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Opening extract from

The Flip-Flop Club: Charmed Summer

Written by

Ellen Richardson

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The Flip Flop Club

Charmed Summer

Coming soon in the Flip-Flop Club series:

Whale Song
Midnight Messages
Star Struck



Ellen Richardson

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Chapter 1

She wasn't going to make it! Waves were already breaking over the causeway as Elly sprinted past the milestone marking the halfway point. She splashed through foam, soaking her trainers. It was taking longer than she had expected to run to the mainland and back. But she had to do something. She loved Aunt Dina, but if she had to crochet one more tea cosy she was going to scream.

She pumped her legs faster. Soon the only way on or off Sunday Island would disappear under the sea. As she raced the tide, Elly remembered one of her mum's acting jobs from years ago—the one where a monster wave destroyed a seaside town. Mum had been eighth in the credits, her best ever. Elly tried to pretend this was a film set and she was the star shooting the big action sequence. But her heart gave a little hiccough as she noticed the sea was swallowing the causeway faster than she could run. All thoughts of *lights, camera, action* vanished. Elly picked up speed.

The waves were over her feet now. A few butterflies—giant mutant moths, actually—started flapping around her insides

as she watched the last of the causeway disappear. Only the fence and a row of flags marked the road.

Don't freak! Nothing bad would happen. But she knew all too well that happy endings were only guaranteed in PG. Life was 12+.

A horn sounded behind her and she stumbled to one side as a rusty Ford Focus surged past, drenching her with spray. The driver called out the window. 'Get off the causeway! It's dangerous!'

'Hey, wait!' Elly stared after him.

Even in those few seconds the tide had risen. It was up to her knees now. Her feet were frozen and she was gasping for air like a stranded fish. She glanced at the island. The tall, windswept hill that islanders jokingly called 'The Mountain' rose from the centre of Sunday Island. New Town crouched at its feet. She could even see Aunt Dina's cottage tucked into the slope of the hill. Ten minutes walk from here. Dead easy . . . if it weren't for the sea trying to kill her.

She sloshed forward, slipped, fell and got a mouthful of salt water. Elly scrabbled to her feet. A sob broke through her gasping breaths. She couldn't die like this and leave Dad all alone. She shoved fear away and kept moving.

The whine of a motor boat made her jerk her head towards the sound. She balanced against the pull and push of the sea and windmilled her arms frantically. The woman driving gave Elly a cheerful wave as the motorboat did a U-turn at full throttle and sped back to open water.

Panic returned at the sight of the boat's wake rushing

towards her. It crashed across the causeway and swept over her, knocking her down, closing over her head. She was in the water, tumbling across concrete, scraping elbows, knees, hands. She was choking, too breathless to scream as the sea dragged her towards deep water. She was going to drown.

It would kill Dad. She remembered his face, in those horrible days after Mum's funeral. He wouldn't survive another loss.

The water slammed her into something hard. Coughing and spluttering, she hauled herself upright and found she was clinging to the fence that ran along one side of the causeway. The sea was waist-deep now, the tide still coming in. Her heart was thudding with hope as well as fear now. Holding tight to the railing, Elly pulled herself through the water to the nearest fence post and scrambled up until she was balanced above the waves on its circular top.

The beach was less than fifty metres away. Her feet were still numb, but the top rail of the fence looked sturdy. She took a deep breath and began to inch along it. The waves were getting bigger. One crashed against the fence, shooting spray waist-high. Elly wobbled but kept moving.

Closer . . . Closer . . . And, at last, she was there! Standing on the warm glittering sand of Sunday Island.

Her legs went limp as rubber bands. She plopped onto the sand and lay on her back, watching the sky spin past. That had been totally amazing.

'What in the name of Venus, Mars and milkshakes did you think you were doing?'

Elly lurched upright. Aunt Dina marched across the sand, her cloud of black hair, silk scarves and tinkling jewellery bouncing with each stride. Before Elly could say a word, her aunt wrapped her in a bear hug. 'Are you trying to get yourself killed?' Aunt Dina's voice boomed through layers of silk and squishiness. 'Did you even think what that would do to Nick? Or me?' There was a loud sniff.

Being hugged by Aunt Dina was like being cuddled by a walking duvet. She smelt of vanilla and finger paints—Mum's smell. Suddenly Elly's eyes pricked with tears. She blinked them away and gave her aunt a quick kiss. 'I'm Super-Elly, remember? I jump over flooded causeways in a single bound!' It was a joke from the old days, when her aunt had lived with them while going to art school in London. Before Gran died and Aunt Dina moved into the cottage on Sunday. Before Mum's cancer.

Her aunt laughed but shook her head. 'You can't get out of it that easy, El.'

'You won't tell Dad, will you?'

'I ought to.' Aunt Dina frowned down at her, one eyebrow raised. 'But Nick's had enough grief. And we don't want him worried—he might take you back to London. You'd be shut up in that stuffy flat all day on your own. I won't tell him. But you scare me like this again and just you see what happens! For now, you are *so* grounded.'

Elly kicked the sand into puffs as she followed her aunt up the beach. Her shorts and tee shirt were already drying in the sun. 'How did you know where to find me?'

'Mr Portas phoned and said he'd driven past a crazy girl on the causeway and did I know where my niece was.'

She hated this stupid island. She'd rather be back in London—at least she'd have her friends, even if they did treat her differently now that she was the girl with the dead mum.

Her aunt marched on, head erect, eyes forward.

They passed through the hillocks of marram grass lining the beach and emerged onto the main road. Elly had to trot to keep up as Aunt Dina surged up the high street. She was painfully aware of other islanders calling greetings to her aunt, who waved back while continuing to lecture in her megaphone voice.

'Disappearing for hours on end without a word to tell me where you've gone or when you'll be back. After today I dread to think what other hare-brained things you might get up to. Your best jeans ripped to shreds yesterday. Just how did you do that?'

While trying to keep from being bored to death. Elly remembered her attempt at sandboarding yesterday, using a bit of planking she'd found behind the garden shed, and winced. She opened her mouth to explain.

'No!' said Aunt Dina. 'Don't tell me. I don't want to know!'

She hadn't finished her lecture. Up the hill and onto the lane, every word blaring, tourists turning to stare. By the time they reached the cottage, Elly was so full of shiny embarrassment she thought she would burst.

She scrambled up the attic ladder into her bedroom and immediately felt better. She loved this room. It had sloping

walls plastered between roof beams and two dormer windows, one looking out to sea, one facing the big hill. Its crazy, tilting wooden floor was scattered with handmade rugs that matched the patchwork quilt on the small brass bed. Best of all, it had been her mother's bedroom when she was young.

Elly went to the dresser and picked up the silver-framed photo she had brought with her from home. It was a photo of her and her mum on the set of London Pride, the soap that had made Mum semi-famous for a few years. When she got pregnant in real life, they had written a baby into the script. Elly had been on and off the screen from the time she was a bump till she was nearly two. Shame she couldn't remember any of it.

She glanced in the mirror. Her skin was a lighter brown, but she had her mother's thick, curly black hair. And even if she had inherited Dad's nose, at least she had Mum's mouth and her love for movies. Her mother had said Elly was a good actor. But that was the sort of things mums say. Elly sighed and replaced the photograph.

How was she going to get through this summer? She had been exiled to Sunday Island as soon as school had finished. Did Dad expect her to spend the whole summer without friends? Or TV? Aunt Dina thought TV rotted your brain. The island didn't even have a cinema. There was only one internet cafe and that was shut half the time.

She plopped down at the desk nestling in the seaward dormer and fished her mobile out of the drawer. Dad *had* to let her come home. She punched in his number but nothing

happened. No signal again. Sunday-Rubbish-Island had bad mobile reception on top of everything else.

Elly dropped the phone onto the desk, kicked off her trainers and headed for her bed. It was then that she saw it. A bright purple envelope, lying on top of her pillow. And scrawled across it were the words:

SUPER SECRET!
FOR ELLY PORTER'S EYES ONLY.