



THE FOUR SEASONS SERIES
BOOK 1

THE
COLDEST
SUMMER

GRACE GERVAS

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CHAPTER 1

I'm standing in the middle of the massive grassland, lost into its view. The wild sun is shining gently, and I can feel the soothing, country breeze flipping my hair swiftly. The feeling is no longer foreign, I've been here before. It's the same place, and he will soon show up; the one with sensual hands, engulfing scent, the only one who constantly makes my heart beat fast, and my curiosity go wild, and my eyes go blind. I wander my gaze into the horizon, taking in every detail of the enchanting, crystal-blue sky, married to the waltzing silver clouds, and that's when I feel his presence behind me; so electrifying, utterly beguiling.

He hugs me tightly, making me melt completely to his touch, my body yielding to his grasp. I close my eyes to indulge the moment, the very same salacious moment, as he whispers in my ears, something I scarcely hear. I try to turn around, to finally have a glimpse of his beautiful face, the one that I've marveled over a million times in my heart, but it doesn't happen. He's always so near, yet so far away. Once again, I fail to see him.

Getting up immediately from my sleep, I run a hand messily through my hair. I'm panting like an injured bull, and I realize that I'm still in bed. So then, it was a dream; the same one I've been having frequently this year.

"I need to get myself a boyfriend," I mutter, turning on the bedside lamp.

Having a proper sleep has been quite a challenge for me. I've lost count of how many nights I've stayed awake, mainly because of a certain nightmare, and this tantalizing dream. I'm an insomniac, and I don't know what else to do about it after trying everything I could possibly do.

Well, maybe I shall heal in time.

A heavy sigh escapes my lungs, marveling the long night awaits. I know I won't easily get asleep right now, I usually don't, and it's only two a.m. Damn my life! I take a deep yawn while grabbing the bottle of water from the nightstand and gulp a bit.

"Ah, that's better," I breathe, my throat refreshed.

Fully aware of the resentment I have towards sweating, the summer has decided to grant me a vengeful visit. I quickly get up and turn on the fan, which allows my body to cool off gradually. The L.A heat is no joke this year.

Well, it's always like this, but then I'd say the same thing next year.

Not knowing what to do in the middle of the night, I grab this adventurous novel, *The journey to the Centre of the Earth*, and try to make my brain tired so as to finally force my body to do the same.

At last, I don't remember when I closed my eyes, until I wake up in the morning wishing it were Sunday. Well, one can only wish sometimes. It's already seven-thirty as I move hurriedly around my room.

I finish tying my natural curls into a simple up-do and slip into a pair of cream pumps. Done with that, I zip up, with much difficulty, the black wrap dress I'm wearing. I quickly run outside and slip in my Old-Benny, just to learn that it's acting up, again.

"Fuck! Why can't you start?" I grunt, wrestling with the engine that's grunting twice as much for almost five minutes. Shit, I'm going to be late. I sigh heavily, leaning on the headrest. "A taxi it is." I grab my handbag and exit the car in a rash.

After hassling with the traffic and all, I manage to hit my workplace, about an hour later. I guess it's one of those terrible mornings that you may wonder how the rest of the day will be. First a haunted night, and then an awful morning.

Good morning, Hollywood.

"Here goes nothing," I breathe, enjoying the free air of this gigantic campus that's already buzzed with people walking in and about.

"Morning, Kira. I'm glad you're early." Dana, our office assistant, regards me as soon as I arrive in the office.

She is dark-skinned, short, slim, and talks like a broken record, but rather very efficient.

"Hey, everything okay?" I reply while putting my belongings atop of my desk, ready to receive the bomb she's about to drop. I know it's a bomb.

I glance up at her, and she looks in quite a frenzy; her short hair all ruffled from a constant scratching, I suppose, for it's what she normally does when things get tough in the office, and fingers are busy scrolling her tablet. God, help me!

"You're supervising the morning exams today, so you better get ready, dear," she urges, and here the bomb explodes. "Only ten minutes left," she adds.

"What? But that's crazy! How come no one told me?" I lament, my voice utterly begrudging; even though it's nothing new.

Dana gives me a hopeless look, fluttering her long lashes. "Because they just announced the changes some minutes ago. Sorry, sweetie." Upon my sullen pout, she graces me an apologetic smile, ready to find her next victim.

Just great! I sigh deeply.

I work as a teaching assistant at the University of California Los Angeles, UCLA. The job I never dreamed of, but it founded me either way. I got a direct recruitment as soon as I graduated here two years ago. Now I've learned to love and enjoy it. Who knows? Maybe it's my call.

I head straight to the auditorium, where the freshmen are already seated. Eyeing them for a while, I end up smiling at the few faces looking so anxious as though approaching the judgment day.

Well, who likes exams?

A bit later, as the students are poking their noses on the papers, my cellphone buzzes. I get a few looks that force me to walk out immediately not to disturb them. It's Samantha, my one and only crazy friend that would never let me live in boredom.

We're like SpongeBob and Patrick.

"Hey, Sam, don't you know it's business hours now?" I snap, half-shutting the door behind me.

"I know, but chill out," Sam quips, her voice full of ecstasy as though she's landed herself a new Mr. Gatsby.

"What is it?" I urge, fully aware that I'm breaking the rule and I may get in trouble in things go west.

"You're taking a leave this time, right?" she asks in her sassy voice.

"Yes, and?"

I can't believe this!

"Okay, listen," she says excitedly. "You and I, are going on a vacation next week," she informs me, and I only frown, wondering what she's talking about now. Damn, I need to get back! "Hey, Kira, don't start playing dead now. I said we are going on a vacation, are you listening?"

"I heard you," I reply absently, my eyes at the classroom through the door. "Sam, I'm supervising the exam right now. How about I call you later, please?"

"Fine," she grunts. "And you better call me, huh?"

"Okay, later." I hang up quickly, and get myself back to work with a smile.

I'm sure she is sulking right now. She really hates when I ditch her, but I've got bills to pay. Plus, I can't risk getting caught on the phone while on duty. And given how chattering Samantha is, she can talk all morning if possible.

Later on after work, which has been longer than I anticipated, I go straight home; it's almost my usual routine. Nothing but the calmness and lavender scent welcome me in my apartment that's furnished in red and white, feeling so great to be home. Sometimes it feels so big that I'm starting to consider buying a pet. Sighing, I kick off my heels, drop my handbag on the couch, and make my way towards the kitchen that's adjoined to the living room. I hope I can find something edible before I lose my balance. I feel like I've survived a hunger disaster.

I make myself a sandwich from whatever I find in my refrigerator, and pretend to have dinner while thinking of Sam's call and her crazy ideas. I better call back before she makes a long distance scene. I'm so glad we live and work separately, or else it'd be a catastrophe. We're like fire and water, yet inseparable.

"Finally," Sam speaks as soon as she picks up, and I throw myself on the red loveseat sofa, feet on the black, wooden coffee table.

"Tell me from the beginning," I urge, biting my sandwich.

"Hey, do you think you're the only one who works hard? I'm an executive assistant to one of the most successful Exporting companies in L.A!"

Here we go.

I decide to turn on the TV while I take in all of my friend's scolding, which I'm already used to. I'm glad it's WWE and it's Roman Reigns kicking some butt.

"Yes, Sam, I know that and I'm sorry about earlier." I roll my eyes. "So, tell me about your grand plans that you didn't consider consulting me first while making." I go sarcastic, and Sam couldn't care less about my whining.

"Look, I met this guy, let's say a client and he invited me to his ranch," she explains. "I kind of like him, Kira, so I accepted."

"Okay, and?" This ought to be good.

"And we're going together, next week," she says, making my eyes widen, but no surprise in them. "I'm not taking no for an answer, just to be clear."

"Huh?" I gasp. Well, she's always bossy . . . or pushy?

"You heard me," she prompts. "And besides, you love country sides and I like him, so it's a fair bargain."

Oh! Why didn't I see this coming? Unsure whether Sam is requesting or informing me, I just swallow it as it comes, and take a deep breath coupled with a yawn.

"Sam, that guy, are you dating him?" I ask, my curiosity highly aroused.

"I think so," she returns with faint surety, and I frown bemusedly. "We had lunch, dinner, like two times. We kissed, we—"

Not the intimate details, please.

"Alright, enough," I interrupt her PG-rated talk. "Fine, I'll go with you."

"Really?"

"Yes, Sam. Didn't you say I have no option?" I roll my tired eyes.

Frankly, I prefer to spend my six weeks at home, reading books, watching movies and maybe a beach walk or swimming during sunset. I'm a very simple person, and so is my life. But knowing Sam as I do, she won't ever let that happen.

However, I've been in the comfort zone for two years and perhaps some little change of scenery is all I need to recharge my batteries. Same routine everyday can be toxic, I know, so how terrible would it be to go with her? I sigh heavily.

Three days have passed, and I'm officially granted my leave. Today I return home early, feeling like a school girl on a summer break. To my surprise, however, I find Sam inside my apartment, turning my space into her beauty parlor. She's busy polishing her long nails with a huge manicure kit on the coffee table. Her short bleached hair cascades freely down her giraffe neck, and I only see a fashion model in her. She's quite a beauty, and she knows the fact so well.

"Hi, Kiki!" She beams, and I hate that name. "You're home early. Let me guess, we're going on that trip."

"How did you get in?" Ignoring her excitement, I close the door behind me.

She frowns, and then drops her long legs from the table. "Kira, I told you to stop hiding your keys under the flowerpot, but well, I'm glad you didn't listen."

"Well, I should've guessed," I murmur, pulling a hair clip to free my thick curls. "When did you get here?" I ask her as I head towards the bedroom.

"About an hour ago," Sam replies, "and I'm fine in case you've forgotten about my health!"

Oh my! I smile. "I'm glad you are. Have you had lunch yet? Or still on diet?"

"Depends," she says. "Are you going to cook?" She now gives me one of her severely tempting smiles; Samantha's special, because only she can break my resolutions.

"Lasagna or Spanish omelet?"

"Spanish omelet."

"As long as you wash the dishes," I mutter.

Sam laughs giddily. She's crazy for those two things, but eats only once a month; feminist torture. At times I get the impression that she only visits my place to eat, claiming that I'm the best cook in the world.

About an hour later, I ask Sam about the guy she's supposedly dating. Apparently they've met during work, and Sam volunteered to tour him around the city. Other details follow that I refuse to listen, but she seems to like him.

"He's not just a hang up, Kira. I seriously like him." She sounds sincere, and it's a first.

"Okay, I'm not arguing. Is he rich? Because I don't think he's a pauper if you're that excited." I take off my shoes, laughing.

"No, he's loaded," Sam says, shrugging heedlessly.

"Is he handsome? Like . . . enough to make terrific babies?"

Sam stays silent for a second, as if meditating, before saying, "He's breathtaking."

Okay, now I'm curious to meet this amazing man enough to make my crazy Sam drool over him. I understand she loves playing around with rich dudes and all, but never takes any serious. But now, I think she's serious about this one.

CHAPTER 2

The next morning, a few hours before our flight, I bump into Amelia, my next-door neighbor who never stops talking of aura and energy. She's into Tarot reading, and I'm not a believer. As usual, she smiles jovially, her big green eyes shimmering brightly.

"Morning, Kira," she greets with that extra enthusiasm. "You look specifically beautiful today."

I arch my brows. "Amelia, I'm wearing my pajamas, and I'm holding a bag of trash, are you kidding me?"

She waves her chubby hand sassily. "I'm talking about your inner beauty, dear. I can see luck, luck, luck; you're surrounded with nothing but luck!"

"Huh?" I frown, stifling a laugh, for I swear there's no way I'll ever understand her words. "What luck?" I end up asking.

"Love," she says briskly, excited even. "You'll soon be blessed with love, lots of love. It may even feel surreal, dear."

"Huh?" I laugh, staring at the green eyes on my redhead neighbor.

Can she tell that dudes never visit my house and assumes I'm in need of one?

Seeing my puzzled expression, she laughs hilariously. "Oh, I'm so excited for you, Kira." She almost jumps.

This is . . . disturbing.

"Okay. Well, I'm going on a vacation for a while, so I hope you stay safe," I inform her, hoping to just end this session of whatever the name is.

"Oh, that's it!" she says stoutly, her bigger and bright.

"What is?" I ask, scowling bemusedly.

God, I hope this woman is okay in the head.

"No spoiler, Kira," she insists, sounding earnest. "Just enjoy yourself, dear. And remember, if your head doesn't know the answer, then your heart will." She beams, and disappears, leaving me completely stunned.

What is she talking about? I just shake my head, smiling. Sometimes you just have to take people as they are. With my smile intact, I dispose the trash bag, and slowly climb the stairs back inside.

"Why the bikini?" I ask Sam when I find her putting a disturbing one in my suitcase.

"You may need it," she says, looking so radiant in her quest for fashion emergencies, seated on my bed with my suitcase, clothes, and other stuff.

"Really? And where are we going?" I ask again. "Because I don't think there's an ocean in any ranch."

"Maybe a swimming pool? A river?" Sam shrugs, laughing.

"Help me, God," I mutter with a sigh.

"Or maybe not. Let's just leave unimportant stuff." She changes her mind, and I'm not even surprised. "I don't think there'll be swimming over there, right?" she asks and I sigh.

We spend some time packing, making sure we haven't forgotten anything important for a vacation. I'm not really excited about the trip, but I do like the idea of travelling outside California for a change. Good thing I'm so organized so packing doesn't take forever as Sam is in charge of the department.

We are finally heading to L.A International Airport, for our afternoon flight. My friend arranged everything, including the tickets, so I just follow suit like a shadow, no complaint given.

"So, where in the South are we going?" I ask again. It may sound weird, stupid even . . . but I only know that we're heading to Montana.

This is by far the reckless thing I've ever done. I guess I've reached a limit in my dull life that I desire some adventure. However, I know Sam wouldn't plan the trip without any head up.

"You'll see, girl, calm down!" Sam growls, trying up her hair with a rubber band as we're stuck for security check. "And don't worry, I've got all the information I need about this so it's not a mystery or some horror movie."

"Yeah, right. You've successfully made me feel the creep." I huff some air.

She knows what she's doing, I decide. But do you? My subconscious whispers. I don't care. I've been too uptight so let's face the unknown.

Sam can be quite handy, but I always trust her ability to plan things; something that makes her reliable at times.

Apparently we're flying business class, but I couldn't care less even if it were economy. I only want to hit the sky, and see if I can catch some sleep after my usual sleepless nights. I only ask Sam to wake me up when we land, and she too, makes herself busy with her tablet. I somehow realized that we're actually going to Yellowstone, Montana. I've never been there before but I like the idea. I'm excited even.

The plane finally lands at Bozeman Yellowstone Airport, at least two hours later. Smiling, I feel quite rejuvenated after my long nap. I don't understand how I did it, but I slept almost the entire time. We take our suitcases and proceed to the arrivals' curb, with no knowledge of our next move. At least in my case, I guess.

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