

FIRESTONE - Prologue

The worst day of my life was three months ago. The day I turned thirty. The day my wife disappeared and my mum was killed. Things got even more confusing when I found the yellow stone filled with fire and the clear pendant in my mum's handbag. I knew they were powerful, I could feel it, and they were important to Mum, but the cryptic note she left made no sense, just a conversation starter.

I spent over two months lying in bed trying to make sense of that day, staring at the useless stones, slipping deeper into depression every day. Then, out of nowhere, Zac marched in and told me to get my passport, stopping just inside my bedroom, his huge body filled the entire doorway and blocked any view of the corridor. He looked at the dirty clothes and rubbish strewn over the floor. In one hand he carried a small suitcase and in the other, a backpack.

I gasped, frightened for a second until I recognised him. "Zac. What are you doing here?"

"Getting you." He looked around and wrinkled his nose, his eyes moving over the tissues, dirty dishes and food scraps on the floor before coming to rest on me. I winced and felt my face flush. Zac's lips pressed together and he rubbed his chin.

"How'd you get in?"

"Front door was unlocked. I knocked, but I guess you didn't hear over the TV in the lounge."

"Why aren't you in London?" My voice came out weak with the emotion building in my throat.

"Because when I spoke to you last week, I got off the phone concerned. Then the other day, Jess called me and said she was worried too."

"Why were you concerned?"

"Because you sounded distant. Distracted. It was like I was talking to a different person. Jess said the same." Zac looked over his shoulder at the empty Bundaberg Rum bottles lining both sides of the corridor. He looked back at me, then to the tower of pizza boxes in the corner. "Now that I'm here, I see we were right. You need a friend."

Zac dropped the bags and walked straight to me with his arms out, grabbing me in a firm hug. I tried to push away, I wasn't worth this kind of affection, but Zac was too strong and just held me until I broke down. Unable to pull myself together, I cried for a long time on his shoulder. It was the first time in two months that anyone held me.

“It’s okay, Kai. Sorry I didn’t come sooner, I thought you were dealing with it, you know, after the wake you seemed alright.” Zac squeezed my shoulder and patted my back. I wanted to say something but couldn’t. “I’m here now. Jess said she talked to you about staying with her in London for a while. Told me she’s lined you up some work on the yachts with her. You need to be with friends who care about you. Jess said you agreed it was a good idea, but you didn’t buy a ticket. That’s why I’m here.”

I sniffed, then wiped my eyes and nose on my t-shirt. “Yeah, I did say that.” I spoke in bursts, a few words at a time while I gained control of myself. “But I didn’t mean it. It was just to get Jess off my back. I didn’t think she’d send you over to get me.”

“She didn’t send me. I offered. Get your passport and wallet.” He waved a hand past his nose. “Better have a shower too, but make it quick, we’re on the clock.” Zac grabbed his backpack and guided me into the bathroom, turned the water on and nudged me toward the shower. “Have you got any clean clothes anywhere?”

“Don’t think so.”

He pulled some gym shorts and a t-shirt out of his bag and gave them to me. “Have a shower and put these on. They’ll be too big, but I’ll buy you some new ones later. Five minutes, Kai.”

After my shower, I walked to the kitchen, thinking of how I could talk my way out of whatever Zac had planned, but instead, I froze and stared. A man and woman stood in my tiny kitchen and talked like they planned on buying the place. When they saw me, the man came over with an outstretched hand.

Zac spoke, “Kai, meet your new tenants, Matt and Lily.”

“What?” I shook Matt’s hand and then Lily’s.

“Alright Geez?” Matt asked.

Lily gave me a nod and a smile. “Pleasure.”

“They’re good friends of mine from London. Always wanted to visit Sydney. When I told them you needed new tenants, they jumped at the chance to live here. Anyway, we’ve got a plane to catch. Give Matt your key. There’s a cab out the front.” Zac shook Matt’s hand, kissed Lily on the cheek and said he’d call soon.

I walked to the door with Zac. It felt like I was in a dream. I was dazed, not thinking straight, just doing what Zac told me. I screwed my face up and shook my head, but kept walking like I was a puppet and didn’t have a choice. Just before I stepped through my front door, I grabbed Mum’s stones and stuffed them my pocket, then I turned to face Lily and felt my face get hot again. “Sorry about the mess, Lily.”

“It’s fine, Kai. Don’t think about it. And don’t worry about your place.”

Two hours later, Zac and I caught a plane to London.

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That was two weeks ago. I spent a few days in London with Zac and another friend, Jimmy, then Jess picked us up and we all flew to France. It was great to see Jess again. I hadn’t seen her since my wedding three years ago, but it was like we’d seen each other every day. That’s what it’s like with old friends. Jess had lined us all up with ten days work on a private yacht at the Cannes film festival. The only reason I call it work was because they paid us to be there, but really it was a big party. Jess and I got pretty close too, and one night, we almost kissed, but I pulled away. God, I wanted to kiss her though. But it was just too soon after Kristy left. That was the first time in three months that I didn’t spend the whole day thinking about Kristy.

Amazing what a difference a day makes. I still remember the old friend who told me that, and even though I haven’t heard from him in over a decade, his words still ring in my ears. At the time I didn’t understand. Now I do. And what about the difference two weeks makes? A fortnight ago, I considered stepping in front of a truck, or swimming across the Indian Ocean. I scrapped the truck idea because it left no room for God, or fate, or whatever to intervene, just in case they had plans for my life. The swim at least had a chance of survival and if it was my destiny to live, then I would find some sort of help; an old life jacket or a sociable dolphin, perhaps.

Now, I’m smiling every day. It feels strange to smile. Sometimes grief pops in and tries to turn my happiness to guilt, and I still get sad when I think about Kristy and why she just left. When I get bad, Zac is always there to bring me back, and I know Jess isn’t far away. My oldest friends, ready to scrape me up and put me back together. In a few days, I will experience my first Italian summer, and although I spend a little time each day trying to make sense of last month, most of the time, I’m happy.