

Chapter 1

The world has ended. Well that's what I thought to myself as I awoke with a mighty headache while tossing and turning from a horrible nightmare. In my dream I was at work and a great massive tsunami came crashing towards me. From my office I could see the sea receding and then a mighty wave come crashing back to the shore, covering the beach, and coming straight at my office building. I was watching it all unfold from the office window. And just before the wave came crashing through the building and killing me in its wake, I woke up. I was lying in my bed at my small flat, my heart pounding in my chest and my head pounding too! I tried to open my eyes to no avail. Why had I dreamt this same goddamn dream again? Maybe I am foretelling the future? Or maybe I am just drunk and slowly losing my mind? The later is much more likely, obviously.

After about 10 minutes of lying in bed and praying for my headache to disappear, I made myself crawl out of bed very ungracefully. I stood up, feeling even more intense pain wash through me. The headache was real even if the dream wasn't.

I went and made myself a cup of coffee and sat on the lounge drinking it savouring every single gulp. I loved my coffee and my food too. And thank god it was Sunday. I had a day to recover before going back to work. I popped 2 paracetamol to help with the pain and went and had a shower.

In the bathroom window I could see my big brown eyes with heavy bags under them, my brown shoulder length hair and my stocky frame. My hair was rather straight but still wispy and unruly and I truly hated it. My family used to say, one is never happy with their appearance and they always wish they were different. I agreed with that statement as I always thought I could look better. And even after taking a long shower I felt terrible.

But then who cares its Sunday, I reminded myself. And I am at home in my own apartment and know one is even going to see me. The main part is my headache was going away, and the pain nowhere near as bad after the painkillers took effect.

I could hear my phone ringing and thought who would be ringing me on a Sunday morning? Feeling a little fresher and in a new outfit, I walked through my apartment to answer the ringing phone.

“Hello”, I said into the phone.

“Cottony, is that you”, replied my brother’s voice on the other end of the phone. I could recognise his voice anywhere.

“Yes, Curtis who else would it be? What’s up?” I replied.

“Oh good, your home. Its just...” he trailed off.

“Its just what?” I asked because my brother Curtis usually just jumped right into conversation, it wasn’t like him to stop talking. Also, he usually only rang when he wanted something, a loan or for me to mind his cute fluffy dog named Sam.

“Its just, do you remember our uncle?”

“Who? Dad’s brother, Frank?” I asked.

“Yeap that’s the one. Well he died last week and I got this package from him in the mail. It was addressed to both of us.” He sounded so matter-of-factly, like it wasn’t a big deal that a relative had died. How was it I didn’t hear about this earlier? Did he have a funeral already or was I going to be invited to the funeral? I had many questions suddenly running through my mind.

“What?” I asked, trying to take it all in. We were estranged from our Uncle Frank as he had a falling out with our Dad, Marcus.

“I know! I was just as shocked as you. I was going about my business and then found this package on my front porch and a note telling me our uncle had died. It was weird”. My brother replied. “So I rang dad”.

“And what did Dad say?” I asked and I was curious now.

“He said that was the first time he heard about Frank’s death. He was in genuine shock Cottony,” said my brother.

“Right, and are we invited to a funeral? What is happening? Is everyone ok?” I asked concerned.

“Well apparently, now sis here is the weird part, apparently there has already been a funeral. I hope you are sitting down now. Our uncle Frank wanted to be cremated as soon as possible after death and his ashes sprinkled in the sea,” finished my brother.

“Right... so there was not really a funeral then?”

“Yeap, that’s correct. His death was so quiet and mysterious. I asked for a death certificate and on it, it just says he had a heart attack,” Curtis replied.

“Well there’s nothing sinister about that!” I commented.

“No there’s not. I know we didn’t know him that much but I thought you might want to come and take a look at this strange box of his belongings?” Curtis asked.

“What is so strange about his belongings?” I was confused that our uncle had died of a heart attack, was cremated and then this strange box appears. What was going on?

“Well, the weirdest part about his box of belongings, are the books and maps in the box, they are all about a mythical place called ‘*Seallinwold*’” Curtis took a breath waiting in anticipation for my response. I could hear him breathing on the end of the phone.

“Seallinwold. That’s not a place, is it?” I asked.

“If it is a place, it is certainly not one I have ever heard of,” he replied.

“Well what do the books say?” I was very curious now!

“Well that’s just it Cottony. The books are in another language. I tried finding out what language, I thought maybe Norse, Danish, Irish, or even Icelandic. But no, the text in these books is not written in any known language that I could see!”

“No known language? But what are the books about then? And why did our uncle get a hold of them?” My mind was ticking away with all the possibilities about what these books could be, where they were from and more. And then, I was feeling sorry and guilty about my estranged uncle dying and me not knowing much at all. One minute I was hung over the next I found out my uncle had died. It was sad, weird, confusing. My mind was ticking away hundred million miles per hour.

"I have no idea. I am truly in the dark as much as you are. So far, I have asked around and no one knows anything at all. Libraries have never heard of the books, the books are not registered anywhere. I even asked an archaeologist and she had no idea and suggested the books could be someone's idea of a fun prank!" he finished.

"Right, well what ever they are, they seem interesting and now you have got my interest. I would love to see them and have a look" I said. "I want to know more about our uncle too."

"Well that's why I am ringing. Me and dad are having lunch next week to look through the box and I thought you might like to come?" Curtis asked.

"Yes count me in," I replied. "Where are we having lunch?"

"At Dad's next Saturday at about 11am," my brother answered.

"Right well I will definitely be there!" I was so excited to go exploring and see what this could all be about. I also wanted to learn more about my uncle Frank and answer all the questions about his life. All I knew about him was that he worked as a mechanic. Well he did work as a mechanic the last time I had seen him, which was when I was 5. I am now 23. So there are many missing years where none of the family had seen him, spoken to him and learning about his life would be interesting. Not only that, but now I was an adult, learning from my father why we were not talking to him any more would be fantastic. What did he do to become estranged?

"Right. I will let dad know," replied Curtis.

We said goodbye and hung up. My brother Curtis loved talking but was always curt and quick with endings and goodbyes. He was certainly not the lovely, emotional type of person.

God what could that all be about I pondered. It was so sad to lose a relative, but having not known him well, I was not overly sad. I was more curious than anything. I wanted to explore his life. I felt guilty because I didn't even know if he had a family or if I had cousins. When I was younger he didn't but 18 years is such a long time and anything could of happened during that time. He could have

got married and had kids for all I knew! The lunch with Dad and Curtis would certainly be interesting I thought.

I decided to Google Seallinwold. Nothing came up in a search, absolutely nothing. Then I thought I would call my friend Alex, she was doing a PHD in Archaeology and might be interested too. I met her back when I was at Uni. I was doing a bachelor of science majoring in oceanography and she was doing Archaeology. We had a few classes together for electives. I have always had a keen interest in the sea and oceans. I now work in an office with a great view of the ocean as a data analyst interpreting maritime data. The pays ok, and the work is not too bad either.

Alex's surname was Rickers and my surname is Randstand. So we used to be called the 2 Rs. People would say here comes the 2 Rs. God knows why people would call us that!

I picked up my phone again and dialled Alex's number. She answered.

"Hello, Cottony," said Alex.

"Hi, Alex. How are you?" I thought I would start with the formalities first. I had no idea how to broach the subject that my uncle died and left me and my brother a box with weird books in it talking about a place called Seallinwold, written in an unknown language.

"Great Cottony, what's up," she replied.

"Um, I just got this weird call from my older brother Curtis," I said.

"Ok. Why weird?" Alex asked.

"Weird in that apparently we received a box of his belongings and in that box are books that are written in another language, about a place called Seallinwold," I finished trying not to sound like an idiot.

"Right...and how do you know its about a place called Seallinwold if its written in another language?"

"Now that is a great question. My brother just said it was about a place called Seallinwold," I said sounding matter-of-factly wondering how my brother knew.

"It sounds bogus to me!" she said.

“Well my brother did say he checked in with an archaeologist and she said it was probably a prank. That wasn’t you was it?” I asked.

“Nope. I can honestly say I have not received any calls from your brother.”

“Right, apparently there are maps too! I am going to have lunch with my brother and dad next Saturday to find out more,’ I said.

“It sounds strange to me, really strange. I remember studying about a manuscript in my undergraduate days, the Voynich manuscript, that was about plants and treatments written in an unknown language that today is still a mystery.”
Finished Alex.

“So are you saying that this book about Seallinwold could be something similar?”

“I have no idea, I can’t give answers until I know more” she sounded so interested.

“Would you like to come to the lunch next Saturday,” I said without thinking!

“Um ok, sure. Can you text me the address and time?”

“Yeap, I will do.” I was even more curious now. What was this book all about and what was I going to discover next Saturday.

“Ok, well see you then Cottony,” finished Alex.

“Ok, bye.” I texted her dad’s address and the time right away.

All of a sudden I had forgotten about my headache and my dream, and was focussing on this random box of my uncles possessions. Then it hit me. What if my evil brother was playing a prank on me? He did that occasionally! Was he making this up? But then why would he make up a story about my uncle dying? Get a grip I told myself! Well I would find out at the lunch at any rate.

I walked out onto the balcony of my apartment and sat there soaking up the beautiful sunshine. It was certainly a beautiful day. I lived in a small apartment in Caloundra in Queensland. I was not that far from the beaches. It was a great place to live. I also worked in an office near the water at the Sunshine Coast too. I was lucky to get a job so close to home. At any spare moment I would go to the beach and walk along the foreshore. I had a good life for all intents and purposes.

I just sat there thinking about the events from the day. Then I remembered why I was hung-over! Oh sugar. I thought. What had happened the night before? Then I remembered, I had met up with a handsome man named James. I remember exchanging phone numbers with him. Oh god! I remember dancing like a complete idiot. Oh well, I reassured myself. I am sure he doesn't remember me! I hope he doesn't. Well what's new? Absolutely nothing. I picked myself up and went back inside to do nothing for the day. I thought, I would give myself the rest of the day to recover from everything.

I put on the TV and sat on the lounge wondering what these books were all about but also thinking of what had happened last night with James. I remembered, dancing, talking and eating. Nothing bad had happened I am sure of it. As I said, I am sure he doesn't even remember me! As I was sitting there thinking my eyes were slowly closing. How was I tired? I had just woken up! I did get home really late. I decided to let myself sleep after only being awake for a few hours and was fast asleep within minutes.