

SLIP KNOT synopsis

GENRE: Contemporary Women's Literature

WORD COUNT: Approx. 80,000-100,000 total

MARKET: 25-50 year-old women.

WHAT IT'S ABOUT: A story about escape, love, and the pursuit of happiness. It's about making new starts, the choices one woman is faced with and how she learns to have the conviction to follow her dreams. But life is tough, even in what seems like paradise. And fresh starts don't always turn out the way you expect.

THE PLOT: After a violent fight with her boyfriend, Lena – a 32 year-old marketing executive – flees the city and heads to Cornwall for a break. Confused about the direction her life is taking she finds herself on the remote Isles of Scilly, where her dreams of living a more simple life by the sea and starting a family are reawakened. On the wild island of Bryher she comes across a hotel up for lease and, faced with the opportunity to up sticks from a city life she wasn't cut out for, thinks about relocating and starting afresh in a place where she believes she can find both emotional and physical isolation from her past.

The decision to stay isn't easy – as well as her own battle between head and heart, the acquisition of the hotel lease puts her at serious financial risk. And adapting to life in a small community has its trials, not least those posed by the landowner (Lord Dennis) and neighbouring hotelier (Grimshaw) who set out to thwart her hotel business. However Lena's determination is bolstered by her acquaintance with a charming landscape gardener, Olly. Not only is Olly the polar opposite of the man Lena has left behind, he is also a devoted single father, and Lena enjoys feeling part of family with him and his son, Michael. Also on Lena's side is Olly's friend Adam, who unbeknown to Lena is besotted by her and competing with Olly for her attention.

The success of the hotel becomes an important goal; its transformation from a state of neglect into a thriving business representing Lena's ability to turn her own life around. As she becomes more stressed out and starts to drink more, her past catches up with her and her mood swings have consequences on her relationships – notably with Olly, whose old flame (Clarissa) has returned from London.

Emails from Lena's best friend in London are used as a device throughout the book, emphasising the contrast between the life Lena left behind and that on the island, whilst also working to reveal Clarissa's previous entanglement with Olly which led her to leave the islands when she was pregnant with his baby.

As the reader witnesses the hotel struggling against the opposition and Lena struggling against her past self, freak storms roll in and cut Bryher off from the rest of the islands – the turning point at which her paradise becomes her prison and she finds out she is pregnant with Olly's baby. But is this really what she wants anymore? Whilst she is mulling over how to break the news to Olly, his son Michael drowns in a tragic swimming accident, as a result of which Olly leaves the islands.

At a low ebb, Lena deserts the business and drinks more, despite her condition. Eventually she decides to keep the baby and sets about building a future for her and the new arrival. It is Adam that steps in and helps her re-build the business, and together they plan the launch of a boutique adventure lodge that will see them win guests back from Grimshaw and win the support of the landowner, Lord Dennis.

Just as things are looking up Lena has a miscarriage, consequently losing her grip on the object of desire – the new start, the baby, the coastal lifestyle and the hotel. Following her convalescence on the mainland she is forced back to the islands to see out the five-year lease. Realising she can't keep running away, she revamps the business into a successful enterprise and re-starts her life on the islands, where a love interest sparks between her and Adam.

The ultimate message of the book is that there isn't always an escape route to paradise, and the path to happiness is a constant struggle.