

# EROSISTIBLE

*by*  
Gill McKnight



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## CHAPTER ONE

Win?” The voice floated across the marble foyer toward Winifred Martin, as crisp and curt as she remembered. “My God, Win.” Then, “Where’s your other half?”

“She...she’s paying the taxi driver.” Win whipped off her sunglasses and blinked stupidly at Benedikte Fiske, her ex-girlfriend of many years.

“I meant you’d lost weight,” Benny stated abruptly. It was little comfort to Win that she looked equally astounded at bumping into each other after all this time.

Win shook her head, as if that would dissipate this bizarre image. Benny was here? Standing behind the reception desk in the elegant marble foyer of the Villa Eros, one of the most secluded, upmarket boutique hotels in the Greek Isles. The same Villa Eros that every lesbian magazine was raving about as an exclusive lovers’ getaway. Win was stunned. The most demented and annoying mistake of her life had literally popped up before her. Benedikte Fiske was *here* at Win’s luxurious holiday destination, never mind acting like a freak as usual. The heat wave had obviously boiled Win’s head to the point of hallucination. She could not understand what on earth Benny was doing here, but the snippy greeting assured her this was no mirage. This was unfortunately the real thing.

Although Benny seemed equally perturbed, it didn't stop her brusque, semi-insulting questioning.

"She's paying the taxi driver?" Benny sounded flustered and annoyed. "You're actually here with someone?" She looked totally affronted at the idea.

Win puffed in exasperation, trying to keep her temper. Benny had a habit of pushing all the wrong buttons with her. Pushing, picking, poking, prodding...

"Of course I'm here with someone." Win recovered enough to show her annoyance. "This, apparently, is a lesbian lovers' paradise. At least that's what it says in the brochure. More to the point, what are you doing here? You're a lesbian lovers' hell."

"I happen to own this hell—this establishment. I didn't see your name on the register," Benny accused right back.

"And I didn't see *your* name in the brochure, otherwise damn straight you'd not see my name on the register." Win was far too tired and cranky for this. She'd just spent three hours on a flight from London to Athens, followed by another five on a dilapidated old ferry, only to end her journey with one last brutal hour in a local taxi devoid of any air conditioning. All this through a crippling heat wave. To arrive hot and irritable and find her hotel was owned by her obstreperous ex-girlfriend. But then she was visiting the country that invented dramatic tragedy. What did she expect?



Benny had nearly short-circuited when her shapely blond ex strolled into her hotel in a breezy summer dress and dainty sandals. Even at one hundred paces and behind those enormous fashionable sunglasses, she could recognize the newly evolved Winifred Martin. Her long hair was piled up under a wide sun hat, a stylish belt clinched the dress to a new slim line waist. What the hell had happened to the chubby, sweet natured, and

totally maddening woman who had thrown her out on her ass three years ago?

She shuffled the pages on the desk and stole another quick peek. Win seemed as put out by the coincidence as Benny. She looked gorgeous though. The years had been good to her.

“Well, are you booked in or not?” Benny noted the beginnings of a tension headache, as if she needed a physical reminder that Win had just stepped back into her life.

“Of course I am. For two whole weeks. What’s wrong with your computer? Don’t tell me you’ve lost my booking. You took my money fast enough.”

Benny ruffled pages when she should have been tapping on her keyboard pulling up records. But the cool shift of quality paper stilled her trembling fingers and gave her a moment to think.

Win was here. In her hotel. Looking gorgeous in a flushed, disheveled, discordant sort of way. Benny was in a spin. Not that it was noticeable under her ice-cold Nordic exterior. She knew how to keep her cool, or at least look the part.

Why was Win looking so svelte and sexy? Why was she here at the Villa Eros hideaway? And who the hell was this “other half” busy paying the taxi?

“Is there a problem?” A voice like warmed caramel oozed across the foyer. Thick, sweet, and decadent. Benny looked up to see a stunning woman stroll over to join them. By her accent and handsome dark looks, Benny guessed she was probably French North African. She, too, was extremely elegant, dressed in a cool summer dress, her dark, glossy hair coiled up in a stylish twist. She had flair and beauty and smelled of expensive perfume and easy success. Benny hated her on sight.

“It seems they can’t find us on the register. Maybe we need name tags.” Win coolly turned her back on the desk and Benny.

“Electronic tags,” Benny muttered under her breath, “so I can see you coming on the radar of woe.”

She kept her head bent over her paperwork ignoring them both. Until the new arrival came over and stood far too close to Win. Touching her, in fact. Casually pressing up against her. Then Benny stood ramrod straight. Win's companion was a tall woman. She regarded Benny almost eye-to-eye in a friendly fashion, and quirked an amused eyebrow.

"Amira, let me introduce Benedikte Fiske. We know each other from a long time ago. Benny, this is my companion Amira."

Win was obviously trying hard to sound casual and light. Even if she had wanted to conceal their past, she could never have managed it. Win had always been compelled to tell the truth come hell or high water. Her embarrassment over the introduction was evident. Amira's other eyebrow shot up to join the first, and Benny gave a tight smile of acknowledgment. It was obvious this tall, sultry "other half" knew exactly who she was "from a long time ago." Which meant Win had been talking about her, which was probably a bad thing. Benny scowled and went back to ruffling and shuffling paper.

"Try looking for Amira Bakri," other half suggested helpfully. No sooner was it said than much to her annoyance Benny saw the name float up from the sheet before her, coupled with one *Martin, W.*

"We should be in the Aphrodite suite," Amira continued confidently, naming the villa's most luxurious set of rooms as if life held no problems a sweet smile, chilled attitude, and American Express Platinum couldn't melt away.

Benny bristled. "I'll have to check that." More paper rustling, then, "I'll need your passports."

Amira nodded cordially, her beautiful smile stretched even wider. She slipped an arm around Win's waist and gave a little squeeze. In one fluid, synchronized movement they slid their passports across the desk, a choreography of glamorous jet set lovebirds, used to traveling around the world's highways together.

Benny glowered at the comfortable pas de deux. Ignoring the glare, Win leaned in to her companion for a cuddle.

They were a handsome couple if you liked that yin and yang, night and day, dawn and dusk look. Benny didn't. She scribbled down their details and slammed some keys on the counter beside the passports.

"Eleni," she bellowed in a very un-boutique way. A teenage girl came sprinting out from the terrace to the left. She was dressed similarly to Benny in crisp white linen pants and shirt, the Villa Eros logo of a little bow and arrow on her breast pocket. Benny nodded at the keys.

"Please look after our guests, Eleni. Your luggage will follow on shortly. Enjoy your stay." She addressed Amira and Win formally and, without further comment, turned her back and pretended to be busy. In the mirrored wall behind reception, she caught Win rolling her eyes at a bemused Amira. Benny gritted her teeth as she watched Eleni begin to gather the lighter luggage.

"Excuse me, but are you Amira Bakri?" Eleni asked blushing furiously.

"Yes, I am." Amira gave a blazing smile.

Now that Eleni had mentioned it, Benny became aware of the covert looks the newcomers were receiving from the other guests as they passed through the foyer. It seemed this Amira was a well-known figure. Benny turned back to observe the passion play unfolding before her.

"Wow. I love your music." Eleni stopped and pulled a bundle of headphone wire from her pants pocket. "I've got you on my iPod. I was just listening to—" She faltered, noticing Benny's stony stare. Darting forward, she grabbed the keys from the counter and gathered up the smaller bags. "Follow me, please."

Under Benny's withering gaze Eleni led her charges away, her devoted eyes constantly sliding over to Amira Bakri. Judging by the quiet amusement on Win's face, this was a typical teenage reaction.

Benny watched them leave, confusion washing over her. So Amira Bakri was a famous musician, was she? Well, famous to the likes of Eleni who thought Bach was a flower remedy and Sibelius a sexually transmitted disease. She'd have to do an online search later and see just who this Bakri woman was that she could drag Eleni out of her usual zombiesque teen trance... and be a half of anything to Winifred Martin.

Dismissing it from her mind, Benny was humming tunelessly when five minutes later Win reappeared before the desk, her face dark with anger, gray eyes flashing. Her jaw muscles clenched and unclenched in that delightful way that reminded Benny of a venting volcano. Then Win would explode in a pyroclastic surge of red hot, scalding anger that could crisp the object of her wrath into Pompeian ashes. Benny loved it. When Win lost her temper, it was as colorful as Chinese New Year.

Calmly, Benny capped her fountain pen and raised her eyebrows in question.

“Yes? Can I help you?”

“Why are we in single rooms?” Win asked through gritted teeth. “On separate floors?”

Villa Eros was a sprawling affair on two levels. It cradled an elegant, formal courtyard, and beyond that beautifully set out gardens. These in turn led to a vista of sloping vineyards that ran all the way down the hillside to the villa's private beach and the sparkling Aegean Sea.

Benny smiled benignly. “That's how you're booked in. Amira Bakri, and Martin, W.” Primly, she read out the page. “Two single rooms from the fourth to the eighteenth. Sea views, scuba, and scooter hire. Oh, and no dairy. I take it that's for you. Does cheese still make you mucousy?”

“Do you think you're being clever?”

Benny leaned across the counter. “I don't have to be clever. It's all on this paper.” She flicked it officiously.

“So, we're agreed, you're far from clever.” Win snorted.

Benny frowned, rethinking her last comment. She could see nothing wrong with it, but Win's snorting disconcerted her a little. So did Win's self-restraint. Where were the pyrotechnics? Benny straightened up. Obviously, a lot of things had changed.

"So you're saying you want to amend your booking?"

"I'm saying I'm only here five minutes and already you're spoiling my holiday. I want my original booking restored."

"I see. You're still blaming me for everything that goes wrong." She knew this sounded petulant, but Benny was still frothing over Win's arrival, never mind the oily charmer hanging on her arm.

"I'm blaming you for separate rooms. Everything else is just perfect, thank you."

"Well, then it's a pity your sleeping arrangements leave so much to be desired," Benny slid in snidely, hoping she was casting aspersions on Win's bedroom activities with Ms. "I'm-So-Super" Bakri. English wasn't Benny's first language and she had to be careful when she got emotional. Things often came out wrong. "I am sure I can fix *that* for you." She smiled coolly at Win. Now *that* sounded exactly right if Win cared to remember.

Win frowned trying to pick out genuine caustic comment from bumbling, self-important nonsense. It was easier to favor Benny's swollen sense of self than deal with a blatant reference to their past. Especially in a bedroom context. Bed had always been the best place for both of them. Horizontally, they worked; vertically, they spent all their time trying to knock each other flat again, or so it had seemed.

"We booked the Aphrodite suite. Why are we not in it?" she ground out. Win was seconds away from heat exhaustion. Through the terrace door to the left, she could see the glimmer of the infinity pool. It took all the reserve she had not to run shrieking at it, tearing off her clothes on the way, and plunge into its cool blue. Even though the entire villa was air conditioned throughout and wonderfully ambient, the earlier heat damage had

already mangled Win's patience. Today she had endured a long, tedious journey through a land of scorched earth and blistering winds. Blasted by UV rays and acrid air no moisturizer known to man could withstand. To be dragged up burned and barren mountains to...wait for it, cherry on the cake, *Benny's place*. Win felt fit to kill. All she needed was prey. And here it was—her lanky, lunatic ex. Tall, angular, white blond, and overexcitable, hopping up and down before her like a suicidal snow hare.

"You are booked into the *Aphrodisia* rooms. Those are our single rooms. It has to stay like that until Ioanna, who took the booking, comes on duty and sorts your problem out." Benny sniffed a little too smugly.

"Aphrodisia, Aphrodite. It's just a typo, for God's sake."

"I can't assume that. Ioanna has to correct it."

"When will Ioanna come back on duty?"

"Tomorrow morning."

"Look." Win's hand slapped down on the counter. "Who is in the Aphrodite suite at the moment?"

"No one. It's reserved for some celebrity or other. That's all Ioanna had written down here. Celeb and '*friend*.'" Benny used finger quotes for "friend" in a way that suggested the Great Whore of Babylon had come to stay.

Win puffed in anger. "And who could that celebrity be? How many celebrities do you have arriving this afternoon with their 'friend'?" She finger quoted back.

"It's against Villa Eros's policy to give out the names of—"

"It's us, you idiot!" Another slap of the counter.

"Ahem." A discreet cough came from the marble stairway. They both ignored it.

"I don't know that. Ioanna didn't put the names on the register, just the 'Celeb' code we use for celebrities. Stop slapping my desk."

"Ahem. Can I help?" The voice came closer.

"And what other secret celebrities have you got hidden away

here, huh? Who's lurking in the grounds? Elvis? Glen Miller? Janis Jop—”

“I'm sorry, but I can't tell you that information. For all I know you might be the press.”

“Press? Me? Why you absolute wank—”

“Benny, what's going on here?” The voice now had a ring of command that demanded their attention.

“This guest is unhappy with her room.” Benny was very sullen. Win took this as an indicator the Greek woman who had just appeared had some influence over her errant ex. She was also dressed in the villa's white linen uniform.

“Please, can you help me?” Win asked. “My companion and I have just arrived. We booked the Aphrodite suite but through some mixup.” She glared hard at Benny before giving full attention to this more intelligent member of staff. “We've been given separate rooms.”

“I will see to it at once, Madame. And you are?”

“Winifred Martin, and please call me Win.”

“Pleased to meet you, Win. I am Ioanna Kakos, a proprietor of the Villa Eros.” They shook hands warmly as Benny watched suspiciously. “Please let me amend your booking to your satisfaction.”

“My girlfriend's name is Amira Bakri. Her assistant made the booking, so I'm not sure how the mistake happened.” There was another glare at Benny, who ignored both her and Ioanna and belatedly began to punch information into the computer.

“See. No names beside Aphrodite, just ‘Celeb.’ How was I to know?” Benny waved belligerently at the monitor showing Ioanna something or other that supported her stance. Ioanna ignored the monitor and stared at her coolly as she passed a set of keys across to Win.

“Please forgive the mixup. It is our policy to keep the identity of our more famous guests as quiet as possible until they arrive. I'm afraid I forgot to update the booking with your details earlier

this morning. I'll have some wine and olives sent to your room by way of apology." Ioanna was faultlessly professional and polite.

Win accepted the keys gratefully. Her shoulders sagged. It had been a hard fight, but she had her romantic suite with its deep tub, cool, shuttered windows, and big, soft bed that she would collapse on to sleep away the rest of the afternoon.

"Thank you so much, Ioanna." She smiled.

"You're welcome. I'll have the rest of your luggage sent along immediately." Ioanna returned the happy smile with a little nod.

"What the hell was that?" Ioanna turned on Benny the minute Win disappeared from sight.

Benny tried to dismiss the incident. "I told you, there were no names in the—"

"Benedikte. The truth please. You deliberately pissed off one of our guests. Why? Why the hell would you want to do that?" Ioanna pinned her down with a long hard stare, her black eyes probing right into the center of Benny's shifty soul. Benny squirmed. Ioanna was some sort of witch; she was sure of it. The unwelcome answer popped into Ioanna's head and her eyes widened. "Oh, my God. Winifred Martin...she's your ex, isn't she? Well, isn't she?"

"Yes, she is. So what?"

"Why did you do that to her and her girlfriend? Are you really that jealous?" Ioanna was immediately hooked by her perceived drama.

"I am not jealous. Stop being so theatrical about a booking error. *Your* booking error."

Ioanna snorted. "I don't even know this Win Martin of yours, but if Amira Bakri's her lover then even I am jealous."

"And who the hell is this Bakri deity? The whole place has gone gaga since she arrived. Even Eleni woke up." Benny huffed.

"She's one of the singers in the French Algerian group,

Araby. They're like a world music version of Abba? Even you must have heard their latest, 'Pour Amour'? Everyone's singing it, humming it, dancing to it?" Ioanna snapped her fingers and swung her hips in a seductive rhythm as she hummed a sexy snippet of a popular tune. Benny shrugged in disinterest. Ioanna sighed and stopped her little showpiece.

"Can I at least assume there will be no more upsets, Benny? We need customers like Amira Bakri. We need customers period. The season is short enough as it is without you chasing them away and ruining us." Ioanna gave her another hard look and shook her head ruefully. "How did I ever end up with a crazy Swede as a business partner? My mind was cracked as an egg."

"My wallet was cracked as an egg."

"And what a beautiful omelet we made." Ioanna waved her arms in a grand gesture at the marbled foyer with its pseudo Doric columns and cool, clipped echoes.

They grinned at each other in a shared moment of pride. Then Ioanna added, "I know you have a history with her, Benny. But please try to control it, and for God's sake, be civil."

"I'm always civil. She was slapping my desk—"

"Benny?" Ioanna warned.

Benny gave a sulky sigh in answer.

"Eleni," she called. When the young girl appeared, she ordered, "Take some wine and olives up to the Aphrodite suite." Eleni's face lit up like a beacon, much to Benny's disgust. "Oh, and cheese. Lots and lots of cheese."