


Book 1



Violet and the Volcanoes

THE MYSTERIOUS MANOR



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

AMY DRORBAUGH

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Chapter 1

Violet was exhausted. It had been over twenty hours since her family had left Ecuador, but it felt more like a week than just one day. Sleepily, she leaned her head back against the car seat and struggled to keep her tired eyes open. The ocean lay off to her right as they drove south toward the bottom of the island.

“I always forget how beautiful Hawai‘i is until—” A huge yawn interrupted her mom’s statement. “Sorry—until we are back here. It’s a good thing the volcanoes are so active: we always have a reason to return.”

Violet’s dad nodded in agreement from the driver’s seat. “Hawai‘i is beautiful, but I would choose volcanoes in Alaska over Hawai‘i any day. I prefer the snow to the humidity.” Although the air conditioning in the rental car was on full blast, he made a show of wiping imaginary sweat off his forehead.

The best thing about Hawai‘i, Violet thought privately, is that it’s an island, so we can’t be very far from our rental house. Despite her best efforts, her eyes drifted shut of their own

accord. She jolted awake again when the car hit another bump.

“We’re almost there, honey.” Her mom studied her in the rearview mirror, and Violet saw her own exhaustion reflected in her mom’s eyes. James and Emily Thatcher were world-renowned volcanologists, and they spent the majority of their time flying from one volcano to another. Emily was afraid of flying, which was unfortunate considering how often the family had to do it.

Stifling a yawn, Violet asked, “Are we staying in the same place as last time?”

“No,” her dad answered. “The company is renting a new house closer to the volcanoes.”

“Is it by the beach?” Violet asked hopefully.

“Well, nothing here is too far away from the beach, right?” her dad replied with a chuckle.

Out her window Violet caught sight of an old lava flow. The river of black rock was evidence of a past eruption of Kīlauea, the volcano her parents were here to study. Most of the leeward, or west, side of the Big Island was hot, dry, and covered in old lava flows. The windward side, on the east, was wetter and—at least to Violet—much prettier with its tropical rainforests.

Suddenly, the car slowed, and Violet swayed tiredly as they turned onto a small dirt road. James navigated around a large hole, the tires of their car going up on the shoulder. “I think we’re almost there—”

His voice trailed off as they caught a glimpse of their home for the next twelve weeks. The car slowed to a stop.

“Well,” Emily observed weakly, “it looks very . . . large.”

“Yes, very large. And very—” James searched for something to say.

“Creepy? Odd? Dilapidated?” Violet suggested helpfully.

Perched on a small hill, the strange house was tall and narrow, coming to a sharp point at the top. Its sloping eaves, extravagant woodwork, and intricate balconies reminded Violet of the gingerbread houses they made at Christmas. Perhaps the house had been charming when it was first built, but the passage of time had not been kind.

“It doesn’t look very Hawaiian, does it?” Violet said, leaning forward between her parents’ seats. “It looks like it came straight out of a Charles Dickens book. Can’t you just picture Mr. Scrooge inside, sitting alone in the dark, eating his bit of beef?”

“There must be some sort of story behind it,” Emily agreed. “Who would build a house like this between a tropical rainforest and a volcano?”

What sort of story would I write about this curious house? Violet wondered. *Would it be dark, mysterious, and full of intrigue? Or more whimsical?* Immediately, she had the urge to sketch the house and tried to remember where her journal was in the mass of luggage.

Once the car was parked, Violet opened her door and climbed out, holding on to the frame as a rush of dizziness made her feel lightheaded. *Hopefully, the beds are in better shape than the outside of the house,* she thought.

Closer inspection did not improve the house much. The white paint had chipped away in most places, leaving the



entire house an unpleasant grayish-brown color. Shutters were broken and hanging at crazy angles or missing completely. Spiderwebs adorned every corner that Violet could see, and the entire house seemed to sag to the left.

“It might be a little odd, but it’s a survivor. Look at that,” James pointed out. Violet followed his gaze to the side of the house, where black lava rock from a previous eruption came within twenty feet of the house.

Slowly the three moved toward the house, but they all paused at the elaborate front door. A large “K” was detailed in lead and stained glass above an immense bronze knocker. No one moved to open the door, and Violet wondered if her parents were feeling the same sense of hesitation that she was.

“Well, let’s check it out,” her dad announced, hitching a bag onto his shoulder. “They said the door would be unlocked.” He grasped the large door handle and turned it.

The door swung open silently, although Violet had been half expecting it to creak. They peered through the dim and dusty interior until Violet’s dad flipped on the light switch, and an elaborate crystal chandelier above them flickered reluctantly to life. They were standing in a large foyer, luxuriously decorated in a style at least a hundred years out of date. Doorways opened to the left and right, and straight ahead, a grand staircase curved up to the second floor.

“Wow.” Violet’s exclamation, though soft, sounded too loud in the still room. Stepping into the house felt like stepping back in time.

“Wow’ is right,” James replied.

Violet stared around her in wonder as they explored the rooms on the bottom floor. First, a narrow dining room with a long table and eight heavy chairs, where Violet could picture elegant meals being served on delicate china plates. Continuing on, they found a living room with overstuffed couches upholstered in rich velvet fabrics and an ornate fireplace. A tiny kitchen tucked in the back of the house behind the staircase completed their tour of the main floor.

Although the materials and possessions in each room were clearly expensive, the touch of time could be felt heavily in the house. Velvet pillows were worn thin, carpets were faded and fraying at the edges, the wooden floors bore deep scratches, and a thick layer of dust lay over everything.

“This house must have been empty for years, but it feels like—” Violet struggled to find the words. She had stayed in *many* hotels and rental houses, and they all had a similar temporary feeling to them—houses and rooms that were used but never *lived in*. This house actually felt like a home. There were books on the shelves and artwork on the walls. An umbrella stand by the door held three battered umbrellas. A hand-knit afghan was thrown over the arm of the couch. Violet almost expected to see a pair of shoes by the back door or a pot of tea steaming on the antique stove in the kitchen. “—like someone is going to walk in at any moment,” she finished.

“Yeah,” Emily agreed, gently touching an embellished gold-plated clock.

Cautiously, Violet reached out to pick up a blue marble egg from a low table next to the staircase. It wouldn’t move;

it stuck firmly to the gold base it sat on. Violet frowned and changed her grip on the egg, rubbing the dust off its slick surface. To her surprise, the egg twisted easily in her hand, rotating on its base in a complete circle. A loud clicking noise came from behind her.

“Whoa!” she exclaimed as the wall behind her started to move. The three Thatchers watched, open-mouthed, as a section of the wood paneling swung outward several inches.

“What did you do?” Emily exclaimed.

“I don’t know!” Violet stammered. “I just twisted that egg.”

James reached out and pulled on the panel. It swung open. A smile lit his tired face. “I think you discovered a secret passageway.”

“Like in a book?” Violet asked excitedly, leaning forward to peer inside. “This is the coolest house ever! Where does it go?”

James pulled out his phone and turned on the flashlight. The light revealed a narrow passage, about ten paces long, ending at a rough door with a small doorknob. Moving into the passageway with Violet on his heels, James immediately sneezed violently as their footsteps stirred up a thick layer of dust. They walked softly toward the far door and grasped the knob. It resisted turning at first but finally gave way, and the door swung outward.

“Where does it lead to?” Emily called after them.

Violet followed her dad out through another section of wood paneling and looked around.

“We’re in the dining room!” she called out, and seconds

later, her mom followed them through. “How cool is this? Do you think there are more secret passages?”

“I’d say it’s possible, pumpkin.” Emily ruffled Violet’s hair, trying to suppress an enormous yawn.

James shrugged. “It’s a mystery . . . but not one we are going to solve today. I don’t know about you girls, but I am exhausted. Shall we save the exploration for tomorrow and go find the bedrooms?” He carefully shut the door to the secret passageway. The three watched as the seams of the door disappeared completely into the paneled wall.

They returned to the foyer and closed the section of paneling, watching in fascination as the marble egg untwisted before clicking into place. Then the tired family climbed the grand staircase curving up to the second level of the house. At the top, four doors graced a long hallway. A glance into the first two rooms revealed bedrooms in the same formal, outdated style as the first floor. Her parents took the first room, decorated in rich blues and golds, but Violet continued down the hallway. The third door revealed a small but functional bathroom, and the fourth door opened to an office with floor-to-ceiling bookshelves. Violet closed that door again, with a promise to herself to explore it soon.

The hallway continued, and she came to a narrow staircase with a single wooden door at the top. *What other surprises does the mystery house have?* Violet thought whimsically as she climbed the stairs.

Her first reaction upon opening the door was simple pleasure. The small bedroom was tucked away under the eaves of the roof and was extremely plain compared to the

rest of the house. Sloping down at sharp angles, the walls mirrored the peaked lines of the roof above, and the only place Violet could stand up straight was in the middle of the room. A simple iron bed frame was centered against the wall opposite a large round window that would flood the room with afternoon sunlight.

“Perfect,” she sighed, letting her suitcase and backpack drop to the ground. The yellow blanket on the bed was dusty like everything else in the house, but when she pulled it back, the sheets beneath were clean and cool. Exhausted from her busy travel day, Violet fell onto the bed, which was as soft and comfortable as she could ask for. To her delight she discovered that she could see all the way to the ocean out her window. As she fell asleep, Violet wondered about the single light that she could see blinking somewhere out in the ocean.



Violet and the Volcanoes

THE MYSTERIOUS MANOR

Book 1

Violet and her parents are visiting the beautiful island of Hawai'i to study Kilauea, one of the most active volcanoes in the world. But they never expected to be staying in a run-down mansion with a mysterious past. Violet is determined to uncover all of the house's secrets, even if she has to brave a hurricane, a volcanic eruption, and the Pacific Ocean itself to do so. This first book in the Violet and the Volcanoes series will keep readers on the edge of their seats while exploring the value of family, friendship, and the power of forgiveness.





Book 2

Violet and the Volcanoes

ALONE IN ICELAND



THE GOOD AND THE BEAUTIFUL LIBRARY

AMY DRORBAUGH

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Chapter 1

Violet opened her eyes and stared up at the roof of her little tent. From the darkness and the silence in the camp, she could tell it was far too early to be awake. But how was she supposed to sleep on a day like today? She'd been waiting for this the entire three weeks they'd been in Iceland. The butterflies in her stomach weren't fluttering so much as swarming frantically.

Giving up on sleep entirely, Violet rolled onto her stomach inside her sleeping bag and placed her notebook on top of her pillow. As long as she was awake, she might as well write. She pulled on her headlamp, adjusting the beam so it lit up the page, and started writing.

Astrid squirmed up the hill on her stomach, wriggling until the rocks and twigs weren't jabbing her anywhere. She jerked her long skirt irritably as it tangled around her legs.

She poked her head over the top of the hill slowly, ready to pull back if any of the men in

the field below were looking up. But they were all watching a young boy holding a heavy sword uncertainly. The boy swung the sword tentatively at his partner, a grizzled old Viking with only one hand. Despite his apparent disadvantage, the old man countered the swing easily, binding the boy's blade and sending it flying.

"C'mon, Axel," Astrid muttered. "Lock your grip."

The young boy retrieved the sword and retook his place. Ulfr Irongrip gestured as he explained how to hold the sword, but Astrid was too far away to hear his words.

In frustration Astrid rolled over on her back and glared up at the sky. It wasn't fair! Axel was learning to fight like a Viking. Well, she was a Viking, too, wasn't she?

Astrid and her twin brother, Axel, were the only children of the great chief Odin Stormrider, the most famous Viking in all of Iceland. The twins had spent every day of the last ten years together—running across the windswept plains of southern Iceland, riding their small but muscular horses, or swimming in the hidden hot springs.

Always together. Axel and Astrid.

But she was Astrid Odinsdóttir, and he was Axel Odinson. This meant when they turned ten years old, Axel was taken for warrior training, and Astrid was sent to learn a woman's duties.

"Astrid!"

Astrid flinched. Her mother sounded impatient. She quickly scooted backward until she could stand up without being seen and hurried down the hill, knowing she would receive a good scolding for her absence. She tried hopelessly to brush the dirt stains off her new skirt as she ran—

“Violet? You awake?”

Her mom’s voice jolted Violet out of the world of Vikings. She hurriedly finished the sentence before capping her pen and calling out, “I’m up!”

“Come help with breakfast.” Her mom’s voice came from somewhere to Violet’s right, the direction of her parents’ tent.

Violet immediately climbed out of her sleeping bag. She dove for her clothes and dressed quickly, but it took several layers before she stopped shivering. Crouching awkwardly in the small space, she pushed her arms through the sleeves of her bulky coat.

The small blue tent was just large enough for her sleeping bag, and it was so short that Violet couldn’t stand up straight. The waterproof fabric cast an eerie light on everything inside when the sun was out and was nearly pitch-black when the sun wasn’t. Violet had given up on illustrating the story while inside the tent because the blue light from the tent fabric threw off her sense of color completely. She tucked her notebook, a gift from her Hawaiian friend Alula, into her backpack before unzipping the tent in one smooth motion. Crouching lower still, she

stuck one foot out the door, shoved it into her heavy hiking boot, and then followed with the other foot.

Once outside, Violet stood up straight, stretching out the muscles in her back, and looked around. She had been traveling with her parents for years now, and she had visited forests and deserts, stood on immense mountains, and walked through red-rock canyons; but nothing in her travels had prepared her for the unusual landscape in Iceland. Although she had been here for three weeks now, she couldn't get used to the sheer amount of nothingness around her. No buildings, no roads, no people. Not a single tree to break up the landscape in any direction!

To her right the land flowed downward in a long, sloping plain all the way to the black ocean in the distance. This stretch of land was composed of old lava fields—nothing but rocks and more rocks, covered in a thick layer of damp green moss. From far away the lava fields looked like a wrinkly green blanket covering the black ground under a crystal-blue sky. It seemed to Violet that green, black, and blue were the only colors that existed in Iceland: green moss, black lava rock, and the endless blue sky. *Oh, and orange for the lava, of course*, Violet amended mentally.

Inland to her left, the rounded hump of the ancient volcano that drew them here dominated the landscape. Even from the safety of their base camp, Violet could see the ribbon of slow-moving lava from the current eruption winding through the barren valley below the mountain. Although it was a beautiful land in a wild and dramatic sort of way, Violet just couldn't get used to the lack of trees.

She glanced up at the sky. It was clear and blue. *Good*, she thought, *today's the day!*

Violet headed toward the tall round tent dominating the central space in their camp, where the team ate all their meals and met to discuss the data and samples they were collecting. Surrounding the large tent were the small personal tents. When she had gone to bed last night, there had been six small tents, but now there were only three. What had happened while she slept?

Hurrying to the big tent, Violet tucked her wildly curly black hair into a warm stocking cap as she went. Birta's tent had been closest to the big tent, but now only the flattened moss bore evidence that a tent had ever been there. Already the resilient ground covering was springing back into its original shape. The older scientist couldn't have been gone long.

Violet slipped between the two pieces of the zippered door. Her mother was there already, cooking bacon while her father manned the scrambled egg station.

"Good morning, pumpkin," her father called out, pushing his wire-rimmed glasses back up his nose with one long finger.

"Morning, Dad. Where are Birta and Dr. Jonsdóttir and Erik?" Violet asked, relaxing a bit as she noted her parents' calm expressions. Surely they wouldn't be standing here making eggs if something were really wrong.

"We got a call early this morning on the satellite phone," her mom told her, turning off the propane camp stove and sliding the bacon off the heat. "There are signs that another

volcano is about to erupt farther inland. They wanted Dr. Jonsdóttir to come and analyze the possibility of another eruption.”

“Two eruptions at once!” James’s voice brimmed with excitement. “That’s a first for us, eh, Violet?”

Violet smiled at his enthusiasm.

“Are we heading back, then?” She tried not to sound disappointed.

He shot her a knowing grin. “We’re going to stay another day or two and wrap up our experiments. Then we’ll head back to Reykjavík to see if they want us to work this second eruption. Gunnar is staying, too.”

“Does that mean I still get to go today?” Violet asked, holding her breath.

“A promise is a promise,” her mom said cheerfully, and Violet let out a sigh of relief. “But first, breakfast.”

“Is there any *skyr* left?” Violet asked.

“Check the ice chest.”

Violet was happy to find three containers of *skyr* in the ice chest, including a blueberry one, her favorite. The thick, yogurt-like cream was by far Violet’s favorite Icelandic food.

With a happy bounce, Violet took her bounty to the table and started slicing the large round rolls they used for breakfast sandwiches. All three Thatchers loved the Icelandic bread—crunchy on the outside, but soft and tender inside. Violet laid them open, and her mom began positioning the bacon onto them directly from the hot frying pan.

“How’s the writing going?” Dad asked, carefully dividing

the eggs between the four sandwiches. “I saw your light on when I got up.”

“Good, but I’m still not sure what my main plot should be. Maybe Axel and Astrid could get lost in a storm?” Violet took a bite of creamy *skyr*.

“Like the hurricane in Hawai‘i?” Mom asked, picking up her sandwich. “Do they have hurricanes in Iceland?”

“I don’t know.” Violet shrugged. “I need to hurry if I want to make the deadline.”

Violet’s plan was to enter her finished Viking story in the Walton-Blue International Writing Contest. Alula, the friend who had given Violet her notebook, had won a prize for the best article in the last contest and had encouraged Violet to enter.

“Maybe Gunnar will know,” James suggested.

“Know what?” The booming voice was immediately followed by the man himself, who bent over to enter and then unfurled his massive height once inside, his head almost touching the ceiling.

Everything about Gunnar Magnusson, their Icelandic guide, was larger than life. He towered over everyone, even Violet’s dad, who stood a respectable six foot two. Gunnar’s deep voice could be heard from anywhere in the camp. His head was covered in blond curls, but his thick beard was a darker shade, somewhere between blond and red. Gunnar was a jolly sort of person, one of those merry souls who managed to find the best in every situation.

When Violet had first met the gregarious guide, so striking in appearance, she immediately thought he would

have made a perfect Viking. She had even based her story character Odin Stormrider, the Viking chief, after Gunnar. He was a never-ending source of knowledge about Icelandic history, and Violet had spent hours listening to his stories.

“Does Iceland get hurricanes?” Violet asked. She added a handful of arugula leaves, Gunnar’s favorite, to one of the sandwiches and handed it to him.

“*Nei*, little one, no hurricanes. Many volcanoes, and rain and snow, but no hurricanes.” He took a huge bite of the breakfast sandwich.

“Well, maybe Astrid and Axel can get lost in a snowstorm,” Violet mused.

Gunnar turned to James after swallowing. “I estimate it will take about a day and a half to wrap up here, Dr. Thatcher. Then we can head back to Reykjavík.”

“Gunnar, how many times do I have to tell you to call me James?” Violet’s dad answered with a sigh.

“At least one more time, sir.” Gunnar saluted, his green eyes twinkling.

Hurrying through the last of the sandwich, Gunnar dusted off his hands and turned to look at Violet. “So, Violet, I think you have a date with a volcano today, right?”

“Yes!” Violet bounced on her toes.

“Well then, let’s get on with the butter and go find some lava!”

All three Thatchers turned to look at Gunnar in confusion.

“Get on with the butter?” Violet asked.

“Yes. *Áfram með smjörið*. On with the butter. What? You do not have this saying in America?” Gunnar asked, surprised. “It means . . . hmm, how would you say? Time to get back to work.”

“All right,” Violet grinned, “let’s get on with the butter. Just as soon as I finish my *skýr*.”



Violet and the Volcanoes

ALONE IN ICELAND

BOOK 2

Violet and her parents are on a research expedition in Iceland when a sudden booming explosion shakes the earth. They rush outside their tent to see black smoke and ash billowing into the sky. The volcano is erupting! The Thatchers must escape before they are trapped. The rivers are flooding, and the terrain is treacherous; one wrong step could send a foot plunging onto razor-sharp rocks. When the unexpected happens, Violet has to summon all of her courage and faith.

