

Falling Deep by Tasha Taylor

Sadie hated that she couldn't stop this rising dread. No matter where she forced her thoughts, they returned to the fact that in ten days' time she would have to say goodbye to everything she had known for the last year. The finality had her floundering like a fish in a net - unseen cords closing round her, hunching her shoulders, dragging her down, everything getting tighter. Her breath caught in her throat and she blinked away the unwelcome sting of tears. Her small hut felt even smaller, enclosing itself around her. But even as her eyes saw the window and the door, and the wide expanse of the Celebes Sea beyond, her brain told her otherwise; she was trapped, no way out. Sadie felt disoriented as she stood from her sleeping mat. Two steps and she would be out the door, onto the deck of her hut. Two steps and she could take deep breaths of fresh air, make this all go away.

Two steps and she put her hand on the loop of rope that was the door handle. As she pulled the door open, she felt a bodily nudge, her legs swayed and she could swear blind that her hut rocked gently on its stilts. A second jolt flung her to her hands and knees out. The mast of a boat leant angled jauntily across the decking. Crawling to the edge of the wooden platform, she peered down to see the rest of the vessel bobbing gently in the shallow water and a man face down on the deck.

Miss Monroe, orthopaedic surgeon was always in control. Harm a patient, make a mistake and her career, her reputation were on the line. Plain old Sadie though, on a year-long sabbatical, began to hyperventilate.

God, not now, she thought. Where was the instinctive rush of adrenaline? She to her feet, reaching inside the door for her medical bag. She carefully slid under the railings, checking that the mast and rigging was not in any danger of falling on top of her, and landed neatly on the deck beside the man. He hadn't yet moved. Sadie thought the impact of the collision had thrown him forward.

"Can you hear me? My name's Sadie, I'm a doctor. What's your name?"

She could see no awkward angles in his limbs which may have suggested a broken bone and so manoeuvred him carefully into the recovery position, made somewhat easier by the fact that he was out cold and extremely malleable. His pulse was alarmingly slow, something she noticed more acutely as her heart was pounding. Brushing long sun-bleached hair away from his face, Sadie gently lifted one eyelid then the other, revealing rich brown, if bloodshot eyes, but his pupils were not blown and reacted. Her concern was the pear drop smell on his breath combined with other symptoms. Had the man had a hyperglycaemic attack? Is that what caused him to lose control of his vessel?

Sadie reached into her medical bag, her fingers grasping the single-use insulin shot, monitoring her patient closely. The sterile, plastic wrapped hypodermic was almost to her lips, so she could rip the packaging with her teeth when the man stirred and managed to fling himself most of the way into her lap. His flailing arm knocked the needle from her hand and nearly clouted her round the face. He stopped breathing as he rolled onto his back and Sadie quickly pressed her ear

to his mouth to listen for breath sounds and rapidly wished she hadn't. The raspy sound she had heard earlier turned into a sinus-clearing snort as his respiratory system kicked back in with a vengeance.

Editor's Critique: Thanks for sending in your first page. The setting in the second paragraph hooked me—hut? Stilts? What's going on here? Consider starting your book the moment the ship hits Sadie's home. While her rising dread will be important to her later on this is a more generic feeling than the fascinating predicament and locale Sadie finds herself in. Why isn't Sadie reacting the way she would in her role as surgeon? Curious!

Keep an eye out for run-on sentences. Varied sentence structure keeps the narration fresh for the reader. Consider focusing just on the mystery man's symptoms—for example, she can be startled later at the rich brown of his eyes, which she didn't at first notice because she was just focused on how bloodshot they were. Might Sadie administer CPR, instead of his breathing starting on its own? High stakes on the first page will keep the reader wanting more. Great job, though—I certainly want to know who this guy is, why Sadie is on sabbatical, and what happens next.