

ROBIN JONES GUNN

whispers

a novel



THE GLENBROOKE SERIES

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MULTNOMAH
BOOKS

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Wendy Lee Nentwig,

a true friend

*with whom I've shared dorm rooms and dreams,
prayers and tears, clothes and friends,
laughter, and my daughter's spelling list.
And that was only the first decade.*



Camp Heatherbrook

Waterfalls

Seth and Leah's Cabin

50 Acres Woodlands

Jonathan & Shelly's Cabin

Genevieve's Home

LINCOLN MIDDLE SCHOOL

Leah's House

Jessica's Cottage

Glenbrooke General Hospital

Glenbrooke Historical Society

Little League Field

HOME OF THE RANGERS

Dairy Queen

WASHBURN HIGH SCHOOL

FIRST ST.

SECOND ST.

MAPLE ST.

ELM ST.

MARIGOLD LANE

ASH ST.

WASHBURN HIGH SCHOOL

WASHBURN HIGH SCHOOL

WASHBURN HIGH SCHOOL

WASHBURN HIGH SCHOOL

A Visitor's Guide to GLENBROOKE

Kyle &
Jessica's
Victorian
Mansion

Madison Hill

Glenbrooke
Community
Church

Hidden House
Bed &
Breakfast

Brady
Alissa's House

Teri's
House

Ida's
House

WREN'S
GIFT SHOP

INDICIFFE
ESQ. &
ATTORNEY

TRAVEL

PARKER
DELIVERY
SERVICE



*But the LORD was not in the wind.
After the wind there was an earthquake, but
the LORD was not in the earthquake.
After the earthquake came a fire, but
the LORD was not in the fire.
And after the fire came a gentle whisper.*

1 KINGS 19:11–12

Chapter One



Teri Moreno flipped her thick brown hair over her shoulder and peered through the cluster of Maui tourists gathered at the airport baggage claim. She had hoped to see Mark among the locals, but it was her sister's voice that greeted her.

"Teri, over here!"

Anita ran toward her with a lei of white plumeria flowers strung over her arm. "You're here!" Anita said breathlessly, giving Teri a hug. "I'm sorry we weren't here to meet your flight. Here, these are for you." She placed the fragrant flowered lei around Teri's neck. "Dan's parking the car. We got a late start. I'm sorry."

"Don't worry about it," Teri said, lifting the sweet flowers to her nose and drawing in the scent. A dozen memories of her previous summer on the island filled her mind. She looked past her sister and with a sheepish smile asked, "Mark wasn't able to come?"

"No, he'll meet us for dinner, though. You really look

great!” Anita said, giving Teri’s arm a squeeze. “Did you lose some weight?”

Aware that her slim sister’s glance had rested on Teri’s thighs, Teri said, “Not really.” A familiar uneasiness settled in. She had never been able to wear a size six pair of jeans like her older sister could—nor would Teri ever be able to.

“You look great, too,” Teri said. “I love your hair like that. I don’t think you’ve ever worn it that short. It’s cute.”

Anita fingered the ends of her sleek, dark hair that clung to the nape of her neck. “Do you like it? I had it cut a week ago. I’m still getting used to it, but I think I like it. Dan does.”

Just then Dan appeared. He was the same age as Anita, twenty-seven. But his dark, wavy hair and short, stocky build gave him the look of a high school wrestler.

“So how was your flight?” Dan said, giving Teri a hug and motioning with his head that they should follow him to the baggage claim area.

“Fine. Uneventful.”

“Don’t think for a minute that your five weeks here will be uneventful,” Anita said. “We are going to have so much fun! I have all kinds of things planned for us.”

Teri wondered if Anita had included Mark in her plans. “That’s my suitcase,” Teri said.

Dan grabbed it for her and lifted it with ease. He had lots of experience with luggage since he worked as a bellhop at the Halekualii, one of the most expensive resorts on the west side of Maui. “Is this your only bag?”

“That’s it,” Teri said.

“Traveling light this time, I see. Looks like you learned all you need to bring to Maui is a bathing suit,” Dan said, leading them out to the parking lot.

“A bathing suit and every hard-earned penny I could

scrape up,” Teri added. She again drew in the sweet scent of the flowers around her neck as they stepped out from under the protected covering of the baggage claim area. A strong wind blew their hair and dried the perspiration from their shirts.

“Ah!” Teri greeted the island breeze with upturned chin and closed eyes. “It’s so wonderful to be back here. Do you know how many times I’ve dreamed of this very moment? Standing here, feeling this wind in my hair, and smelling the flowers.” She impulsively gave Anita a hug. “I can’t believe I’m here!”

“Why don’t you stay for good this time?” Anita asked.

“Don’t I wish,” Teri said.

“I’m serious. Why don’t you move here?”

“Well, one small matter is making a living on the island.”

“They always need teachers,” Dan said. “The pay isn’t great, but you could always do like the rest of us and wait tables on the weekends.”

“I don’t imagine the demand is high for Spanish teachers,” Teri said.

“We can always find out,” Dan replied. He unlocked the trunk of their white compact car and dropped her suitcase inside. It had been a rental car that he had bought from a friend for a low price because the right rear door was smashed in. They still hadn’t fixed the door. Teri noticed the rust inside the dented area, which hadn’t been there a year ago. She slid into the backseat through the one rear door that did work and made a mental note that, even though they both worked two jobs, they hadn’t been able to fix their car. How could she possibly afford to support herself in such an expensive location?

“I don’t know,” Teri said. “I have a comfortable life in Oregon. Maui is a great place for a vacation, but I don’t know if I could actually live here.”

"Sure you could," Anita coaxed her.

Dan paid the airport parking lot attendant and pulled out into the traffic.

"Can you wait for dinner or are you starving? You know it will take about an hour to drive to our side of the island and probably another half hour before we eat," Dan said.

"My stomach can wait," Teri answered. The part of her that couldn't wait was her eyes. They longed to feast on the sights of this enchanted paradise. With all the windows down, Dan drove the two-lane highway that linked the two sides of the island. Anita chattered away as they drove, while Teri only half listened. She was too absorbed in the scenery.

First came the waving sugar cane fields in the central valley. To the left rose Haleakala, the great volcano circled in a wreath of clouds that looked like a halo of baby's breath. The road followed the outer rim of the west side of the island, curving through cut volcanic rock and past sequestered sandy coves shaded by palm trees.

Teri drank in the beauty of the blue ocean and the imposing sight of the nearby neighboring islands, popping up out of the Pacific Ocean: Kahoolawe, Lana'i, and the green, sleeping giant, Moloka'i, which lay only nine miles north of Dan and Anita's small house. She had waited a year in rainy Oregon for this feast of her senses, a year filled with romantic dreams and hope inspired speculations. Now Teri Angelina Raquel Moreno was about to see if those dreams were ready to come true.

Chapter Two



I thought we were going to your house first,” Teri said when Dan announced they were almost at the restaurant.

“We don’t have time,” Anita answered. “Besides, Leilani’s is right here, and our house is ten minutes up the road.”

“Why can’t we go to your house first? What’s another ten or twenty minutes?” Teri asked, trying to make her voice sound calm.

“We told Mark we would meet him at the restaurant now. He’s probably waiting for us.”

“But I’m not dressed for dinner,” Teri said, feeling flustered. “I wanted to change.”

“For Leilani’s?” Anita said. “You’re fine. You don’t want to look like a *haole*, all dressed up for dinner.”

“A what?”

“*Haole*. That’s Hawaiian for ‘tourist,’ a ‘foreigner.’”

Dan added, “It literally means ‘stranger.’ The locals don’t usually dress up. Annie’s right; you look fine.”

Teri didn't feel fine. She felt scruffy, having been on a plane for more than five hours. Her jeans felt hot, and her white cotton blouse was crumpled. She had wanted to look and feel just right when she saw Mark again and had packed two new sundresses to insure that she did. She felt as nervous now as she had last year when Dan and Anita had set her and Mark up on a blind date.

"Did you take me to this restaurant last summer?" Teri asked, trying to remember what sort of place this was.

"I don't think so. We only went to the one where Danny works."

"Right," Teri said, remembering.

"Leilani's is here at Ka'anapali." Anita motioned out the open window as Dan drove past a lush golf course on the right and turned left into an extensive resort community with beautifully landscaped grounds and a long row of high-rise buildings along the beach.

"This is one of our favorite places," Anita said, smiling at Dan. "When we have a chance to go out, that is."

Dan drove into a parking garage and found a place on the first level. They parked and hurried into the Whaler's Village Shopping Center where dozens of tourists leisurely strolled in and out of the shops.

Teri followed her sister and Dan down the winding cement walkway toward the beach. The closer they came to the restaurant, the more unsure she felt of herself. They took a jog to the left, past several lit tiki torches, to Leilani's Restaurant where Dan opened the door for Anita and Teri.

Teri held her breath. She could feel her heart pounding, not only from the brisk walk but also from the anticipation of seeing Mark.

She remembered feeling caught off-guard the first time they had met. It wasn't that Mark was so perfect looking. He

had a broad nose, a wide mouth, and a square jaw. But somehow, all those features together gave him a solid appearance. He didn't open his mouth when he smiled, only the corners curved up. To Teri the expression was mysterious and comforting, a gentle contrast to her own wide smile that showed all her teeth in one flash.

Something had sparked between them at that first glance. Was it love at first sight? She wouldn't go quite that far. But it was definitely fireworks that were strong enough to draw her back to him in her thoughts for twelve long months.

As they entered the restaurant, Teri looked quickly at every person in the waiting area until she found Mark. She fixed her gaze on him as his eyes met hers and his wide lips drew up into a curved smile. But he didn't move.

What is he thinking? Are there fireworks for him? Are there any for me? What am I feeling? I don't even know. Should I go over and hug him? Why isn't he moving?

"There's Mark," Anita said, just noticing him. She forged the way over, and Teri followed.

Mark hugged Anita first, giving her the traditional aloha kiss on the cheek. Then he did the same for Teri. She felt nothing. Everything inside her seemed to have shut down. Could it be that in all the months of anticipation she had built their relationship into something bigger than it was? Now that they were actually back together was Teri experiencing her true feelings, or was she too stunned?

"It's good to see you," Mark said. He was sunburned across the nose. His brown hair had much more blond streaking through it than she had remembered.

"It's great to see you!" Teri said enthusiastically. "How are you doing?"

"Fine. And you?"

"Good. I'm doing really well. It's good to finally be here."

Oh, brother, Teri chided herself, I sound like an idiot. Why is this so awkward? It isn't at all like I anticipated it would be.

The young woman at the hostess desk next to them called out, "Hunter, party of four please. Hunter."

"That's us," Mark said.

"Looks as if we arrived just in time," Dan added, taking Anita by the hand and following the hostess to their table. Mark motioned for Teri to go ahead of him, and he followed the procession.

They had a window seat on the second floor of the restaurant. With no screen or glass to block their path, the balmy night breezes fluttered in off the ocean, which lay only a few hundred yards away.

"Perfect," Anita said, as Dan pulled out her chair. "I love this place. I'm glad you're here, Teri. It gives us an excuse to get out for once."

Mark pulled out Teri's chair. She felt a little silly, as if she and her sister were double-dating to the prom or something.

She studied Mark as he seated himself. She couldn't tell what he was thinking; his face was unreadable. He hadn't promised anything, of course, over the last year. A total of seven phone calls and a few greeting cards between them were the fuel Teri had used to foster and feed her expectations.

"We have to save room for some Naughty Hula Pie," Anita said, glancing at her menu.

Teri opened her menu too, glad to have something to hide behind. She scanned the list of seafood and immediately decided on the mahi mahi. But she kept the menu barricade up and tried to collect her thoughts and feelings. They needed to start talking in a natural manner. That would help. Of course this first meeting would feel tense at the beginning. What had she expected? That he would jump for joy when he saw her? Mark was reserved. She knew that. He was probably just as

nervous as she was. If only Dan and Anita weren't there, then everything would feel like it had last summer.

"Have you decided yet? Or do you need a few more minutes?" Their waiter was back to take their order, and Teri couldn't hide behind the laminated paper wall any longer. She lowered it and ordered and then inwardly coached herself to relax.

"So, how's your research going?" Teri asked Mark as soon as the waiter left. Teri knew Mark's work as a marine biologist was a passion in his life. She figured the topic would jump-start the conversation.

"It's going very well. We actually changed our focus to the baby whales. I don't remember if I told you that."

"No," Teri said, smiling and hoping Mark would feel at ease, even if she didn't feel that way herself yet. "You didn't mention that. What are you studying—or researching—then?"

Mark leaned into the table, and speaking to all three of them, he said, "It's basically a study of whales from birth to about one year old."

"And someone is giving you money for that?" Anita asked.

"It's quite important," Mark said. "Did you know that baleen whales are the only whales that are born head first? All the others are born tail first, and so are dolphins."

"And what is the reason for that?" Dan asked.

"No one knows. That's why we're studying it. You see, the birthing process can be several hours long. Since whales are mammals, and of course, breathe air, they could drown if they came out head first. But the baleens are born head first, and they don't drown. It's quite a mystery."

"I just can't believe you're paid to watch baby whales be born," Anita said.

"Have you actually seen one?" Teri asked.

A slow smile pressed up the corners of Mark's mouth as he

turned to Teri and said, "Two. I shot some great footage that has been very helpful."

"Let me get this straight," Dan said. "You put on your scuba gear and swim around with a video camera while these baby whales are born, and the mothers don't bother you? I thought they were extremely protective of their offspring."

"They usually are," Mark said. "But Mabel and I are good friends. I've been around her for almost three years so I think it didn't bother her that I was there during the birth. Plus she was pretty busy at the time. I don't think she paid much notice to me. Pua and Nui were there."

"Pua and Nui?" Dan asked.

"Whales," Mark answered, as if he weren't used to having to distinguish between humans and whales in most of his conversations. "They're blue whales like Mabel. Sort of self-appointed aunties. Almost like midwives. It took almost an hour, but little Jonah came out just fine, all twenty-five feet of him."

"And he came out tail first?" Teri asked.

"No, head first. He's a baleen."

"I thought he was a blue whale," Teri said, just as the salads arrived.

"He is. See, there are two basic kinds of whales. Toothed and baleen. Baleens feed on krill. Blue whales are baleens. Actually, three kinds of blue whales are in the rorquals. Mabel's a pygmy blue."

Teri smoothed her salad dressing around and tried not to look as confused as she felt. It was as if Mark were speaking a foreign language.

"The rorquals have that triangle shaped fin on their backs, near the tail." Mark pointed over his shoulder and then looked at Anita and Dan to see if they were following him.

"Oh," Teri said. She broke into a wide smile and said, "I

guess I have a lot to learn about whales. All this is new to me.”

“It’s not really as complicated as I’m making it sound,” Mark said.

“I’d like to go out with you sometime,” Teri said.

Mark’s eyes widened.

“I mean, on your ship, or boat, or whatever you call it.” Teri laughed at herself. “I’m such a novice I don’t even know what you call it.”

“It’s a boat,” Mark said.

“Well, sometime, when it’s convenient, I’d like to go out on your boat and learn more about your great blue, rorqual, baleen friends with the triangle fins on their tails.”

“The fin is actually on their backs. By their tails.” Mark smiled back. But he didn’t extend an invitation for Teri to come out on the boat with him.

She made a mental note of that and brought it up later that night when she and Anita were alone in the living room.

“Didn’t he seem a little aloof to you?” Teri asked. “He didn’t ask me to go out on the boat.”

“That doesn’t necessarily mean anything.”

“Yeah, but he seemed so distant, not like I thought he would be. Do you think he’s starting to have a hard time relating to humans because he’s with whales so much?”

“That’s a crazy thing to ask.”

“No, it isn’t. Mark seems different to me. A lot different than he was last year. Do you think I’ve changed much?”

“No.”

“Then it’s he. I think he’s emotionally involved with someone else.”

“Why in the world would you think that?” Anita said.

Teri could hear the low hum of the ceiling fan as it stirred the night air. “It’s just not the same. At all.”

“Why are you jumping to conclusions, Teri? You haven’t

given him a fair chance. One dinner is not enough to throw out your relationship. Didn't you feel anything when you saw him?"

"Not like I did last year. But last year it seemed mutual from the start. I think I was hesitant to let myself feel anything tonight until I knew where he was coming from."

"Maybe he was doing the same thing," Anita said. "You both are making this complicated. You need to wait and see what happens. You'll see him tomorrow."

"I *might* see him tomorrow. Didn't you hear what he said? If the boat stayed in dock he *might* come to the luau. I had the impression that if he showed up at all it would be at the last minute. He sure didn't commit himself to anything, did he?"

"Is that what you were expecting? An instant commitment? Teri, you're analyzing all the romance out of this. You have a tendency to do that, you know. Don't turn this into another Luis relationship."

"It's not," Teri said, instantly on the defense.

"Why don't you sleep on it and see what happens tomorrow? I'm going to bed." Anita gave her a hug before heading off to the bedroom where Dan was already asleep. "Good night!"

Pulling out the Hide-A-Bed and slipping between the cool sheets, Teri wondered if Anita had ducked out so quickly because she didn't want to talk about Luis. Teri curled up and let her mind fill with memories of him. Luis was a terrific man. Everyone thought they would marry. They were from the same backgrounds, had the same major in college, liked the same things, and had dated for almost a year. But one day they looked at each other and mutually decided to end it, even though neither of them could articulate a clear reason either for themselves or for their shocked friends and family.

Teri remembered saying something about how they needed either to marry or break up, but they couldn't go on any longer

the way they were. It was too easy, too comfortable, and too unexciting. They were more like two cousins together at summer camp than two people deeply in love. There were no fireworks. Teri needed fireworks.

Since Luis and Teri had broken up during their senior year of college, no other significant man had been in Teri's life. Now, with a glimmer of a relationship with Mark, Teri wondered if her sister were right about her analyzing all the romance out of her relationships. Still, the fact remained: she needed fireworks.