flailing and gasping for air. There was still nothing. Nothing but the ocean and the sky. Midnight blue as far as the eye could see. Stars everywhere, but nothing else. Nothing but the ripples atop the water. I was never going to be able to survive this. Never, never, never.

But somehow, I kept treading. Minutes passed. Hours. I had no idea how long I had been out there when my limbs started to feel impossibly heavy. When my mind started to grow so very tired. I tried to float again, and as I lay back my eyes fluttered closed. Instantly I saw a flash of Sabine DuLac, her face twisted with ire, and I felt her hands grab my shoulders and shove me down. I struggled against her, but the more I squirmed and writhed, the further I sank. She was pushing, pushing, pushing me down. I opened my eyes under the water and they stung from the salt. I could see nothing. Nothing

but . . . a shadow. Something moving. Something dark. And it wasn't very far away.

My heart burst with fear. I clawed my way to the surface and heaved in a breath, flailing around in the ocean, trying to find whatever it was I had seen under the water. Was it a shark, or a harmless fish? A turtle? A dolphin? A whale? I had no idea how big or small it was. How far away or how near.

Suddenly I felt something slither around my ankle. I screamed and kicked and started to cry. *My God, please don't let anything be down there. Please just let it be my paranoia taking over.*

But there it was again. Something sliding across my toes. I screamed again and swam a few feet away, my tired muscles barely functioning. As if a few strokes were going to free me from a water dweller. If something out here wanted me as its midnight snack, it was pretty much going to have me.

I was sobbing now. Gulping for air. Afraid that at any second I would feel it again. Or worse, that I would feel jaws close around my foot. See a fin sailing ominously by. I gasped in a breath and started to choke. Water filled my mouth and throat and I spit it out, coughing, choking, struggling for air.

I had to get a grip. If I didn't, my panic attack was going to drown me.

Maybe it was nothing. Maybe I was just imagining things. Or maybe it was seaweed. Or even my dress. Maybe it was still nearby but had sunk below the surface.

I took a breath. Yes. That was it. I told myself it was just the dress.

And even though I didn't completely believe it, my breathing started to return to normal.

But still, the tears came. And suddenly, I was thinking about Josh Hollis. Josh, who was back in the States, probably out to dinner or cuddling on the couch somewhere with his girlfriend, Ivy Slade. I imagined what he would do when he heard of my death. Would he cry? Scream? Throw a fit of despair? He'd already lost his best friend. Would losing me push him over the edge? Or was he falling in love with Ivy? Had he already forgotten me? Would the news of my death be just one more tragedy, a story they could tell their kids as they grew older, how daddy's old girlfriend drowned tragically off the coast of St. Barths?

I scoffed a laugh at the thought of Josh and Ivy as a married couple. Forget Josh. What would Upton do? Would he miss me? Or would he just move on to the next girl? Would he ever know that it was one of his deranged exes who had done this? Would he even care?

The guy had claimed he loved me. But if he was so in love with me, how could he have just left me in the Ryans' stateroom like that? We had gone down there to snag a little alone time and been caught half undressed by Mrs. Ryan and Poppy, one of Upton's many ex-hookups. But instead of staying with me and pep talking me out of my abject humiliation, he had gone after Poppy to make sure she was okay. Was he still with her right now? Had he even realized I was missing? Why hadn't he come to save me?

My chin dipped under the water and I surged up again. My arms were moving slower and slower. My eyes had closed. I was falling

asleep. For a moment I fought against it, but I felt my lids growing heavy again. And then my nose was under. Heart panicking, I pushed up with all my might, but I barely got my chin above the surface.

This was it. I had nothing left. I had done my best, but this was how I was going to die. I thought of my mother. Of how sad she would be. And my dad. He definitely wasn't going to take this well. I hoped my brother, Scott, would be there for them. The thought of the three of them alone together, without me, brought tears to my eyes and made my nose clog. *I'm so sorry . . . but I can't do this anymore. . . .*

"There! I see something! Right over there! Shine the light!"

I closed my eyes. I was hallucinating. It was really over.

And slowly, I started to sink into the inky blue depths of the sea.

"Reed! Over here! I'm coming!"

I blinked. My brain told me I was hallucinating, but I raised my right hand just in case. The effort did me in, and instantly, I sank like a stone. Just before the water closed over my face, just before my eyes fluttered closed for the last time, I caught the briefest glimpse of a blond-haired boy tearing off his shirt and diving into the water.

This book is a work of fiction. Any references to historical events, real people, or real locales are used fictitiously. Other names, characters, places, and incidents are the product of the author's imagination, and any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.



SIMON PULSE

An imprint of Simon & Schuster Children's Publishing Division  
1230 Avenue of the Americas, New York, NY 10020

Copyright © 2009 by Alloy Entertainment and Kieran Viola  
All rights reserved, including the right of reproduction  
in whole or in part in any form.

SIMON PULSE and colophon are trademarks of  
Simon & Schuster, Inc.



alloy**entertainment**

Produced by Alloy Entertainment  
151 West 26th Street, New York, NY 10001

Typography by Andrea C. Uva  
The text of this book was set in Filosofia.

Manufactured in the United States of America  
First Simon Pulse edition TK

2 4 6 8 10 9 7 5 3 1

CIP Data is available from the Library of Congress.

ISBN-13 TK  
ISBN-10 TK