

# Someone To Love

Book 1 of the Lost Girls Trilogy

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***Someone to Love* - Prologue Excerpt - NOT FOR SALE**

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## Prologue

“OH, MY. WOULD YOU look at that?”

Libby cowered in the traveling trunk where she'd been hiding, determined to make herself as small as possible. She'd shut her eyes, yearning to be invisible, but it hadn't worked. The man who was looming over her could definitely see her.

He was wearing a uniform, so he appeared very large and very important. There were gold buttons on the front of his blue coat, and he had a belt with a big knife dangling on one hip and a big gun dangling on the other.

“Out with you now,” he said, but she simply stared up at him, wondering if she could jump out and escape.

In the time she'd been living on the deserted island, the few adults who'd been stranded with her had constantly advised her to watch out for bad men, but how was she supposed to know if he was bad or not? How was she supposed to know if she could trust him?

The adults had all passed away, so she had no one to answer those questions. She was only five, and it was frightening to have to decide so many issues on her own.

She peeked over the edge of the trunk, wishing Caroline and Joanna would be standing there. When the man's ship had dropped anchor out

in the bay, when the sailors had rowed to shore in their longboat, the sight had been so alarming that her two friends had run into the jungle.

Libby was smarter than Caroline and Joanna, so she'd assumed the traveling trunk was a better spot to hide. She'd been wrong though. The man had entered their dilapidated hut and opened it almost immediately.

What should she do? She was tired and hungry and anxious for him to help them. Tears welled into her eyes, which she hated. She wasn't a baby, and she'd been told repeatedly that she had to stop acting like one.

"Let's go, you adorable moppet," the man said, and when she didn't move, he reached down and lifted her out.

The instant her feet touched the ground, she tried to bolt out the door to freedom, but he was too quick for her. He grabbed her arm, and though she wrestled and kicked, she couldn't get away.

"Hold on, missy, just hold on."

He continued to talk, offering calming words until she was too fatigued to keep fighting him. Once her skirmishing ceased, he knelt down and asked, "What's your name?"

She scowled forever, debating whether to admit it. Her mother had warned her over and over that she should never confess it to anyone. It was a powerful secret, and if wicked people learned who she was, they'd take her away. Even though her mother had to be dead, the admonition still resonated.

The man recognized her consternation. "You can tell me what it is. Don't be afraid."

She debated a bit more, then said, "It's Libby."

"Libby . . . what?"

"Libby Carstairs."

"Hello, Miss Libby. I'm Captain Ralston. Is your mother or father with you?"

"No."

"Where are they?"

"I don't know."

"Do you have any idea what happened to them?"

"I think they drowned."

"Were you on a ship? Did it sink?"

"Yes. In a storm."

"I'm betting that was scary. Did you swim to shore?"

"I don't remember."

She thought she'd swum though. She had terrifying dreams of huge waves, dark water, angry clouds, and wind. For ages afterward, the palms of her hands had been sore and blistered, and she recalled gripping a piece of wood, loud voices shouting at her not to let go of it, and she hadn't.

The Captain glanced around the hut, assessing the crude beds, the ramshackle construction. They'd carried on the best they could with what they'd had, but it hadn't been much.

"Are there any adults with you?"

"No."

"Were there some in the beginning?"

"Yes."

"How many?"

"There were six, but they died."

"How?"

"They were hurt."

"When the ship sank?"

"Yes. Then they got sick."

"How long have you been here?"

She leaned in so they were nose to nose. "For a really, really long time."

She didn't have a number to explain how many days it had been. At first, Joanna's mother had survived with them, and she'd counted to

eighty-five, but after she'd cut her leg on a tree stump and had passed away, they'd lost track.

"Gad, but aren't you pretty?" he murmured. "You'll break some hearts when you grow up."

"That's what my papa always said."

"Your papa was right."

He stood and patted the top of her head, and the gesture made her feel safer. She didn't think he was a bad man, so he might agree to fix what was wrong.

"What was your papa's name, peanut?" he asked her.

"Papa?"

He snorted at that. "What about your mother?"

"Mama?" She frowned and posed a question that had been vexing her. "Could you find them for me? If they didn't drown, I'm worried they might be searching for me, but they don't know where I am."

"I will assist you as much as I can, but you shouldn't hope we'll locate your parents. I'm sorry, but I doubt you'll see them ever again."

"Maybe in Heaven someday?"

"Maybe in Heaven."

He sighed, and from outside, a sailor called, "Captain, would you come out? I have a surprise to show you."

On being summoned, he walked out, but he kept a hand on Libby's shoulder so she couldn't flee, but she'd decided she wouldn't. He appeared incredibly commanding to her, so he'd be able to tell her what should occur next.

Perhaps she could go home to England. She'd been happy there. At least she *thought* she'd been happy. She seemed to recollect a large mansion, a kind nanny, and a pony.

The sailor had stumbled on Caroline and Joanna where they'd been crouched in the foliage. Caroline shrugged at Libby, as if to admit their plan to hide in the jungle had been stupid.

Libby supposed they were a fearsome sight. Their hair was long and tangled, bleached blond from the hot sun, their dresses bleached too, the fabric worn thin and faded to white. They were barefoot, their skin bronzed, their condition bedraggled.

“Look what I found,” the sailor said to the Captain. He indicated Caroline and Joanna. “They’re all alone, and apparently, they’ve been living like a pack of wild animals.”

“No, we haven’t!” Libby furiously insisted. “We have a hut and everything.”

The sailor ignored her and addressed the Captain. “They’re like a trio of abandoned wolf pups.”

“We had mothers!” Libby huffed. “It’s not our fault that they died.”

But she was ignored again.

“Are there any others?” the Captain asked the sailor.

“Not that we saw.”

The Captain peered down at her. “Is it just the three of you? And don’t lie to me. This is important.”

“There’s just us three,” Libby said.

“Lord almighty,” he muttered as he led Libby over to Caroline and Joanna. “Will you introduce me to your companions?”

“This is Caroline”—Libby pointed to her—“and this is Joanna.”

“Are you sisters?” he asked.

“No.”

“None of you?”

“No. We’re like sisters though,” Libby told him. “We’re closer than sisters.”

“I’m sure you are.”

The Captain studied their surroundings. The sky was so blue, the ocean a brilliant turquoise color, the sand blazing under the sun’s unrelenting rays. The palm trees swayed but provided no real shade.

“What shall we do with them, Captain?” the sailor inquired.

The Captain grimaced with disgust. "It's beyond me. We'll convey them to the nearest port, and the authorities can figure it out."

"Shouldn't I stay here?" Libby asked. "What if my parents come for me?"

The Captain and the sailor exchanged a tormented glance, then the Captain said, "Trust me, Miss Libby, they won't come. Now then, are there any items you'd like to take with you? Have you any dolls or clothes or other mementoes you'd like to bring?"

"No, I don't have anything," Libby said.

"That's the saddest comment I ever heard." He spun to Caroline and Joanna. "How about you two girls? Are there things you'd like to take?"

They shook their heads, not keen to talk to him. It seemed like a dream, as if they would eventually wake up and the day would glide along as all the other days had glided along since they'd arrived.

"There's no reason to linger then," the Captain said, and he motioned to the longboat. "Let's get you out to the ship."

Libby blanched with dismay. "I won't go on a ship! None of us will go on a ship ever again!"

"It's all right," the Captain said. "Mine won't sink."

"It's what Mother claimed about the last one, but it wasn't true."

"I'll make it true," the Captain firmly stated, "and you have to be very brave, so Caroline and Joanna will watch you and realize how to be very brave too. Can you do that for me?"

"I guess," she grudgingly replied.

He picked her up and balanced her on his hip. She couldn't remember an adult picking her up before. And she was five, so she wasn't exactly tiny. For once in her short life, she felt protected.

"I'll climb onto a boat for you," she said, "but only if you promise I'll be safe."

"You'll be safe. I promise."

Libby rested her head on his shoulder and told herself to believe him. What other choice did she have?