

# BREAKER'S PASSION

*by*  
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## CHAPTER ONE

The nightmare always began the same. Bodies bathed in sweat. Arms and legs twisted among wrinkled sheets damp from hours of passion. The only noise in the room came from the two figures bound together in pleasure. It wasn't until the barest rays of dawn peeked over the horizon that silence engulfed the room. The next sound was the sick, piercing scream. Earsplitting at first, it started to diminish second after second, softer and softer until silence reigned again.

Colby woke with a start. The crushing weight in her chest, the room spinning, her face drenched in sweat were familiar. The pounding in her temples overwhelmed her, not letting up. She shook her head, running her fingers through her short black hair and squeezing tight, as if the pain that her action caused would stop the throbbing.

It took her a few moments to realize the pounding wasn't inside her head, but outside her small apartment. She threw her legs over the side of the bed and walked naked across the room. Opening the curtain she looked down to see a group of seven or eight people by her front door, one of them knocking. It was her eight a.m. surfing class. Colby stepped back before any of the eager students noticed her bare breasts through the window above their head. Grabbing a T-shirt off the chair

beside her, she pulled it over her head before she opened the window.

“Hey, sorry about that. Be down in a second.” Colby waved, then slid the window shut.

She brushed her teeth and washed her face in less than five minutes. Her hands had finally stopped shaking from the nightmare as she stepped outside into the new day. No matter how bright the sun, every morning transformed the nightmare into reality.



Elizabeth was ready to explode. She'd been waiting in baggage claim for the last ninety minutes with no sign of her luggage. She fumed again, though Elizabeth Collins never lost her temper. She was always calm and composed. Libra was her astrological sign—the scales. She was well-balanced in both her personal and professional life and rarely experienced the highs and lows that most people did. An ex-girlfriend had said she was inhibited. During one of their many ugly fights, another called her frigid. She didn't care what people thought. She was comfortable with herself, except for right now.

Elizabeth looked around one more time. Another crowd of people eager to begin their dream vacations descended on baggage claim, grabbing their luggage as it tumbled off conveyor belt #4. For the past thirty minutes, eight such crowds had come and gone. To her left a single green bag circled clockwise around belt #2, going nowhere, obviously unclaimed. Elizabeth was too pissed off to wonder about its owner.

She seemed to have been going around in circles with the lone bag. First, no sign of her suitcases, then a trip to customer service, then back to baggage claim, and again back to the

same woman at the customer-service counter, who this time assured her that her three suitcases were on the next inbound flight. Three flights later Elizabeth was still wondering which *next* she was referring to. This wasn't a dream. It was a nightmare.

The warm Hawaiian air made a bead of sweat snake between her breasts, and she was glad she had put her shoulder-length blond hair up with a large clip. The humidity would make her curls even more unmanageable. The entire baggage-claim area was open, with no doors or windows, simply a dozen or more thick cement columns supporting a tall roof. Luggage carts, lined up at least sixty deep between carousels #1 and #2, were waiting to be loaded with tourist baggage. Two vending machines prepared to spit out Coke products and junk food stood on the far wall next to the entrance to the restrooms. Behind her was the required Starbucks stand and next to it a small magazine outlet. Apart from the open-air baggage-claim area and the sign on the ladies' room door that said *Wahine*, the biggest surprise of island life so far was that the TSA security screeners wore shorts.

A steady breeze blew through the entrance, causing tourist brochures to flap in their holders. She had read just about every one while waiting for her AWOL bags to appear and learned that while she was on the island she could do everything from visiting an aquarium and sailing down a zip line to eating every kind of seafood imaginable.

She reached for her phone, but before she had a chance to flip it open, it rang. Recognizing the number displayed on the face, she didn't mince words.

"What?"

"Jesus, Elizabeth, you're in paradise, supposed to be relaxing with a fruity drink in your hand, not biting my head off."

“Sorry, Diane. I’m still at the airport waiting for my luggage.”

“I thought you’d be on the beach by now.”

Elizabeth gave her best friend, Diane Tatum, the CliffsNotes version of her trip so far. “What’s up?” she finally asked.

“My mother broke her hip.” Diane’s New York accent echoed in her ear. *Mother* sounded more like *muth-a*.

“What?” Elizabeth wasn’t sure if she understood because another flock of tourists heading toward the baggage carousel had distracted her.

“I said my mother broke her hip. She tripped over that goddamn mutt of hers and fell. She was on the floor all night before she was able to get to the phone and call me.”

Elizabeth’s stomach knotted. She had spent so much time at Diane’s house when she was growing up, Lucille Tatum had been almost as much a constant in her life as her own mother.

“My God, Diane, how is she?”

“Not good.” Diane sighed into the phone, sounding weary. “The doctor said it’s practically shattered. She needs a hip replacement. She’s in a lot of pain and heavily sedated. Surgery is the day after tomorrow.”

Recovering from the shock, Elizabeth started walking toward the ticket counter. Maybe she could get a return flight to the mainland on the next US Airways flight. “Look, I’ll come back. You’ll need help with her when she’s recovering.”

“Don’t.” Diane’s voice was firm, and Elizabeth stopped as though Diane had reached through the cell-phone waves and grabbed her. “There’s nothing you can do here. She’ll be in the hospital for about a week, then off to a rehab facility for at least a month or two. I want you to stay. You need a vacation, Elizabeth. You promised me you’d relax.”

After months of needling, she had promised Diane she would do just that. She had been more keyed up lately, at least for her, and as much as she had dragged her feet on this trip, she knew it would be good for her.

“She won’t die. She’ll live another thirty years. That dog of hers might not make it through tomorrow, though, if I have to take care of it.” Diane was beginning to sound like her normal sarcastic self.

“Di—”

“No, Elizabeth,” Diane barked back at her. “If I find out you came back I’ll kick your butt.”

With relief she saw her bags pop out of the chute. A few more words with Diane, then she hung up. She glanced at her watch, furious. It was almost one thirty. She slung her backpack over her shoulder, grabbed her luggage, and headed for the rental-car counter.



Elizabeth looked at her watch for the third time in almost as many minutes while the rental-car attendant demonstrated how the sleek sedan transformed into a sleeker convertible with just a click of a button. She knew how these things worked, but this guy probably had to follow rules and regulations and procedures to reduce their liability if she did something stupid like try to open the top while driving. Trying to exhibit more patience than she felt, Elizabeth listened to the safety instructions, where she could and couldn’t take the vehicle, blah, blah, blah.

Finally, after what seemed like forever, he handed her the keys, wished her a good day, and she was on her way. She asked how to get to her hotel as she exited the rental-car lot.

After a quick left turn, then a right, Elizabeth slid her Ray-Bans on her face, her Arizona Diamondbacks cap on her head, and stepped on the gas.

Traffic was light, at least in comparison to what she was used to, and she maneuvered the car in and out of the unimpressive vehicles on the road. The cars in the Enterprise lot were either Jeep Wranglers, convertibles like hers, or minivans. God forbid she would ever be caught driving a minivan. Even if by some strange luck she found herself with half a dozen kids she would never, ever own one. They were the pure symbol of white-middle-class heterosexuality. She was more the Cadillac Escalade kind of woman.

Passing the requisite Home Depot, Costco, and Kmart on her left, Elizabeth was soon enjoying the cool air as she made her way west out of town. After she turned left on the Honoapiilani Highway, traffic was almost nonexistent and she increased her speed. She was still pissed off about the luggage delay, but the green rolling hills on the right calmed her.

Even though the entire island was formed of lava rock, the sheer fortitude of Mother Nature created a lush, tropical landscape. In preparation for the trip, Elizabeth had kept a close eye on the weather forecast and knew Maui had received an unusually large amount of rainfall recently. The greenery along the highway confirmed it.

Three or four miles farther, the shoreline finally appeared to her left, as beautiful and breathtaking as Elizabeth had imagined. It was early afternoon and the sun was still high in the sky behind her, reflecting off the crystal-clear blue ocean and the crashing white waves. The sight of the cresting waves and the clear sky, with other islands off in the distance, affected her with surprising intensity.

She was not emotional. Far from it. She was analytical, looking for a reason and an explanation for just about

everything. In fact, Diane often teased her, had tagged her emotional stability a flatline. At first she was amused, but the more she thought about the term the more she didn't like it. She was pleased she didn't suffer the emotional highs and lows of her friends, but the reference to flatline indicated no heartbeat, no pulse, and no life. She wasn't dead. Far from it. She was alive and lived life fully. She was happy. At least she thought she was.

As she drove, she remembered a recent conversation when one of her friends called at ten p.m. sobbing because she had just broken up with her girlfriend. Elizabeth rolled her eyes. It was ridiculous. Her friend had known this woman all of six months and she was heartbroken, practically wailing into the telephone with words like "I'll never love again," "How could she do this to me," and "We were perfect together." How could she be so emotionally upset when their relationship ended? Elizabeth hadn't acted even close to that bad when she had finally admitted her relationship with Sarah was over.

She had met Sarah eight years earlier in a public library, both of them reaching for the same copy of Edgar Allan Poe's collected poems. Dozens of lunches, dinners, cups of coffee, and sleepovers later, Elizabeth finally admitted they were a couple. Sarah had wanted to live together, but Elizabeth had drawn the line at that point. She had watched far too many friends become typical lesbians and move in with each other after one or two months. No way would she humiliate herself by doing the same thing, only to find that after a few months the relationship fizzled and one of them was left trying to find a new place to live. With her luck she'd be stuck trying to throw Sarah out because they were living in her place.

She rarely thought about Sarah in the years since their relationship ended. It started out fun and exciting, even lustful, but after several years they discovered they were too much

alike. Most people would consider that a good thing, she and Sarah being exactly alike in temperament. They weren't particularly adventurous either inside or outside the bedroom, let alone anywhere else in their lives. In the beginning of any new relationship the atmosphere at the same old restaurant always brightened and the food tasted better. The same shops had a new look and feel, walks were more beautiful, and smells were more acute when you were holding hands with your new love. But after a while the excitement faded and one day simply melted into another, which melted into another. With Sarah it melted into four years.

Elizabeth hadn't tried to analyze the growing discomfort in her sedate relationship. Instead of feeling relaxed and secure she was anxious, as if she was looking for something but didn't know what. Like something might just show up and knock on her door.

Sarah had no idea their relationship was ending when she agreed to Elizabeth's plans to have dinner at Sarah's apartment. Elizabeth didn't know when to break it to Sarah, but over coffee and dessert she started the conversation she had rehearsed earlier that day. Sarah took it surprisingly well, and since they didn't live together Elizabeth merely had to collect some toiletries and a few clothes she had left in Sarah's closet. Two grocery bags later Sarah was out of her life. Nice and neat.

Sure, it had hurt a little, but she wasn't sure if it was because she cared for Sarah or because yet another relationship hadn't worked out. For some reason she had thought about this sad fact of her life on the flight over and realized that her relationships with women had fallen into a pattern, an unsuccessful one. She'd meet someone, they'd hit it off, then the relationship would go stale, and she'd move on.

Halfway into the flight she'd decided she wasn't interested

in a long-term relationship. She wasn't made for one. She never felt overwhelming desire or craved a woman's touch. She liked sex, but it never really rang her bell that loud, so to speak, like it did with her friends. Passion, want, that never-ending thrill of a lover's touch was critical in a partner. She just didn't have it in her.

The honking of a horn brought her attention back to the road. She was alone in a sleek sports car in paradise and should be acting like it. She was still angry about the luggage fiasco, even though she should just get over it. The navigation system directed her to turn left in one hundred yards. Regardless of why she was here alone, she intended to make the most of this vacation.

She pulled into the wide circular drive of the resort. The valet hurried around the front of the car, opening the driver's door almost before she slid the gear into Park.

"Good afternoon and welcome to the Carlyle. Do you have a reservation with us?"

"Yes, I do," she replied, stepping out of the car.

"Wonderful. The lobby is right through those doors." The young man pointed over her left shoulder. "I'll have your luggage sent right up."

She had three bags; one she had managed to squeeze into the practically nonexistent trunk, the others were tossed casually into the backseat. Exchanging her last name for a claim check, she turned toward the lobby, slowing her pace as she approached the sliding doors the valet had indicated. Everywhere else there were open doorways and large spaces where windows would have been in a more traditional hotel lobby, but the open floor plan let the freshness of the warm Hawaiian afternoon drift through.

She walked to the registration desk, her tennis shoes not making a sound on the highly polished marble floor. Two

women behind the desk dressed in twin hotel uniforms looked more like leaders of an outdoor adventure than desk clerks in a five-star resort. Both of the stunningly beautiful women smiled as she approached. The woman on the left spoke first, repeating the question the valet had just asked.

“Checking in?”

“Yes, I’m Elizabeth Collins.”

“One moment, Ms. Collins.” The clerk’s fingers flew over the keyboard.

Elizabeth glanced around the lobby again. The sound of birds chirping was so close and clear Elizabeth turned around, fully expecting to see them hovering overhead. The woman drew her attention back.

“Here it is, Ms. Collins. I’m confirming that you’re scheduled to be with us for ten weeks?”

“Yes, that’s correct.” Elizabeth slid her backpack off her shoulder and placed it on the low counter in front of her.

“All right, Ms. Collins. If I could please see your driver’s license, I can finish checking you in. It should just take a minute or two.”

Elizabeth finished the rest of the paperwork, then the clerk gave her directions to the wing where her villa was located. Instead of going directly to her room she needed to stretch her legs a bit. Between sitting at the airport and the flight itself, she had been inactive for the past twelve hours and felt groggy and lethargic. She needed sunshine and fresh air.

She quickly exited the lobby and soon stood in front of an entrance to what appeared to be a miniature tropical rain forest. A brick sidewalk branched to the left and right, and a flagstone path curved out in front of her and disappeared into the foliage. A waterfall at least twenty feet high that flowed into a koi pond at her feet was the centerpiece of the entrance. The fish, between six and eighteen inches long, swam in lazy

circles, occasionally breaking the surface as if searching for their own breath of fresh air. As the water cascaded over the rocks, the tension in her shoulders soon drifted away and her head cleared. Water did have amazing healing powers. She looked forward to spending as much time as possible at the beach.

Taking the flagstone path she was quickly engulfed by trees and bushes; barely any light shone through the thick foliage in some places. A few more steps and she stood in a stunningly beautiful courtyard surrounded by dozens of bright pink hibiscus open to the sun that cut through the thick trees. At the other end of the courtyard was a small, blistering white gazebo. She could practically hear the multitude of wedding vows that had been repeated in the splendor of these intimate surroundings.

The sound of the ocean drifted into her head, and she turned toward it like a horse picking up an unfamiliar scent. Drawn to the ocean, she reluctantly left the sanctuary of the courtyard.

The path led her to another small patio, this one covered by a large green cabana and occupied by a small wedding party. The bride was beaming, the groom looked terrified, and a baby in the front row was crying. She continued past a flat, wide expanse of green grass with the dozens of lounge chairs scattered there supporting resort guests in various stages of dress worshipping the late-afternoon sun. A couple of kids no older than nine or ten were throwing a Frisbee back and forth while another pair tossed a football.

She passed a small restaurant tucked discreetly behind a large hedge. The clink of silverware and smell of seafood greeted her as she rounded the corner. Not particularly hungry, she kept walking past another pool with as many people in the water as out. At several tables guests were relaxing with

pitchers of beer. Other vacationers held red or orange beverages and their boisterous laughter indicated they had been drinking for some time. She wasn't big on alcohol. Rum, the main ingredient of tropical drinks, gave her a headache, but a few mild ones wouldn't be too bad.

Holding on to a handrail she untied her left shoe, pulled it off, stuffed her sock inside, then removed the other one. Two more steps and she was in the sand. Step after step her toes sank and her calf muscles tightened then relaxed. It was about twenty yards to the water, and in less than a minute the Pacific Ocean was lapping around her ankles.

As she stood there gazing out over the horizon, salt water splashed the legs of her shorts, but she didn't care. For the first time in years she wasn't on any timetable. She didn't have to punch a clock or keep one eye on her BlackBerry for the next meeting reminder to pop up. There was absolutely no place she had to be for the next ten weeks. She was here to relax and work on her new book, but her time was her own. The mere thought of the unending free time, the vast openness of her schedule, her calendar, her life almost overwhelmed her. She seemed to be in the middle of the ocean in front of her with no land in sight in any direction and nothing to hold on to. With no anchor she felt adrift and was suddenly uncomfortable.

Sensing she needed a significant change in her life, when she planned this trip she'd intentionally done nothing more than sketch out how far she wanted to get each day in the research for her book. She could do everything via the Internet these days, which was very different from twenty years ago when she'd gathered information for her PhD dissertation on seventeenth-century tribal warfare in Western Europe. She had spent years in dark, damp rooms in the back halls of musty old libraries digging through volumes of books with pages yellowed with age. She loved books—their texture, their smell,

the way they fit in her hands. She missed being able to almost touch the history she knew so well.

Due to technological advances and the green initiative at Embers College, her students didn't even have textbooks. Everything was digital, either downloaded via the mysterious World Wide Web or uploaded onto their tablet PCs from a flash drive no bigger than her little finger. The college library was small, housing only a few thousand books and reference material that had not yet made it to the digital age. Before leaving for this vacation she had shipped the last case of books to a small college in Nigeria that had asked for books to help their students learn English.

The receding tide tugged at her legs and she looked to her left, then her right, down the shoreline. Two kids laughed as they chased a third, who darted in front of her, forcing her to step back to avoid getting run over. "Sorry, lady," came a high voice from one of the kids as he raced to catch up with his friends. Smiling at the joy of youth, she turned to her left and started down the beach.

She wandered in and out of the tide, the water soaking her shorts then barely covering her toes as if teasing her to jump in and splash around like a kid again. Because she grew up only an hour from San Diego, Elizabeth had been to the beach as a child more times than she could remember. Her father was the produce manager in a grocery store, her mother a stay-at-home mom tending to the needs of Elizabeth's two siblings and making magical meals from the various leftovers her father brought home from work every day. Money was tight in the Collins house, so practically every weekend they packed the picnic basket, piled into the station wagon, and headed to Mission Bay, where her brother and sister swam and surfed all day. She preferred to bury her nose in a good book.

She didn't particularly care for the water. Actually

she didn't like the seaweed brushing against her calves and wrapping around her legs. When she was five, her brother played a cruel trick on her, convincing her that what she felt on her legs was a school of piranhas attacking her. She rarely went into the water again until she was much older. She wasn't squeamish or frightened anymore, but the feel of seaweed brushing her legs still gave her the creeps. This beach was free of it, though, and she continued walking.

As she passed resort after resort, the tension in her body drained away. "How can you not relax in such a beautiful place," she said out loud, no one within a hundred yards.

She was surprised when she glanced at her watch to see that more than an hour had passed. Even though it was barely after five, her stomach told her it was definitely past dinnertime. Fighting the urge to keep walking as far as she could around this beautiful island, she turned around and headed back toward her hotel.

A man wearing a scrap of brightly colored material that barely covered his crotch lay prone on a lounge chair to her right. He was far too overweight and hairy for any woman, even a straight one, to consider him the slightest bit attractive. But obviously no one had ever told him, judging by the way he proudly displayed his manliness. He was wearing mirrored sunglasses and she felt his eyes rake over her. She was wearing sunglasses too, albeit much more fashionable, and as much as she tried not to look at him too closely, it was like passing a train wreck. Her eyes kept darting over at him. She quickened her pace and chose instead to look at the adjacent islands off in the distance.