

## CHAPTER ONE

I woke up when a man sat on my bed. I'd left a nightlight on in the bathroom and I could tell it was a man just from the width of his shoulders and the size of his muscular arms. The first thought that flashed through my mind was that it was the last creep I dated, but he wasn't as muscular as the man sitting on the bed. My heart started racing; I sat up and tried to scream but just a horrible moaning sound came out of my mouth. The guy jumped up, turned around, and shouted, "What the hell?"

I jumped out of bed and backed myself into the corner, frantically looking for anything I could use as a weapon. I sank down onto the floor.

I stammered, "Please, don't...rape...me. Take my...purse, my...computer, whatever you...want."

The intruder reached over to the wall and flipped on the light switch. I curled into a ball and burst into tears.

He said, "Jesus. Chris, it's me, Jack Quinn, Meggie's brother."

I looked at him through the tears in my eyes. I was shaking from head to toe. He walked around the bed and crouched in

front of me.

He gently put his hand on my shoulder. “Are you okay, Chris? I’m so sorry I scared you.”

He then scooped me up in his arms as if I weighed nothing and sat on the bed with me on his lap. I put my arms around him and held on tight. At that moment, I wanted to crawl inside his body for safety. He held me for a while and rubbed my back while making shushing sounds. I took a couple of deep breaths and tried to calm myself. Reluctantly, I pulled away from him and looked into his concerned blue eyes.

He pulled me back toward him and kissed my forehead, both my cheeks and then my mouth. His kiss started off sweet and gentle, and then his arms tightened around me and the kiss deepened. I played with the soft hair at the base of his neck and opened my mouth to let him in. He didn’t hesitate a bit and devoured me. My whole body went up in flames. He abruptly broke the kiss and we looked at each other in surprise. We were both breathing heavily.

The silence was making me uncomfortable so I said, “I’m better now.” Standing, I reached for a tissue on the bureau, wiped the tears off my face, and tucked my messy hair behind my ears. Jack stood up and I got a better look at him. He towered over me, standing well over six feet. He wore a black T-shirt and a pair of faded jeans that fit him perfectly, showing off his hard, toned body. His light brown hair was cut short and his piercing blue eyes at the moment were looking at my boobs, braless in my tank top. My nipples, which have a mind of their own, were puckered up, a result of the scorching kiss he had just laid on me. His sexy mouth turned up at the sides and he put his huge hands on his hips. The stubble on his

face made him look far too sexy. There should be a DANGER label on his forehead.

Jack Quinn is my cousin Ian's brother-in-law. Ian's wife, Meggie, has two brothers, Jack and Charlie. Jack is the elder and too good-looking, if there is such a thing. He's a merchant marine and away most of the time. Meggie told me Jack has left a trail of broken hearts all over the world. After that kiss, I have no doubt.

He said, "Chris, I'm so sorry. I didn't know anyone was staying here. I got a call from Ian last night. One of his boat captains broke his leg and he asked me to come up and fill in for him. I'm on vacation for the next few months. What are you doing here?"

"I was talking to Meggie last night and she invited me to stay for the summer. My condo complex is really noisy and I wanted to get some work done, so I took her up on the offer. I guess it was just a miscommunication thing between them. I can go home tomorrow."

He shook his head. "No, no. I'll stay in the other bedroom. I'll be gone all day on the boat, so you'll have quiet time to work. I don't see why we can't both stay here. I'm willing to give it a go if you are. I'd stay with Meggie and Ian, but they're newly married, and I think they should have their privacy."

"I agree with you on that one. Well, I guess we could give it a try, but let me know if you change your mind. It's not like I don't have a place to live. I can go back to Boston anytime."

He nodded. "Okay. I'm sorry about the kiss. That shouldn't have happened and it won't happen again. I wouldn't want you to think you aren't safe here. I'll behave myself. Well, I'll see you in the morning. I'm not starting work until Sunday."

I smiled and said, “Goodnight.”

He nodded and walked out of the bedroom and shut the door. I got back in bed wide-awake. I seriously doubted that this situation is going to work. My attraction to Jack is off the charts. We spent a lot of time together when I went to Philly for Ian and Meggie’s wedding. Since then, he has had the starring role in all of my sexual fantasies. After the kiss we just shared, I can safely say that my attraction isn’t going to fade anytime soon. I’m going to have to keep it under control, though, and try not to be too obvious. My boobs better start behaving themselves.

The next morning I started to have flashbacks of last night’s events. Thank God it was Jack and not some sicko rapist. Cozy Harbor is a very safe place, but you never know. The cottage was quiet, so I assumed Jack was still sleeping. I dressed in a pair of khaki shorts and a pink tank top. I made sure to put a bra on the naughty girls. I twisted my hair and secured it with a clip and went into the kitchen. I had just finished making a pot of coffee when Jack strolled in mid-stretch. His large, hard body filled the doorway, muscles rippling. He had a pair of green cargo shorts on but no shirt. His chest was tan with wisps of soft, light-brown curly hair, which led down to six-pack abs. He could be a male model with a body like that. His blue eyes smiled at me, and all I could think of was, what a way to start my morning. Who needs oatmeal? Oh, baby! A girl could get used to a steady diet of Jack Quinn for breakfast.

He smiled. “Mornin’, Chris. Did you manage to get some sleep?”

“Yes, I did. I’m sorry I got a little dramatic last night.”

He shook his head. "I don't blame you a bit. Let's just put it behind us. Okay?"

"Sure. How about a cup of coffee?"

"It smells good."

"How do you like it?"

"Just black, please."

I poured him a cup, put some milk and sugar in mine, and sat at the kitchen table.

He sat across from me smiling and then asked, "What are you up to today? Do you work on the weekends?"

I'm a freelance book editor. I write articles once in a while for different publications, but most of my bread and butter comes from editing jobs.

"I pretty much make my own hours. It's what I like best about doing freelance. I was going to do some grocery shopping this morning and work this afternoon. I want to finish up the book I've been working on. Do you want me to pick anything up for you?"

"If you wouldn't mind, that'd be great. I'll make a list for you. What kind of book are you working on?"

I was hoping he wouldn't ask. I wish I could be picky about what I edit, but a girl has to eat. Why couldn't I be working on some great literary feat? "It's a love story about two vampires."

He wiggled his eyebrows. "Sounds pretty kinky."

"I wouldn't say kinky. A little too bloody for my taste, but it's pretty well written. I edited a murder mystery last week that was very disturbing. I think that is one of the reasons I freaked out last night. I can't seem to stop thinking about it. What kind of books do you like? No, don't tell me. Let me

guess? Tom Clancy, Ken Follett, Robert Ludlum?”

“Yeah, I like those authors. To tell you the truth, though, when I’m at sea for months, I’ll read anything I can get my hands on. Most of the people I sail with are big readers and we all share books. Most of the crew is male, but there are a few women on board. I’ve borrowed books from them many times. I’m a big fan of Sue Grafton, Lisa Scottoline, and my favorite is Janet Evanovich. I love her Stephanie Plum series. Before my last tour, I bought an iPad and downloaded a bunch of books. It lightened up my sea bag quite a bit. I would usually bring about a dozen books with me when I went back to work.”

“What else do people do onboard when they’re not working?”

“Some play instruments, mostly guitar, but one guy plays the banjo. A few people paint and a few of the women make jewelry. All the ships have pretty nice gyms on board so most people work out every day. One of the guys is giving me guitar lessons.”

“Are you any good?”

“I’m getting there. I’m picking it up pretty easily. I wish I had done it years ago.”

“I’d love to hear you play sometime.”

“Sure.”

“Do you ever get tired of sailing?”

He shook his head no. “I’ve been sailing captain for the last three years. There is a lot of responsibility that goes with the job and a lot more paperwork, so it’s been challenging, always something new every day to deal with. I’ve seen most of the world, and I love the sea. I’ve been sailing for fifteen years now. I suppose someday I’ll settle down with someone

and reevaluate my career choice. The divorce rate among sailors is pretty high. The time away is tough on relationships, especially where kids are involved. The mom is in charge for months at a time and then the dad comes home and wants to run the show. The kids don't know who the boss is and it gets confusing for them. It's a tough life, definitely not for everyone. One guy I sailed with, his wife met the ship when we came back to Seattle from the Far East last year. She gave him an ultimatum: her or the ship."

"What did he do?"

Jack laughed. "He packed his sea bag and we haven't seen him since. A lot of the guys get the ultimatum sooner or later. That's why I avoid relationships. I like to keep things light. No promises. No commitments. It works for me. One thing I really love about my job is the chunks of time off. You can't beat three months off at a shot."

"Did you have plans for your time off before Ian called you?"

"I was going to rent a place at the Jersey Shore for a month with a couple of guys and do some surfing and then I was going to paint the outside of my folks' house. I think I'll still have time to do that before I go back to work. If not, I'll hire someone to do it."

"That's nice of you."

"Hey, I owe them. They still let me crash there when I'm home. I travel a lot when I'm off, so I never got around to buying a place. I didn't see the point."

His cell phone rang and he went into his bedroom to answer it. I rinsed out the coffee cups and started making my list for the store. When he came back into the kitchen, the

show was over; he'd put on a white T-shirt.

"That was Ian," he said. "He's doing repairs on the *Stalwart* today so I'm going to give him a hand. He invited me to dinner and he mentioned you were coming, too. How about we ride over together? No sense in taking two cars."

"Sure. If you could make out your list for the store before you leave, that would be great."

He grabbed a pad of paper sitting on the table, scribbled a few things down, and handed it to me.

"See you later, Chris."

He walked out the door and I sank into an overstuffed chair in the living room. I looked at his list: OJ, Honey Nut Cheerios, and bananas. Shucks, no condoms. I better get my mind out of the gutter, but the man is sex in a pair of topsiders.

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I did some work and then went to the grocery store. It was lunchtime when I got back so I went over to the Snack Shack. Helen stood up when I walked in.

Mo asked her, "Where are you off to?"

Helen sighed. "Tony's grandmother is giving me cooking lessons. Today she's going to teach me how to stuff a lentil."

Mo and I laughed.

Mo told her, "Sugar, I think she's pullin' your ponytail. Do you even know what a lentil is?"

Helen threw up her hands. "Not a clue."

Mo enlightened her. "It's a legume. It's like a small bean, smaller than a pea. There is no way in hell anyone can stuff them. Not even the great Ms. Julia, God rest her soul, could've

done that.”

Helen said, “I hate cooking, always have. Tony cooks like a top chef and I set the table and make yummy sounds as I stuff my face. It works for us. I’m just trying to be nice and win his grandmother over before the wedding. The only thing she likes about me is my appetite. I can eat like a stevedore. So far, I’ve learned how to make the red gravy, the meatballs, and I can put together an antipasto salad. She made me sign a confidentiality agreement swearing I won’t divulge any of the family recipes to outsiders. She’s one scary little old Italian lady.”

Helen turned to me and smiled. “Hi, Chris. Are you down for the weekend?”

I nodded. “Actually, I’m going to spend the summer here in Cozy Harbor. I was complaining to Meggie about the noise at my condo complex and how hard it was to get any work done. She suggested since no one was staying in her Gram’s cottage this summer, I should come down and stay for a while. I think in the fall I’m going to contemplate moving. There are way too many college kids where I live, and it’s party central. Meggie’s brother Jack showed up last night, much to my surprise.”

Mo said, “You two goin’ to shack up for the summer?”

I laughed. “Well, I offered to go back to Boston but he said we could share the cottage. He’s filling in for one of Ian’s captains who broke his leg. We agreed to give it a go, so I guess I have a housemate for the summer.”

Mo said, “I heard about John breakin’ his leg. That’s too bad. Well, I don’t think living with that hunk for the summer will be much of a hardship. It’ll be fun havin’ you here for a

while.”

Helen said, “Yeah, we can hang out. I’ll be hanging by the pool at the house and hitting the beach. I’d love some company. I want to have a nice tan for the wedding.”

“It’s in September, right?”

Helen nodded. “Yeah, Saturday the 22<sup>nd</sup> down in Philly. Mark your calendar. It will be a crazy Polish–Italian wedding. We should be getting the invitations out in a few weeks.” She rolled her eyes, “God, I hate these cooking lessons. After the wedding, all I’ll be making is coffee and reservations.”

Mo snickered. “And little Maronis.”

Helen laughed and held up her right hand. “Whoa. Not right away. After the wedding, I’m hoping to get an engineering job up here for a couple of years and then we’ll start thinking about having some little bambinos.” Helen wiggled her eyebrows. “Until then, we’ll be having lots of baby-making practice. Well, I’d better go or I’ll get the evil eye from the old lady. Wish me luck.”

Mo and I waved her off and I took a seat at the counter.

Mo asked, “What can I get you, hon?”

“I’m pretty hungry. I skipped breakfast and all I’ve had is coffee.”

“The special today is a grilled chicken tzatziki wrap.”

“That’s a yogurt and cucumber sauce, isn’t it?”

“Yep.”

“That sounds great, Mo.”

Every time I come to visit, I make a point of having breakfast or lunch at the Snack Shack at the marina. Mo has been cooking at the Shack for over ten years and people come from miles around to grab a bite at her counter. She’s a retired

Marine Corps cook. She grew up down South and retired up here to be near her brother who relocated to Rhode Island years ago. Mo is in her late fifties, a full-bodied woman with a blond, chin-length bob and friendly blue eyes. She finally got married for the first time this past winter. She married a local fisherman named Big H, whom she'd been flirting with for years. When she started dating on the Internet, Big H decided he'd better make a move before someone else snatched her up. Mo is all heart and everyone who knows her adores her. The Shack is also gossip central. If you want to know what is going on in Cozy Harbor, just stop by the Shack for a cup of coffee with Mo.

Mo turned around to make my wrap and asked, "What are you working on now, Chris?"

I answered, "I'm editing a vampire sex book."

Mo shivered, "Holy bloody cow. I bet there's a lot of bitin' and suckin' goin' on."

I laughed. "Oh yeah. Vampire books are really popular right now. I've been editing quite a few lately."

Mo said, "That vampire stuff freaks me out. When I was young, I used to watch the show 'Dark Shadows' on TV and it scared the bejeezus out of me. To this day, I sleep with my sheet up around my neck. I even did it when I was menopausin' and sweatin' like a big old hog on a hot Alabama day. No vampire is goin' to get me. No siree bobtail."

I laughed. "Mo, you don't really believe there are vampires, do you?"

"Of course not, but I'm not takin' any chances. The only one I want bitin' my neck is my big hunk of love."

"How is Big H, by the way?"

Mo's smile could have lit up the sky on a moonless night. "My sweetheart is just about the most perfect specimen of manhood on this here planet. Yesterday, he told me to meet him at his boat after I finished work. When I got there, he had dinner all laid out. He'd picked up a rotisserie chicken and some salads at the market and had a nice bottle of white wine all chilled. We ate and then he took me for a ride up the pond. I never know what that man is gonna surprise me with. He's a real romantic. It took me a long time to reel him in, but he was a catch worth waitin' for."

"You're a lucky woman, Mo. Tell him hi for me. I haven't seen him since Meggie and Ian's wedding in February."

She handed me my wrap and I took a big bite. Her tzatziki sauce is out of this world.

Mo leaned on the counter and asked, "Chrissy, how's your love life these days, honey?"

I shrugged. "Nonexistent at the moment. I haven't had a serious relationship since college. The last guy I dated was kind of overwhelming, almost stalker-like. It was a little scary, to tell the truth. I would go to Starbucks and he would show up 'coincidentally,' or so he said. Then, it started happening all the time. I'd run into him at the grocery store, the bank, the dry cleaners; he even showed up at a restaurant where I was having dinner with one of my girlfriends. I only went out with him for a month and then I had to cut him loose; he was creeping me out. I wasn't that physically attracted to him either. That was about six months ago. I haven't had a date since."

"Have you seen him around since you broke up?"

"No, thank God."

Mo shook her head. “You gotta trust your instincts about people. That’s the way I always operated when I was datin’ on the Internet. I met some nice fellas, but a couple of weirdos got past my perv radar. I caught on to them pretty quick, thank the good Lord, and kicked their sorry asses to the curb. I thank my lucky stars every day Big H manned up and asked me out. A girl as beautiful as you, Chris, should have guys beating down her door. I bet you have that pretty-girl problem.”

“What’s that?”

“Guys automatically think that a girl as pretty as you must have a boyfriend, so they don’t bother askin’ you out. That happened a lot to me in my younger days. I was quite the looker when I was in the Corps. One of my friends brought it to my attention, and I had her spread the word on base that I was single. Maybe I could do that for you. I could let all the worthy, eligible bachelors know you’re available.”

“That’s nice of you, Mo, but I think I’ll just leave it up to fate. Besides, all the good ones around here are taken with Big H and Tony off the market. I should have been here last summer. It was like the ‘summer of love.’ Meggie met Ian, Helen came up from Philly to visit her and met Tony, and you and Big H got together.”

“You’re young and have plenty of time to find Mr. Right, Chris. I wasn’t in any hurry to get hitched. I had a lot of fun with the boys in my younger days. My motto was ‘Why buy the whole pig when you can get the sausage for free.’”

We laughed.

She said, “Hey, maybe you and Jack will turn up the heat in the cottage.”

“I doubt that, Mo. He’s a heartbreaker with a reputation

a mile wide.”

“At least he’ll be nice to look at all summer.”

“Oh yeah. There is that perk.”

I finished my wrap. “Thanks, Mo, for a great lunch.”

“Anytime, sweetie.”

On my way back to the cottage, I popped in the marina store. I had stopped in before I went to the grocery store looking for Meggie, but she wasn’t there.

“Hi, Journey. Is Meggie back yet?”

Journey has been working summers at the marina for the past three years. She’s a student at the University of Rhode Island and an original. Her fashion style would not be found on any runway. Today she was wearing a pink scarf on her head with multi-colored strands of hair poking out from underneath it. She had an orange long-sleeved T-shirt on with purple pants and black combat boots. The piercings on her nose and eyebrows made me wince.

“No, Chris. I’ll let her know you stopped by.”

“Thanks. Tell her I’m over at the cottage.”

“Will do.”

I wandered back over to the cottage and finished unpacking. When I had arrived yesterday afternoon, I had taken the bedroom with the gorgeous view of the marina. I love looking out at all the boats. The cottage and the marina are owned by Jack and Meggie’s grandmother. The cottage is cozy with two bedrooms, one bath, a comfy living room, and a kitchen and eating area. Jack and Meggie’s Gram’s collection of local pottery, which is displayed all around the house, gives it a nice homey feel. Their grandmother got remarried last year after years of being a widow. She now lives in San Diego in

the winter and spends her summers in Newport. The Quinns keep the cottage available for the family to use. Because I'm Ian's cousin, I guess that gave me family status—lucky me. When I walked into the cottage yesterday, I felt like the walls enveloped me in a big, welcoming hug. Living here for the summer will be the best thing that's happened to me in a while. I just hope Jack and I can get along okay. I opened all the windows and let the salt air blow through the house. I love the smell of the sea. I cleared off the desk in the living room, set up my computer, and went to work on *Damian the Blood God*.

*“Damian knew that Stavros was responsible for the uprising in the southern sector. If he could only prove it, he could convince the southern sector’s council to cooperate with the alliance. Stavros had never forgiven him for taking Delphine away from him. Delphine would have been taken out by the Hooded Cult if he hadn’t saved her when he did. She was his now and Stavros could throw whatever he wanted in his path, but he’d never let her go.”*

About an hour later, I heard a knock on the door, looked up and saw Meggie. Meggie was adorable as always with her copper-red hair up in a ponytail, her bright blue eyes shining, and the warmest smile on her face. In my mind, my cousin couldn't have found anyone more perfect for him than Meggie. Meggie and I have become really close in the past year. She is the sister I never had and always wanted.

I got up and gave her a big hug. “You’re a sight for sore eyes,” I said.

She asked, “Did you get settled in okay? I’m sorry about

the mix-up with Jack.”

“That’s okay. We decided to try being housemates. He’ll be working on the boat so I’ll have the cottage to myself during the day. I offered to go back to Boston but he insisted I stay.”

“Well, just do yourself a favor and don’t fall for him. I love him to pieces, but he is a footloose and fancy-free kind of guy. I wouldn’t want you to get hurt.”

“I’ll take the warning and shield my fragile heart.”

We laughed.

I told her, “To answer your question, I’m all settled in and I even had lunch at the Shack. Thanks again for inviting me down for the summer.”

“Are you kidding? It’ll be fun having you around. Ian’s thrilled.”

My cousin Ian and I are really close. We have a very small family. We’re both only children; he’s my only cousin but we’re actually more like brother and sister. Ian bought his dad’s lobster business when my aunt and uncle moved to Florida. He has three large lobster boats.

I asked Meggie, “What have you been up to today? I tried to catch you twice at the marina, but you were gone.”

Meggie sat on the sofa, leaned back, and shrugged her shoulders. “I had a doctor’s appointment. I’ve been really tired lately, and it’s been awhile since I had a checkup. I’m sure I’m fine. This is the busy season at the marina. I’m probably just working too hard and Ian and I *are* still honeymooning.”

“Brag, brag, brag.”

She blushed and I laughed.

I told her, “You need to take care of yourself. You know I would love to help you. It’s the least I can do to pay you back

for letting me stay here. Anytime you need a break, just come and get me and I'll fill in for you."

She smiled. "Okay, I'll take you up on that. Well, I'll let you get back to work. You're still coming to dinner, I hope. Ian's bringing home lobsters. Jack is coming and I invited Helen and Tony. Come around six-thirty and pop in the marina to say hi anytime you feel like taking a break."

"That's sounds great. Don't forget I'm bringing dessert. Hey, I hope you're okay."

"Don't worry about me. I'll be fine." She gave me a reassuring smile and walked out the door.

I got back to work. The more I got into the book, the gorier it got. I think I might have to sleep with *my* sheet up around my neck.

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I was putting the icing on the red velvet cupcakes I made when Jack walked in the door. He came into the kitchen and stood behind me, peeking over my shoulder. I could feel the heat coming off his body. Even though he smelled like sweaty man and diesel fuel, I had to fight the urge to lean back into him.

He said, "They look delicious. I'm going to jump in the shower and I'll be ready in a few minutes."

I didn't realize I'd been holding my breath. I let it out in a whoosh and finished the cupcakes. They did look pretty amazing, if I do say so myself. I had showered earlier so I just needed to change clothes. I have thick, medium-light-brown hair that hangs a few inches past my shoulders so it takes

awhile to dry. I don't let it get any longer than that because I'm only 5'1" and I'd look like a troll doll. I put on my favorite skirt. It was blue with little white stripes, short but not slutty-short, its hem about three inches above my knees. I pulled on a white tank to go with it and slipped my feet into a pair of white sandals. I put some silver hoop earrings in my ears and a few silver bangles on my wrist. I looked at myself in the mirror. People have always told me I'm pretty, but I guess most people are critical of their own appearance, myself included. I have big brown eyes. I think they're too big for my face. On the plus side, my lashes are long, so I only need a little mascara. My nose is fine. I have nice full lips, but I think my mouth is too wide. I put a little mascara, blush, and lipstick on and brushed my hair. If it were only *me* going to dinner at Meggie and Ian's, I would have just thrown on shorts and a T-shirt.

I walked out into the living room to find Jack standing looking out the window. He was looking as handsome as ever in a pair of beige cargo shorts and a blue and white striped polo shirt. Our clothes matched. Maybe that's a sign. He turned around and gave me the once-over. I must have met his approval because a big smile came across his face.

He said, "You look pretty."

I was never very good at receiving compliments, but I welcomed that one with open arms. I could tell he meant it. "Thanks. I'll get the cupcakes and we can go."

"Let's take my car."

I followed him out to the parking lot. He led me over to a black Lexus LS.

I commented, "Beautiful car."

He smiled. "Thanks. I just bought it before I came up. It

rides like a dream. I drove an old pickup for years and loved it, but it was starting to have serious problems so I decided it was time to get a decent vehicle.”

He opened the passenger door for me and I climbed in. It had that great new-car smell. I decided to hold the cupcakes on my lap. I’d hate for him to have cream cheese frosting all over his beautiful leather upholstery.

He joked, “I guess we’ll be eating a lot of lobster this summer.”

“Fine by me, I love it. In fact, I’m looking forward to eating a lot of fish this summer.”

“I love it, too, but I have to have some red meat once in awhile.”

“How is the food on your ship?”

“Too good. That’s one of the reasons everyone works out.”

It only took a few minutes to drive to Meggie and Ian’s house. They lived in Sand Hill Cove in a beautiful house on the water. Ian inherited it from his grandparents on his Dad’s side and he’s done a lot of renovations in the last few years to update the house. Ian’s black Lab, Sam, greeted us at the door and Jack gave him his due of pets and scratches. I found Meggie and Helen in the kitchen. Jack said hello to them and went out on the deck to join Tony and Ian.

I said, “Hi, girls. Meggie, how are you feeling?”

Helen turned to Meggie, her concern written on her face. “Meg, are you sick?”

Meggie shook her head. “No. I’ve just been a little tired lately so I went for a checkup. The doctor did some tests and I’m sure I’ll be just fine. I have a follow-up appointment the week after next.”

Helen raised her eyebrows. “Maybe you’re pregnant.”

Meggie paled. “I doubt it. I did go off the pill a few months ago and I haven’t had a period since, but I always heard that it takes some time to get regular again. That’s why I went off the pill in the first place; I wanted to get my body back on a normal cycle before we started trying to have a baby.”

I asked, “Did the doctor do a pregnancy test?”

Meggie shrugged. “I don’t know. She did a blood test. Maybe I’ll call the office tomorrow. Oh God, I don’t know if I’m ready to be pregnant. I don’t feel pregnant, but I’ve never been pregnant, so I don’t have a clue how it would feel. We were hoping to start trying next year. I’m sure I’ve probably just been working too hard.”

Helen asked, “Besides being tired, have you had any other symptoms?”

Meggie sat on a stool and put her face in her hands. “Just one. I can’t stand the smell of fish. Ian walked in the house after work the other day and I thought I was going to lose it. I made him go out to the garage and take his clothes off and leave them there. The smell of lobster bait never bothered me before. To be honest, it kind of turned me on.”

I laughed. “Oh, honey. I’ll bet money you’re pregnant.”

Meggie shrugged. “It doesn’t happen all the time. I’m fine tonight. I can smell the lobsters cooking in the pot on the grill and I’m okay. I think I had a bug. I’m already feeling better.”

Helen smirked. “We’ll see, my friend. We’ll see.”

Meggie got up and said, “Don’t tell anyone what we’ve discussed. Now let’s get dinner on the table. I’ve got corn on the stove. Helen, grab your potato salad out of the fridge. Chris, could you melt that butter in the microwave? The table

is set out on the deck. Chris, want a glass of wine?"

"Sure."

She poured me a glass of white.

Helen asked, "Chris, *so*, how is living with Captain Jack working out for you?"

"We got off to a rough start. He scared the daylights out of me when he sat on the bed and woke me up in the middle of the night. He didn't know I was staying at the cottage. It's only been a day, but it's fine so far. He'll be busy. I'm busy. I told him if he would rather have the cottage to himself, I could go back to Boston."

There was no way in hell I was going to tell them about the kiss. The most scorching hot kiss I ever had in my life, if I'm being truthful.

Meggie said, "Sorry again for the mix-up about the cottage."

"No problem. I still think I should just go back to Boston though. I wouldn't want to cramp his style."

Helen smiled, "Now that wouldn't be any fun. I think you two look good together."

Meggie said, "I agree, but remember what I told you, Chris. I'd hate to see you hurt. He's my brother and I love him, but if he hurt you, I'd disown him."

Helen said to me, "Think like a man. Just use him for sex all summer."

Even though that was the best idea I'd heard in a long time, I said, "Stop. Jack and I are just housemates. That's all. You both are way off base here."

Helen glanced at Meggie and said, "If you say so, Chris."

Ian poked his head in the door. "Lobsters are done."

Helen said, “Well, girls, I guess we should leave the land of denial and join the boys on the deck.”

The conversation flowed at dinner. Tony and Helen shared some of their wedding plans with us. They’re a great couple and probably one of the best-looking ones I’ve ever seen. Helen is tall, I’d bet close to six feet in flats. She has long blond hair and blue eyes. She is slim with big boobs, a thin waist, and legs that are a mile long. Most women would kill to have a body like Helen’s. Tony is the classic tall, dark, and handsome guy with his dark hair, dark eyes, and beautiful olive skin tone. Their looks complement each other beautifully. They’ll make a gorgeous bride and groom and they’re as nice as they are good-looking. I can’t help but be a little jealous of these two loving couples. It would be nice to have someone special in my life.

I kept sneaking glances at Jack during dinner. It was obvious he was enjoying spending time with Meggie. It will be nice for Meggie to have Jack around for a while. I know how much she misses her family. Her parents live in Philly and her other brother, Charlie, is a travel writer, so she doesn’t get to see any of them all that much anymore since she moved to Rhode Island. At least her grandmother will be back next week so she will have her around for the whole summer. Helen moving here is also a big boon for Meggie.

Everyone devoured the cupcakes, which I took as a compliment to my baking skills. It was worth the effort I put into them. I helped Meggie and Helen clean up the dishes, and then Jack and I said our goodbyes. Meggie and the boys start work early in the morning, so everyone was ready to call it a night after dinner. I can’t say I didn’t wish Jack and I were

on a date, because I definitely did. We said our goodnights when we got back to the cottage and went to our separate rooms. I couldn't fall asleep. Thoughts of him and that kiss kept popping up in my head. Maybe I should go back to Boston. Living with Jack is going to be sheer torture. It's hard to control myself when I'm with him. I want to touch him so badly and kiss every inch of him. I'll have to start sitting on my hands.