

About WHY ROMEO HATES JULIET...

Revenge was never this much fun...

From the first moment they meet, when has-been movie star, Romeo Boyd mistakes romance writer, Juliet Soma for the hot stripper his friends have hired for him for the night, the beach neighbors clash and an epic war of pranks begins to brew between them.

And when the sexy novelist gets the partying, Hollywood bad boy arrested by mistake, things spiral further downhill from there.

One day, a prank goes too far and Juliet accidentally shoots the movie star. When Romeo comes to, to Juliet's horror, he has amnesia and believes that she is his wife.

But does he really?

No, of course not! He's just faking it to get his revenge and make her his slave.

But how far is Romeo prepared to go, especially when he finds himself falling, head-over-heels, in love with the annoying, infuriating but achingly gorgeous enemy next door?

And how far will Juliet take things when she discovers how the electrifyingly handsome bum has been playing her all along? Will she finally admit that she's completely in love with him too?

WHY ROMEO HATES JULIET is a romantic comedy, emotional rollercoaster ride filled with shocking twists & turns and highs & lows, spanning an entire, fun-filled summer at the beach.

Why Romeo Hates Juliet

By Anna Mara

Chapter 1

“You’ll always be my little peach pit, no matter what.”

Eight year old Juliet Soma turned her chocolate brown eyes upwards to meet her father’s gaze and her brows crinkled in confusion. “But why are you moving away? Aren’t you coming to the lake with us?” she whined, as her small heart began tattooing a frantic beat inside her chest. She turned to her six year old sister, Sara, who was sitting beside her on the living room couch, with her little hands clasped in her lap and her eyes focused downwards at an imaginary spot on the carpet at her feet. Sara never said much when Juliet was around. She always let her big sister do the talking.

Juliet turned back to her father who suddenly crouched down low in front of her to meet her at eye level. “Juliet, I’ve already told you that I can’t come with you. Not this time.”

“But why? You said you were going to teach me to swim.”

Tears began to mist in her eyes. This was the first time her father had broken a promise to her. Had she done something bad? Was he mad at her? Maybe this had something to do with the yelling she’d heard coming from her parent’s bedroom last night? Juliet had been awakened by shouting coming through the walls and then she’d heard her daddy slamming the front door shut as he’d left the house. Was that why he was moving away now? Because he’d had a fight with mommy?

She turned to where her mom sat in the armchair with the orange flowers by the fireplace, softly crying into a tissue. Like her little sister, her head was bent too and she wasn’t looking at any of them. Was her daddy moving away because he didn’t like mommy anymore? Was that it?

She turned her wet eyes back to her father. “Please, Daddy! Don’t go. If you’re mad at Mommy, she didn’t mean it. She’s sorry.”

At that, her mom’s eyes flew upwards in anger and threw her father a withering stare. “I’m not taking the blame for your bullshit, Ken. You’d better tell them the truth, now!” she shouted through tight lips.

Juliet flinched in surprise. She’d never heard her mom swear before. In fact, bad words were never allowed in their house. Her frantic eyes riveted back to her father’s frowning face. “Please, Daddy, please – come to the lake with us, please,” she sobbed, as her salty tears began to flow faster down her pink cheeks.

Her father suddenly stood up, allowing his presence to tower over her. “Juliet, stop it!” he commanded. “I’ve already told you that I can’t do that. I’m moving away to Toronto and that’s that.”

“But why? Me and Sara – we’ll be good from now on, I promise. We’ll do our homework and we won’t watch TV anymore and we’ll help mommy with the dishes and...”

“I said stop it! Just stop it!”

Her father’s cold tone startled her into silence and caused her little sister to start crying. She heard her father let out a deep sigh before he continued in a softer tone.

“Girls, you’re both old enough to understand this, so I’ll just say it. Your mother and I are getting a divorce. She won’t be my wife anymore but I’ll always be your daddy. And even though I’m going to be living very far away now, know that I’ll always love you. We’ll talk on the phone every night and you can come and visit me anytime. You’ll

even get to fly in a big airplane. Now that'll be fun, won't it?"

Juliet hadn't heard any of her father's speech. All she knew was that her daddy was leaving and moving far away. Who would protect her now? Her dad was the strong one in their family and he wasn't afraid of anything. What about that time when Bobby Taylor from across the street had taken her bike? Hadn't her dad gotten it back for her? What if it happened again? Who would look after her now? Sara was too little and her mom needed protecting too. If Daddy was leaving, no one would be there for her now – no one! Well, she'd just have to look after herself from now on, that's all; and she'd look after Sara and Mommy too. She was strong, just like daddy, and she'd take care of them all.

Suddenly, Juliet's little mind short-circuited with the weight of her new responsibilities and all thinking stopped, giving way to pure emotion as deep sobs choked out of her.

Chapter 2

Sullivan Lake was a small but very deep lake in the wilds of British Columbia, Canada and it was home to ten private cottages all positioned around its shoreline. The three bedroom rustic cabin that Juliet, Sara and their mom were staying at belonged to her mom's friend, Mrs. Henderson, who'd invited them to spend the month of July there with her.

On their first night there, their mom had invited some of the other kids from neighboring cottages to a cookout that she'd planned. Sabina, Scottie and Riley were all eight and nine year olds whose families owned cabins near Mrs. Henderson's.

Juliet had been introduced to them about ten minutes ago but since she was shy, as were the other kids, they were all just quietly sitting around the campfire not saying a word to each other. Besides, Juliet didn't feel like talking anyway. Her dad had left for his new home in Toronto yesterday and she missed him so much already.

Juliet's eyes darted from one strange face to another before alighting on her mom, who was busy handing out hot dogs that they'd just barbequed on the grill.

"Okay, guys, what do you say to a cow who crosses in front of you?" her mom announced with a smile.

"Oh Mom..." an embarrassed Juliet whined, as she rolled her eyes at her mother's stupid joke.

"Don't 'oh mom' me, young lady. It's a perfectly good question. What do you say to the cow?" The kids all looked at each other and no one said anything. Juliet's mom continued, "You say moooo...ve."

Juliet's mortified gaze traveled from Sabina's silent face to Scottie's and then to Riley's... and they all stared back at her before suddenly bursting out laughing at Mrs. Soma's silly joke. Juliet joined in, as did little Sara and before long they were all singing campfire songs being led by Mrs. Henderson.

Eight year old Tracy Miller was just stepping out of her parent's car when she heard the loud singing coming from the Henderson cottage down the lake. She squinted her beady eyes in that direction and spotted her friends Sabina, Scottie and Riley over there sitting around a campfire with two new girls. But why weren't her friends here, welcoming her back for the summer? After all, she was the boss of everyone! And who were those new girls anyway? She seethed with jealousy as she stomped inside her cabin.

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The next afternoon, Juliet and all the kids had been invited to Sabina's cottage on the other side of the lake. The cabin itself was plain and small, but the one unique feature of the property was that it had a large eight foot outcropping of rock which jutted out into the water and was a perfect spot to dive from.

"Come on, Juliet, jump in," Sabina yelled, as she took a swan dive off of the rock formation into the water. Scottie and Riley were already swimming after having belly-flopped in moments earlier.

Dressed in a t-shirt and shorts, Juliet cautiously stood on top of the rock, but kept a safe distance from its edge. "I didn't bring my bathing suit," she yelled, shivering as she looked down into the murky water.

The fact was that Juliet couldn't swim and was too embarrassed to tell the rest of

the kids. What would they think of her if they knew? They'd probably laugh and call her a dweeb, or worse... a chicken.

Suddenly, she heard a rustling sound behind her and an angry voice shouted, "This isn't your house. You don't belong here!"

Spinning around, Juliet came face-to-face with Tracy, who was standing there with her hands on her hips and a defiant glare burning in her eyes. She could feel waves of hate being thrown at her. "I – I was invited. I'm a friend of Sabina's," she nervously stammered.

"I know all of Sabina's friends and you're not one of them." Tracy moved closer, her hands balled into fists by her side. "You're not welcome here, you weirdo!"

Juliet backed away in self-defense, not realizing that she was inching closer to the rock's edge. "I'm – I'm not a weirdo," she whispered breathlessly, the words lodging in her tight throat.

"Yes, you are. And you're ugly and stupid too! Why don't you go back where you came from, you freak."

Juliet began to tremble with fear as she took in the twisted hate splashed across the other girl's features. Who was this person and why was she being so mean? If her daddy were here, he'd make her be nice. He'd show her! But he wasn't here, was he? He was far away – and he couldn't help her now. In fact, he couldn't help her ever again.

A fiery flash of anger thundered through Juliet's small body. Well – she would just look after herself from now on – that's what she would do; and no one was going to be mean to her anymore; and no one was going to make her do what she didn't want to do – no one – and that included this bully. She'd been invited here by Sabina and she was going to stay and she wasn't backing down – and if this new girl wanted a fight, then a fight was what she was going to get. She wasn't afraid of her.

Juliet defiantly raised her nose in the air. "Maybe you're the one who's not supposed to be here, you big baby."

Stunned by the new girl's courage, Tracy flinched back before regaining her senses. Sparks of fury flew out of her eyes as she raised her balled fist in the air. "You'd better get out now or you'll be sorry, you stupid cow!"

Juliet's eyes narrowed on Tracy's twisted features. "Oh yeah? Make me!"

Suddenly, an enraged Tracy lunged at Juliet's chest and shoved with all her might, sending the other girl reeling over the rock cliff and into the water.

With a resounding, clumsy splash, Juliet found herself in the lake, gasping for air. Unable to swim or even tread water, she sank quickly into the dark, murky depths as her arms and feet floundered in panic. All thought vanished and she went on pure instinct as she tried valiantly to push herself back up to the surface. But the more she struggled, the deeper she sank. Oh no! She was going to die today, she knew it, and Sullivan Lake was going to be her tomb.

She gulped in water as she panicked some more and her chest felt tight as if in a vice. She couldn't feel her arms or legs anymore and she stopped struggling. The pain immediately eased up in her chest and a deep feeling of peace and calm overtook her as she floated deep in the water. It felt like she was floating in a wonderful dream where she'd been dropped into a pile of mattresses made of soft, warm feathers. It was wonderful – and everything suddenly was so nice and easy.

Maybe she should just let go and then she wouldn't have to think about Mommy

and Daddy splitting up and Daddy moving away and her having to be strong for everybody. She'd never have to think about any of it ever again. And with that last thought, Juliet lost consciousness and everything went black.

All of a sudden the pressure on her chest came back with a vengeance and her lungs felt like they were being crushed. Fluttering her eyelids open, Juliet began coughing up water as she was lifted up and over onto the sandy beach. One of the mothers held her tight as she continued to expectorate the liquid out of her chest, coughing and gasping for air.

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That night, Juliet woke up and found herself lying in a hospital bed. She sensed her mom suddenly stepping forward and felt her grasping her hand as she bent over her.

"Sweetheart, Mommy's here now and everything's going to be okay," Mrs. Soma whispered with a faint smile playing on her lips.

Juliet stared into her mom's face and noticed that her eyes were red and swollen, and she knew that her mom had been crying over what had happened.

"I'm sorry, Mommy," Juliet whimpered, feeling bad that she had been the cause of her mother's unhappiness.

"Shhh, you stop that, you hear? It wasn't your fault."

The telephone beside her bed rang and her mom picked it up. "Hello?" she said, before pausing and then handing the receiver to her daughter. "It's your father."

Juliet latched onto the phone like a life preserver. "Hi Daddy," she squeaked. "Are you coming to see me?"

But her daddy ignored her question. "How's my little peach pit feeling?" he asked.

"Fine."

"You gave us quite a scare, you know. Did that other girl push you?"

"Yes." Juliet felt shy and awkward talking to her dad because for some reason, he didn't feel like her dad anymore.

"Your mother tells me you're going to be just fine and the doctors are going to let you go home tomorrow."

"Are you going to be there when we get there?"

"No, honey, you know I can't."

Hot tears began to cascade down Juliet's cheeks. "Please Daddy, please come home", she begged. "I miss you."

His voice turned firm. "Juliet, you know we've talked about this and you know I can't do that. I will come and visit you and Sara soon, though, I promise."

Suddenly, Juliet heard a baby crying in the background. Who was that, she wondered? "Daddy...?"

But her father quickly cut her off. "Listen sweetie, I have to go now but I'll call you again, okay?"

"Okay, Daddy," she sniffled. "Bye." She handed the phone back to her mom who placed it back in its cradle.

Juliet's eyes grew pensive and she turned to her mom. "Mommy, who was that baby with Daddy? It was crying."

Her mom's face suddenly dropped and she burst into tears. "That baby is your

half-sister and – and your daddy is going to be living with his new family now.”

Juliet was stunned and anger filled her little body. How could he? How could her daddy do such a thing to all of them? He was just a big, old stupid jerk and she hated him! She hoped she'd never see him again!

New tears streamed down Juliet's cheeks as she buried her face into the hospital pillow and sobbed her heart out.

Chapter 3

Juliet was in the water again and she couldn't breathe. Oh God, she was going to die! She gasped for air, but instead, water rushed into her lungs as her arms and legs flailed wildly at the bottom of the lake. She was trapped. 'Oh God, help me!'

With a start, 27 year old Juliet woke up from her dream and found herself slumped over her desk. "Ohhhh," she moaned, as she came upright and massaged her sore neck. Using her laptop as a pillow hadn't been one of her best ideas and in fact, that had been the third time this week she'd done that. But she needed to get this book written and sent off to her publisher. Her deadline was looming.

Juliet put her hand to her forehead and wiped off the beads of perspiration, the last remnants of her dream. But why was she having that dream again? She'd gotten over that long ago.

Lifting her eyes to the computer screen, she stared at the open document file which read 'Page 47'. Oh, heaven help her! How was she ever going to finish writing a 500 page novel in a couple of months when she was still only on page 47?

The problem was that she was blocked – writer's block, to be more precise – and she hadn't been able to write one single new word in the past few months. She wanted to write, was desperate to write, and had forced herself to sit at the computer all day everyday, but nothing had come to her – no new words, no new ideas, nothing. It was as if there was a concrete wall between her fingers and her keyboard and she just couldn't smash through, no matter how hard she tried.

Sighing in frustration, Juliet stood up and walked to the living room of her one bedroom apartment, passing by the hall mirror. She stopped and stared at her reflection in the glass. Oh God, when did she get those dark circles under her eyes and why was her skin so pale? She looked almost sickly.

With her large brown eyes, full lips and perfectly straight nose all packed into a slim, 5'8" lean body, Juliet had been told many times that she could have been a model if she'd wanted to. But she doubted she would have gotten those compliments today. Her shoulder-length dark brown hair was pulled back into a sloppy ponytail and the extra large t-shirt and track pants she had on made her look frumpy and boyish. No, she didn't think Vogue would be calling her anytime soon.

Out of the corner of her eye, Juliet noticed that the message light on her answering machine was blinking. Taking a deep, protective breath, she pushed the play button, instinctively knowing who had called her.

"Juliet, this is Lisa. Listen, I spoke to your publisher and they aren't budging on the deadline. They're insisting you deliver them your book by September 15th," her literary agent's voice stated bluntly. "If you can't, then you're going to have to give them back their advance. I'm sorry but they're adamant about this. Give me a call. We'll talk."

"I am so screwed," Juliet sighed, as she put her head in her hands. The fact of the matter was that she'd already spent the \$100,000 her publisher had given her to write her second novel and if they wanted their money back, then she'd have to declare bankruptcy because right now, she was dead broke!

The answering machine beeped as it moved on to the second message. "Juliet, this is your sister, your ONLY sister? Remember me? I'm the one who loves you. Yet you never seem to crawl out of that apartment jail cell of yours to come and visit me

anymore,” a younger but angry female voice ranted. “I swear if you don’t agree to have lunch with me today, then I’m going to camp outside your front door until you let me in. I want to know what the hell is going on with you. You’d better call me back, missy – got it?” The machine clicked off.

Juliet sighed again. She’d have to see Sara today; she just couldn’t put it off any longer. But if she did, then her little sister would pry and poke and prod until Juliet had spilled the beans about her troubles. But how could she tell Sara that her strong and capable older sister was broke and soon to be unemployed because her career as a big-hit, first-time novelist was now in the toilet, soon to be flushed away into the sewer system of broken dreams.

Chapter 4

The dark, cavern-like interior of the Brothers Grimm Nightclub was alive with wild dancers and party-goers. Even though it had only opened six months earlier, the hip Los Angeles, California hangout had already become the ‘in’ hotspot to be seen at. Everyone from celebrities to wannabes sandwiched themselves inside the club nightly and were transported to sin by the throbbing dance music.

Twenty-eight year old, action movie star, Romeo Boyd, entered the club with a bleached-blonde, Hollywood bimbo on each arm and an entourage of male friends trailing behind him. This was his domain; the dark, seedy L.A. nightlife and he reigned over it like a king.

Being in-between movie jobs, he had been partying non-stop for the past three months. He was dressed in a ripped white t-shirt, jeans and a plaid, lumberjack jacket; and with his long, scraggly, dark hair and full beard covering his superstar good looks, he was totally unrecognizable as the former A-list movie star whose films had grossed billions for the Hollywood studios since he’d started acting more than 13 years ago when he was a wild, young pup.

As he strutted into the club, some of the party-goers swarmed around him and welcomed him like a supreme monarch. Suddenly, the music was turned off and amidst sounds of moans and groans, everyone turned their eyes to the DJ booth.

The young, male DJ took to the microphone and announced, “Ladies and gentlemen, can I have your attention please. Romeo Boyd is in the house!” The room erupted into cheers and Romeo acknowledged his subjects with a wave. The DJ continued, yelling over the noise, “Romeo, please give us a few words of your wisdom.”

The crowd continued to go wild as Romeo gave them his pearly white, sexy signature smile. He climbed onto the DJ booth, grabbed the microphone and instructed everyone to ‘shut the fuck up’ before royally pronouncing, “We’re here for a good time, not a long time – so LET’S PARTY!”

The club patrons erupted into wild cheers and the DJ started the music up again. Romeo headed to the bar and automatically received his first Jack Daniels whiskey shot, the first of many that he intended on consuming that night.

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“You look like shit!” Knox Williams shouted at full decibel.

“Ohhhh,” Romeo moaned, as his hands flew to his head. “For God’s sake, Knox, don’t shout. I’ve got a killer headache today.”

Knox appraised his client’s rough, debauched condition as Romeo lay sprawled on his office couch with both eyes closed. He shook his head in disbelief. The top notch Hollywood agent couldn’t believe what he was witnessing. The great Romeo Boyd, voted the Sexiest Man Alive only five years ago, now looked like a bum. He was wearing a dirty t-shirt under a rumpled grey jacket and pants that looked like they had come out of a Goodwill donation bin, and on his feet were the dirtiest, scruffiest, oldest pair of boots that he’d ever seen in his life. They looked like they’d been fished out of a garbage landfill.

Knox angrily crossed his arms in front of his chest. “Look at you. With that beard and stringy hair, I wouldn’t even recognize you if I saw you on the street and I’ve known

you for ten years. You party way too much, drink more than a human body can stand and you probably have every sexually-transmitted disease known to man.”

Romeo squinted one eye open and gave a short laugh. “You haven’t been reading Gossip World again, have you Knox? You know it’s all lies.” He closed his eye again.

“Oh, really?” Knox reached over to his desk and grabbed the latest issue of the celebrity gossip magazine. “Let’s see... which story is a lie? Is it the one about you being thrown into a coffee table during one of your drunken fights? Or is it the one about your ex, Tamara trying to sell a sex tape with you in the starring role? Or wait...” He quickly flipped through the weekly rag. “Here’s one. Here’s a picture of you with a smoke between your lips, a drink in your hand and two bouncers holding you upright outside a club because you’re too wasted to stand on your own two feet.”

Romeo smirked again and pried open both of his bloodshot eyes this time. “Okay, so maybe this week’s issue is accurate, but last week, where they said I was dating Jennifer Parker? I’ve never even met the woman.”

Frustrated, Knox rolled up the magazine and threw it back on his desk. “Yeah, this is all one big joke to you, isn’t it? Well, let me tell you something Romeo, and I’m telling you this because I care about you. Word around town is that you’re finished in this business. Your stock’s gone down in Hollywood.”

Romeo focused his hungover gaze on his agent’s stern countenance. “Calm down, things aren’t that bad.”

“Not that bad? Your last four movies were flops, and in this business, that means you’re on your way out. I can’t even get scripts sent to me for you to read anymore. They’re all saying that you’re box office poison. Five years ago, you had everything and with your constant partying and bad press, you blew it.” He paused as he gave his client a long look. “I don’t know how to tell you this, but... you’re really finished.”

Romeo slowly staggered up off the couch and headed for the door. None of this was news to him and he had stopped caring a long time ago.

Knox watched his retreating back. “What are you going to do now?”

Turning, Romeo plopped his black sunglasses onto his face and gave his agent a dazzling, movie star smile. “I’m going to have a pool party, what else?”

Chapter 5

“You look like shit!”

Sitting outside in the June sunshine, opposite Juliet at the small bistro table of Pasta Plenty, a neighborhood eatery in downtown Vancouver, British Columbia, 25 year old Sara Crawford meticulously studied her sister’s face like a plastic surgeon examining a patient before giving an estimate on work to be done.

Two years younger, Sara looked the complete opposite of Juliet. Her hair was also dark brown, but styled in a trendy, boyish bob. Her eyes were blue, her physique was plump and at 5’ nothing, she looked very short when standing next to her tall sister. They always joked that she was the runt of the litter, but she knew that she took after their mom’s side of the family while Juliet was more like their dad’s.

“No seriously, you look awful,” Sara reiterated.

Juliet frowned. “Thanks, little sis. You know just what to say to make me feel better.”

“Your skin is pale, you’ve got dark circles under your eyes and you’ve ignored me for weeks. What’s wrong?”

“Nothing’s wrong,” Juliet fibbed, as she took in her sister’s disbelieving face. “Honest.”

“Is it your book? I know you’re working against a deadline.”

“Sara, I’m fine, really.”

“It’s your book, I knew it,” Sara deduced. “You never take time off to have fun anymore. When was the last time you had a date?”

“Christmas,” Juliet defiantly replied.

“OMG! That was 6 months ago when I set you up with Rob’s cousin, Trace, and you’ve been doing nothing since then except work. That’s not healthy, Juliet.”

“Butt out, Sara,” Juliet retorted angrily. “You know how busy I got when my first novel hit the New York Times Bestsellers List last year, and then this year I’ve been busy working on my second one. You don’t write a book by going to parties and dating geeky cousins of my brother-in-law.”

“Trace may have been geeky, but he liked you. He wanted to see you again; he told me so.”

“What he liked were my feet. He had a foot fetish, Sara.”

“Of course he has a foot fetish; he’s a podiatrist.”

Juliet rolled her eyes before angrily stabbing back into her ziti pasta with her fork. “There’s no talking to you,” she vented.

“And there’s no talking to you either,” Sara snapped back, as she reached for her wine glass. She studied Juliet’s pinched face again as she took a sip. “Seriously – what’s wrong?” she asked in a softer tone.

Her little sister’s soft voice was Juliet’s undoing. Suddenly, a hot tear rolled down her cheek, followed by another – and then another. Her vision blurred and she choked back a sob.

Sara was stunned. Juliet never cried. She was the strong one, always had been. After all, she was the big sister who could solve all problems, no matter what they were. How many times had she, herself, gone to Juliet for help and she’d taken care of everything?

Sara's stomach clenched tight with fear. Rushing out of her chair, she moved to her sister's side and bent down to give her a hug. "My God, Juliet, what's wrong?" Her big sister shook her head, unable to speak and she brushed away the wetness on her cheeks with trembling hands. Sara's heart began leaping wildly out of her chest. "Talk to me. Are you sick? Is it your health?"

Juliet shook her head. "I'm – I'm okay. It's not that," she managed to choke out. "Then what? You're scaring me."

Juliet swallowed hard and regained control of her emotions, willing her tears to stop. She took in her little sister's frightened expression. "I didn't want to say anything because – because it's too humiliating, but I'm broke, Sara." The word 'broke' was said in a whimper.

Sara's eyes grew wide with shock. "But – but I don't understand?"

Juliet blew her nose on her paper napkin. "If I don't deliver a completed novel to my publisher by September, I'm going to have to give them back their \$100,000 advance, but I don't have the money because I've already spent it all on paying back taxes and credit card debts that I had from writing my first book. It's all gone, everything's gone, and so I'm going to have to declare bankruptcy. And when I do that, I'll lose my book deal and my writing career will be over. I'll be finished as a writer." The words spilled out of her like a raging river flooding its banks, but now that she'd finally said them out loud, she felt relieved.

"But, but – your first book was a big hit and you made money and – and..."

"My first book contract was a lousy deal and I didn't make very much and I had bills to pay from my starving artist days. All that money went a long time ago."

"But you're writing your second book and then you won't have to give them the money back, right?" Sara was stunned. She'd expected Juliet's troubles to be a case of working too hard and maybe needing a boyfriend and having some fun. She'd never imagined her problems were so serious.

Juliet took in her little sister's bewildered face and sighed. "I'm blocked, Sara. I haven't been able to write anything for months and if I don't give them a 500 page novel by the middle of September, I'm screwed." Her eyes suddenly widened with fear, and her voice became small and frightened. "What if – if..."

"What if what, sweetie?"

"What if I'm just a one-hit wonder? Maybe that's all I have in me – one bestseller – and that's it. Maybe I'm not good enough to be a writer anymore and maybe..."

"Stop it! Stop this thinking right now, Juliet, you hear me?" Sara hugged her sister tighter. "You're an amazing writer – the best – and it wasn't a fluke that your first book was a hit. You are so talented. And you did it once, and you can do it again; I know you can."

Juliet nervously bit her bottom lip as she let her sister's words of encouragement wash over her. "You think?"

"I don't think. I know! And as soon as I get home today, I'm talking to Rob and we'll lend you what money we've got. I'll help you, I promise."

Juliet hugged Sara lovingly before releasing her and stared into her sweet, concerned eyes. "Sara, Rob's still in residency at the hospital and you guys don't have that much money yourselves right now. I thank you for the offer, but this is something I have to figure out on my own, okay?" Her mouth curved into a small smile. "Besides,

you know how resourceful I am. I'm a fighter and very stubborn. I'll pull through somehow."

Sara grinned. "Oh, I know all about your stubbornness. Nana always said when you put your mind to something, only God could stop you."

"I remember," Juliet chuckled, as her thoughts lovingly raced back to their feisty grandmother who had died a few years back.

Nana, as she was affectionately called by the girls, was their mother's mother and had taken the three of them in when their dad had divorced their mom and stopped paying alimony and child support. Their father had distanced himself from all of them and as the years went by, had focused more and more on his new family in Toronto. Juliet's mom had had to get two jobs to support all of them and because she'd been working all the time, Nana had raised them. Their mom had died only last year of breast cancer, a bitter shell of her former self, and had never forgiven her ex-husband for abandoning them. Juliet's thoughts came back to the present as she suddenly saw her sister's face light up with excitement.

"Wait – I know how to help you!" Sara beamed. "Rob's parents, they own a beach house on Prince Edward Island, right on the ocean and maybe you can't write because you're always stuck in that gloomy, small apartment of yours. Why don't we go there, me and you, and spend the summer? I promise I'll be very quiet and leave you alone so you can write in peace and maybe the change of scenery will do you some good – you know, give you new ideas for your book? What do you say?"

Juliet was at a loss for words, "I don't know, Sara. Won't his parents mind? And Rob? Technically you're still newlyweds and he might not want you to be so far away from him for so long."

"His parents are in Europe and the beach house is empty. They offered it to me and Rob but he can't get away from the hospital, and I deserve a vacation anyway. Having to deal with a class of ten year-olds all year long is exhausting work, you know. So what do you say?" Sara stared at her sister, holding her breath waiting for her response.

Juliet stared back at her little sister's expectant face. Was this really a solution to her problems, she wondered? Was a change of scenery really all that she needed to finish her book and meet her deadline? And she would love to visit beautiful Prince Edward Island, a tiny island province on the east coast of Canada, and relax in a quiet, beautiful beach house with the sounds of nature all around her. Man – it sounded like heaven on earth! Of course, she'd stay away from the ocean since she still couldn't swim, but it would be nice to wake up to the sounds of the waves lapping at beach sand, wouldn't it?

Sara started fidgeting beside her. "Well? What do you say?"

Juliet frowned. "I shouldn't be spending what little money I have left on a plane ticket but..." she smiled wide, "I say – yes, a big yes!"

Ecstatic, Sara gave her sister a bear hug. "You'll see, Juliet. This is the best thing for you. And you'll have peace and quiet and you'll be able to write again and all your problems will be solved."

Chapter 6

The girls flew into Charlottetown Airport the first week in July. While in-flight, Juliet gazed transfixed out the airplane window, taking in the lush agricultural fields and rolling green hills of Prince Edward Island, Canada's smallest province, which was situated in the Gulf of St. Lawrence on that nation's east coast.

PEI, as it was commonly referred to, was a little over 2000 square miles. An important claim to fame held by the tiny province was that it was where author Lucy Maud Montgomery had written her series of novels about a little orphan girl named 'Anne of Green Gables', first published in 1908.

Juliet sighed, as the plane wheels touched down on the tarmac. If only she could be as prolific a writer as Lucy Maud Montgomery had been, then she wouldn't be in the mess she was in now. Oh well, maybe Prince Edward Island would create the same writer's magic for her as it had for Ms. Montgomery all those years ago.

After retrieving their luggage, the girls rented a car and then drove about twenty-five miles northwards to the Green Gables Shore area of the tiny island. They marveled at the beautiful expansive ocean views they were witnessing as the highway snaked along the shoreline.

The beach house was situated near a small community called Cavendish, where the Anne of Green Gables novels had been set. It sat on a large but very secluded expanse of beachfront property. When the girls finally turned onto the private Hemlock Road leading up to the house, they had to drive for a full minute before the cottage came into view and when it did, they oohed and ahed in amazement at what they saw.

"Oh my God, this is beautiful," Juliet gushed, as she stepped out of the car.

Before her, sat the most beautiful house she had ever seen. It was a two-story, white beach house designed with very clean, geometric lines of architecture. It had massive windows everywhere, top to bottom, to allow the privileged occupants uninterrupted views of the majestic, vibrant blue ocean, which gently pounded the golden, sandy shoreline about fifty feet from the residence.

The only drawback to the house was that right beside it, only forty feet away, sat an identical white, two-story structure. It was, in fact, an identical copy of their house except that it had a pool in its backyard facing the ocean and theirs didn't.

Sara followed her sister out of the car and came to stand beside her. "This is incredible, isn't it? My in-laws bought the place five years ago but they rarely come here."

"Who lives next door?" Concern furrowed Juliet's brow. She'd thought they were going to have a private vacation with no noisy neighbors. After all, she was banking on having quiet time to work on her book.

"My in-laws don't know, only that some rich American bought it years ago. He's never here though and they've never met him."

"Why are these houses so close together? I mean with all this beachfront property, they could have easily built this one a mile away."

"Apparently, they were both originally owned by a Canadian Olympic skeet shooter in the 50's. He built our house for him and his wife, and he built the other one for his daughter and her family so that they could have vacations together. That's why they sit so close to each other."

“Skeet? Isn’t that where they shoot clay targets with a shotgun?”

“Yup, that’s it. If you look over there, you’ll see a skeet machine.” Sara pointed to a mechanical contraption with a metal arm, wedged upright in the sand about 200 feet away from their house. “That launches the clay discs into the air and then you point your gun and shoot them down. Apparently, the former owner won a bronze Olympic medal in the 50’s for Canada. He was a big celebrity at the time and he used to come down here and practice.”

“Isn’t that kind of close to the house? I mean you are shooting a gun, aren’t you?”

“I guess it is, but he was a ‘big shot’ at the time, no pun intended, and the local government allowed him that privilege, and when the house was sold by his heirs to my in-laws, that privilege was sold along with it. That’s what Rob’s dad told me.”

Sara opened the car trunk, and with each grabbing a suitcase, both sisters trudged to the front door. “So why is there a pool in the other house when we’re right on the ocean anyway?” Juliet exhaled, as she dropped Sara’s heavy bag onto the flagstone patio.

“Rob’s dad said that the skeet shooter had it built for his grandkids when they were little so that they could swim in a safer environment rather than the ocean.”

Flashback memories of her near-drowning accident all those years ago raced through Juliet’s mind and she shivered as a trickle of fear ran down her spine. “There’s no such thing as a ‘safe environment’ when it comes to water.”

Sara gave her big sister a full-on glare. “Maybe if you learned how to swim, Juliet, you could finally get over that once and for all.”

“No thanks, little sis. I’ll just admire the water from a distance, if you don’t mind.” She walked up to the locked door and rattled the doorknob. “Let’s see what’s inside.”

Sara fished in her pockets for the keys. She unlocked the door and the girls stepped inside. They were delighted to find themselves in the middle of a Great Room with soaring twenty foot ceilings leading all the way up to the second floor.

“Wow, this is really nice,” Juliet exclaimed, as she walked around the all-white large room, admiring the setup.

The interior of the house looked like it was painted with pure white snow. The Great Room was one massive room which was the size of the home from front to back and it housed a fireplace, navy and white striped couches and a plasma TV setup. To their right, against the south wall was a white, oak staircase which snaked to the second floor, all in plain view. Against the back east wall, were two sets of double French doors which Juliet could see led to the kitchen area, and the bedrooms were probably upstairs. The west wall of the Great Room was a huge expanse of windows and in a very secluded corner, overlooking a breathtaking ocean view, Juliet spotted a writing desk and chair which she thought would be perfect for her to write from.

She approached the desk and lovingly caressed the oak wood frame. Maybe this had been a good idea, coming to Prince Edward Island with Sara. The serenity this place exuded could definitely help her get over her writer’s block and if she did that, she could finish her book and not have to pay back the money. Yes, maybe this place was the answer to all of her prayers after all.

Chapter 7

Over the next couple of days, the sisters used that time to relax and soak up the sun. Sara was an excellent swimmer and usually spent her mornings and late afternoons in the ocean. On the other hand, Juliet's fear of the water was always uppermost in her mind and she took great care to stay away from the surf, agreeing only to walk the length of the sandy beach away from the tide.

By the third day, Juliet felt like a boulder had been lifted from her shoulders. She was refreshed, relaxed and was starting to get a healthy rosy glow back into her previously pale cheeks. Maybe she should try sitting at her laptop and see if she could work on her book? Would the ideas come? Or was she doomed to a life of being a one-hit wonder, never to write another word again?

With her heart pounding in her chest, she sat down at the writing desk and booted up her computer. As she opened up her book file document, her previously written words popped into view and her racing heart skipped a beat. Positioning her shaking fingers over the keyboard, she paused. "Okay God, give me one idea to get started, please?"

Suddenly, an idea popped into her mind – and then another-and then another... and before she knew it, her fingers were flying across the keyboard, trying to keep pace with her racing thoughts. Her writer's block had finally been broken and Juliet let out a whoop of delight.

Chapter 8

Disaster struck on Day 5. Juliet should have known it was too good to last.

She had spent a very fruitful morning at her desk, when suddenly, she was startled out of her writer's reverie by a loud blast of rock music blaring from outside. Stunned by the deafening intrusion into her peaceful world, her fingers froze over the keyboard as did her breath. What the hell was that?

Sara, who'd been sunbathing on the beach, came racing inside. "I think we've got new neighbors!" she yelled, as her voice tried to compete with the din coming from next door.

Frowning, Juliet stood up and looked out the window. She spotted three men and three women, all in their mid-to-late twenties clustered around the pool, drinking beers. One of the guys, a tall, lanky type with a well-toned body, long hair and full beard, suddenly let out a "whoop" and jumped into the pool with all of his clothes on while still clutching his bottle. Two of the women, also fully clothed, followed suit while the others all broke out in laughter as the heavy metal music continued to blast. This was clearly the beginnings of a wild party.

"Who are they?" Juliet moaned, as frustration and worry marred her pretty features.

Sara came to stand beside her. "I saw them come up the drive about ten minutes ago in two black Escalade SUVs. I tried to get to you in time to warn you, but the music started too fast."

"How am I going to work on my book with all this going on, Sara?"

"Let's not jump to conclusions, okay? They've only just arrived. Maybe they're just letting off steam and soon, things will calm down."

Juliet nervously bit her lip. "You think?" she mumbled uneasily. She so desperately wanted to believe what her little sister was saying. After all, these past few days she'd been able to finally break through her writer's block and make some progress on her book.

Sara put a comforting arm around her. "Of course. Just give it a couple of hours." She began to steer Juliet towards the kitchen, hoping to take her sister's mind off of this new intrusion. "Let's go make some lunch."

Juliet nodded and tried to stay positive as she sat down on one of the counter stools. Suddenly, there was a knock at the kitchen door and Sara went over to open it. Twenty-eight year old Faith Simpson stood there holding three full bags of groceries.

Faith, along with her husband Brad, owned The Cavendish General Store, a quaint, old-fashioned establishment where they sold everything from hardware to groceries. The girls had struck up a friendship with the PEI islander and had liked her immediately on meeting her. She was friendly and genuinely nice, and both Sara and Juliet had made an instant friend.

"Hey girls," she greeted, as she walked in. "I've got your order here."

"Thanks, Faith. I'll go get your money," Sara said, walking out to get her purse.

"What's with the commotion next door?" Faith asked Juliet, as she plunked the bags down on the kitchen counter.

"New neighbors. Aren't we lucky?"

Faith giggled, "Sounds like they like having a good time."

Another feeling of uneasiness swept over Juliet. “Faith, you’ve lived here for awhile. Have you ever met these people?”

“Brad and I have been here for about five years now and as far as I know, that house has always stayed empty. If the owners ever came to the island, they never shopped at my store.”

Just as Sara walked back into the kitchen with Faith’s money, the rock music next door was cranked to an all-time high decibel and the walls of the girls’ cottage began to pulsate in rhythm to the hard-driving, metal beat.

“Oh – my – God!” Juliet shouted, covering her ears with her hands. “That’s so rude and inconsiderate. Didn’t they see our car in the driveway when they pulled up? They’ve got to know that there are people living next door.”

Furious, she got up and barreled into the living room to stand at the large expanse of windows which afforded her a view of her neighbor’s back yard. She glowered at the pool party still going on in full force. Both Sara and Faith sprinted after her and they too clustered at the glass window.

Sara let out a shocked gasp. “Wow – I think they’re all naked in the pool.” She ran to the hall closet and retrieved a pair of binoculars. Racing back, she brought them up to her eyes and adjusted the lens. Through them, she could clearly see the three men and three women all topless while frolicking in the water together.

Faith squinted her eyes, trying to get a better view from her vantage point. “Maybe the women are only topless and the men have bathing suits on.”

The words had barely left her lips when one of the women, a tall leggy blonde with hair down to her waist, jumped out of the pool, completely naked, and laughing, ran to the ocean to dive in. One of the men, the tall, lanky one with scruffy hair and beard, jumped out of the water and ran after her. He was naked too.

Sara and Faith both gasped at his ripped, gorgeous male physique and Faith mumbled a quick, “Oh, come to mama” as her eyes hungrily followed the man’s racing body.

Juliet wasn’t paying attention. All she could think about was how knee deep in financial manure she’d be if she didn’t finish her book on time, and how in the world was she going to do that if the noise next door continued? Was Sara right? Would this all die down soon? Or was this just the beginning of one long, continuous, never-ending party?

“Let me see,” Juliet mumbled, as she grabbed the binoculars out of her sister’s hands and put them up to her own eyes. She watched as Mr. Perfect Naked Body, whoever he was, ran into the ocean, chasing after Ms. Blonde Naked Bimbo.

Sara pouted. “Juliet – Faith and I are old married women now and we never get to see hunky, naked men anymore, so don’t spoil our fun.” She tried grabbing the binoculars back out of her sister’s hands but Juliet squirmed out of the way.

Faith giggled, as she continued ogling the party from her spot at the window. “I think I’ll be accepting some lunch dates with you two girls while Brad stays home with the kids.”

Juliet thrust the binoculars back into Sara’s grasping hands. “Go to town, ladies. Enjoy the scenery all you want, but if that music doesn’t stop by tonight, I’m on the warpath.” Annoyed, she plopped down on the couch.

Both Sara and Faith exchanged a quick giggle before they each started fighting over the binoculars to see who could get the better view of the naked pool party still

going on at warp speed next door.

Chapter 9

Later that afternoon, Romeo, Tommy, and Chace, dressed only in shorts and dark sunglasses, were all sprawled on lounge chairs by the pool, drinking beers and working on their tans. The three girls they had brought with them to the island were inside the beach house. And the rock music continued to blare all around.

Still sporting his long hair and full beard, Romeo Boyd was completely unrecognizable. Blond-haired Tommy, who had been Romeo's friend since grade school, gave a low chuckle as he watched his best buddy take a long swig of his beer, burp and then proceed to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand, caveman-style.

"Gee, Romeo, you'll never get invited to meet the Queen again with manners like that," he shouted over the deafening music.

Romeo took another long sip of beer and turned to his friend. "I'm on vacation from life, Tommy. Manners don't exist in my world anymore," he yelled.

Chace, who was sitting in a lounge chair to Romeo's right, let his gaze wander over the beautiful PEI scenery that surrounded them. It was mid-afternoon and the sun was brilliantly shining high, the sky was peacock blue and the ocean gently pounded the sandy shoreline that was a stone's throw away. "Man, this is awesome. How long have you owned this place, Romeo?"

Chace was an up-and-coming young actor who had a distinct, curly, red-haired look to him. He'd appeared in several small roles in independent films of late and his career had begun to take off when the press had labeled him as a talent to watch. He'd known Romeo for a couple of years and it had been his friend who'd helped him get his first acting job in a movie.

"Since Vampire of the Dark gave me my first big movie paycheck," Romeo clarified.

"But why did you buy this place with another house so close next door? Couldn't you have bought something a little more private?"

Romeo shrugged his shoulders. "When I first came down here to help scout locations for Vampire, I saw this beach house and loved it. I had to have it. But then the producers decided not to shoot here and when that stupid movie went straight to video, it made a killing. Since I had points on it, I scored my first big acting money and so I got on a plane, came right back down here and bought this place on the spot. The one next door wasn't for sale at the time."

Chace took a swig of his beer and readjusted his sunglasses against the glare of the sun. "So when was the last time you vacationed here?"

"Never," Romeo grinned.

"What?" Shocked, Chace sat upright in his chair and faced his friend.

"Yeah," Tommy nodded. "Romeo and I have been friends since we were kids and this is the first time I've been here."

"I don't know," Romeo mumbled as he reached for a new beer bottle and twisted it open. "I was just a kid when I bought this place; and right after that, my career took off and I started doing picture after picture. I was working all the time, the money started rolling in, and then I just wasn't that kid anymore." Suddenly annoyed, he shifted uncomfortably in his chair. "Look, do we have to talk about this? We're here to party, not psychoanalyze my behavior. That's what I pay Dr. Greenberg for back in L.A."

Chace gave a quick laugh as he reached into his pocket and pulled out a marijuana joint. “Hey, the conga line starts behind me,” he chuckled, as he lit the illegal smoke.

Romeo’s face grew dark as he suddenly jumped out of his chair, snatched the lit cigarette from Chace’s lips and threw it into the pool. “Not in my house, Chace. You know how I feel about drugs. Why did you bring that shit in here?” he yelled, his voice trying to compete with the blaring music still going on.

“Calm down, dude. It’s never bothered you before when we were out partying in L.A.”

“Not in my house, okay?” Romeo stormed off into the cottage.

“What’s up his ass?” Chace mumbled, taking off his sunglasses as he watched the movie star disappear through the sliding patio doors.

Tommy sighed. “Romeo grew up in a house where his dad was an addict. He was around it 24/7 and he watched his mom go through hell. He doesn’t care if you do it, that’s your choice – but not in his house, okay? Respect his house.”

Tommy slid off his chair and followed his best friend into the house. Chace mumbled a “whatever” before plunking his sunglasses back on and re-positioning himself on the deck chair to better catch the hot, summer rays.

Chapter 10

The interior of Romeo's beach house was the exact same configuration as that of Juliet and Sara's next door. But, unlike the girls' house, this one was not really decorated and the furnishings were sparse. It had none of the charm or coziness that the sisters enjoyed and the entire look was one of utilitarian masculinity.

In the living room, the walls were beige, the couches were blah and the end tables were two small beer fridges stocked full. There was a massive entertainment/TV setup against one wall which gave the room a futuristic look. All the latest techno gadgets were on display to be enjoyed. On an opposite wall, was a long row of closed cabinets which housed a huge array of liquor bottles that they'd purchased on first arriving to the island.

As Tommy walked into the living room, he found Romeo partially hidden behind the open cabinet doors, rifling through the booze collection.

"Tommy, where's the bourbon?" Romeo asked, as he heard his friend approaching from behind. He was frustrated with being reminded of his deadbeat father and all he wanted was to find the strong, damn drink to blot out the shitty memories.

"Chace finished it," Tommy grinned.

"Shit, man, I told him not to touch what was left," Romeo growled, as he grabbed a full vodka bottle and slammed the cabinet doors shut. He plopped onto the couch, reaching for an empty glass on the wooden coffee table in front of him. Unscrewing the bottle top, he poured himself a good measure of the clear liquid.

"I guess a bottle doesn't go far with six partiers in the house," Tommy laughed, as he sprawled his long, lean torso into an opposite armchair. "Where are the girls?"

"In the kitchen eating salad or yogurt or some low-fat crap," his friend drawled.

Suddenly, Tommy cleared his throat as if he was about to choke on his next words. He sheepishly looked at Romeo who was gulping down his vodka. "Dude – I gotta ask because we've known each other forever and you know I'll always have your back. And if you don't want to answer, that's fine, just tell me to fuck off..." His voice trailed away.

"Just spill it." Romeo closed his eyes as the alcohol began to course through his blood stream. This was the only time he seemed able to relax nowadays, when booze was coursing through his system; and that fact alone was beginning to scare him. He didn't want to end up addicted to the stuff. Sure, he'd been partying a bit too much lately, but he still knew his limits and he could stop. But would there come a day in the future when he wouldn't be able to stop anymore if he kept going like this? He didn't know – and it was beginning to worry him.

Romeo wasn't stupid. His father had been an addict and he knew addiction ran in families. Just because he didn't do drugs like his old man had, didn't mean he couldn't become addicted to alcohol and end up like the wasted old fart his father had become just before he'd died. In the back of his mind, that scenario was always just one thought away. "What do you want to know?" he asked, when he realized that his friend was still hesitating.

Tommy cleared his throat again. "Is it serious between you and Carrie Ann? In the jet over here, I heard her hinting at something like that to Kristen."

"Carrie Ann is in love with my money and fame, not me. We're just having fun and if she said anything else to Kristen, it was probably to warn her off me to protect her

meal ticket. I'm a stepping stone for her in Hollywood, that's all."

Tall, leggy blonde Carrie Ann was beautiful in a fake, over-processed, L.A. sort-of-way. She had long bleached blonde hair down to her waist and a perfect but surgically-enhanced body that had gotten her a major part on a TV jiggle show. Filming was to begin on the new series in a couple of month's time and it had all the earmarks of a hit, but it would never garner her the kind of A-list fame that Romeo had enjoyed. She knew that she'd never walk the Oscar red carpet on her own acting merits alone, but she could one day do it on Romeo Boyd's black-tuxedoed arm, if she played her Hollywood cards right.

Kristen and Rachel, the other two girls in the house, were twenty-something, model/actress wannabes who were friends of Carrie Ann's. She had introduced them to Tommy and Chace a month ago and all three had been partying with the boys since. Rachel and Chace seemed to have hit it off and Kristen had gravitated towards Tommy. As long as Romeo Boyd was paying for everything and treating them all to VIP nights on the town and private jets to exotic places, they were happy.

Romeo gave his friend a steady glance over his glass. "Carrie Ann and I both know the score."

Tommy nodded in relief. "Sorry man, I had to ask. I love you like a brother and I don't want to see you get hurt."

Romeo studied the serious expression on Tommy's face then burst out laughing. "Gee Tommy, later on, why don't we all build a campfire, hold hands and sing songs together?"

Tommy's concerned expression broke into a grin. "Fuck you, Romeo Boyd."

Romeo laughed even harder. At that moment, Carrie Ann came into the living room and plopped herself on the couch beside her boyfriend and like an octopus, wrapped herself around his slouched frame.

"Hey sweetie, how about taking an afternoon nap with me?" she purred and then proceeded to nuzzle his neck.

Enjoying the caress for a split second, Romeo let out a moan before pushing her away from him. "Baby, I've got so much booze coursing through my system right now that I need a nap for real. Maybe later."

Carrie Ann pouted, "But we're all going out later."

"We are?" Romeo was surprised. This was news to him.

Nervous, Tommy jumped up. "Ahhh, we're all going out, but not Romeo. He's got a headache and is staying home tonight." He let his words tumble out before winking at Romeo behind Carrie Ann's back.

Quick to pick up on his friend's hidden message and ever the actor, Romeo smoothly lied back, "Yeah, I need some sleep, darlin', but you all go. I'll be here when you get back." He then reached into his back pocket and pulled out his wallet. Taking out five one hundred dollar bills, he squeezed them into Carrie Ann's waiting hands and smiled, "Have fun."

Carrie Ann gave him a quick peck on his lips. "Well, if you're sure..." she replied, before unwrapping her tentacles from his body. Getting up, she waltzed into the kitchen, holding on fast to the money in her hot, little hands.

Romeo turned to his friend, "What's up?"

Tommy gave him a big smile. "Chace and I wanted to thank you in our own way

for having us here, so we've arranged a little surprise for you tonight."

Romeo sat up straight, suddenly very interested. Nothing of late really seemed to interest him anymore and he relished the feeling when it came. "Like what?"

"I'm not telling, but let's just say that you'll be getting a surprise visitor tonight and she comes very highly recommended. We had her fly in from New York this afternoon and..." Tommy let his last word hang in the air.

"And what?" Romeo prompted, practically salivating with anticipation.

"And – she knows how to put on a show, so expect the unexpected. That's all I'm saying." Laughing, Tommy got up and walked away towards the kitchen.

'Hot damn', an excited Romeo thought to himself, the boys had gotten him a stripper! He'd better go take that nap right now for real so that he'd be refreshed and ready for his own private show later on that night.

Chapter 11

Juliet had spent one of the worst afternoons of her entire life. The ear-splitting, deafening music next door had not abated for one breath of a second all day and by dinnertime, she had developed a major headache. In fact, the pounding in her head began to match the pounding of the rock beat coming through her beach house walls.

Would those degenerates next door ever decide to quiet down and chill out for a change? Sara seemed to think that they would but Juliet doubted it. Those inconsiderate boobs were here to party – and party loud – and they didn't seem to care whom they bothered with their wild antics.

By 7 p.m. that night, Juliet had reached her limit. Even though she'd taken two aspirins earlier, her headache was worse and her anger had reached the danger zone.

"That's it, Sara! I've had it! I'm going over there right now." She lunged off the couch just as Sara was coming down the stairs.

Sara winced, as she knew her sister very well. Juliet was usually a calm, rational person, but when her temper finally boiled over, there was no telling what she'd say or do. She'd probably march on over there, start World War III and then it would be hell for all of them until finally either they or the group next door left the island. Sara did not want to spend her summer embroiled in an epic feud, which is what her sister would give her.

"We can always buy you some earplugs?" Sara cracked, trying to diffuse her sibling's wrath.

"No way!" Juliet exploded. "I'm not changing my writing habits to accommodate their loser lifestyle." She started marching towards the back door.

"Juliet, wait!" Sara ran after her, putting a restraining hand on her sister's wrist just as Juliet was about to turn the doorknob. "Why don't I try going over there first," she pleaded. "I'm in a calmer frame of mind than you are and they probably just don't realize that their music is too loud. I'm sure they'll turn it down once I explain to them in a very pleasant, neighborly tone that it's a bit much for us."

"Come on, they know their party is way too loud, but they just don't care who it bothers."

Sara sandwiched herself between her sister and the door. "Just let me go first, please?" she begged. "You're the big-guns; I'm the little gun – you know, the one that when you fire it, out comes the confetti and a laugh? Sometimes, that's all you need. And our houses are too close together to start a war."

"Sara..." Juliet began, but her sister stopped her.

"Please, Juliet, for me? Don't ruin my summer," she begged.

Juliet took in her little sister's earnest face and her shoulders slumped in capitulation. It was hard to refuse Sara's pleading eyes. "Fine, go see what you can do."

Sara's face broke into a wide smile. "I'm sure they'll listen to reason and be nice about it," she chirped, before walking out.

Standing at the windows, Juliet watched her little sister walk over to the pool where two of the guys, the red-haired one and the blond, were standing near the water's edge, smoking cigarettes. The girls and the other troublemaker with the hobo appearance were nowhere in sight.

Juliet then saw Sara say something to them. They said something back to her,

whereupon her little sister turned and proceeded to walk back to the house with a sour expression splashed across her face. She reached the backdoor and came in, giving Juliet a long look.

“So, do we bring out the big-guns now?” Juliet quipped, already knowing the answer.

“Big guns? We need a tank barrel aimed at those disgusting people,” Sara flashed, as she started to give in to her rising anger. “Do you know what those two bastards said to me? I introduced myself and then asked them very nicely if they could please turn the music down. Then that red-haired pig looked me straight in the eye and told me that I had two choices. I could either show them my – and I quote – ‘tits’ or I could ‘fuck-off’. Can you believe it?”

“What? How dare they say that to you! Nobody treats my baby sister like that, nobody!” Juliet gritted, as she marched to the backdoor, anger racing through her system like a rampaging wildfire.

Chapter 12

Fueled by her red hot anger, Juliet had reached their pool in two seconds flat before realizing that no one was there anymore. The backyard was deserted. Looking around, she could see that the sliding doors leading into the house were closed, but she could hear loud music still coming from inside.

She approached, knocked on the glass and waited. No one came. She knocked again, this time loudly pounding on the sliding door with her clenched fist. Again no one came. She couldn't see into the house either because the curtains had been pulled over the window panes. She jiggled the door handle to see if it was open, but that too had been locked.

"Damn it!" Juliet huffed under her breath before marching along the side of the house towards the front. Just as she was rounding the corner, she saw one of the black SUVs pull out of the driveway and take off down the private road towards the highway. She could make out the silhouette of several people inside the truck. But the music was still blaring from inside the cottage, so she knew that someone had to be home.

She approached the front door and pounded loudly with her fist. The portal was yanked open and she came face-to-face with the bum she had nicknamed 'the troublemaker.' He was tall and lean with wild longish hair and a beard, and he had the bluest, most piercing eyes she'd ever seen on a man. Juliet could swear that they matched the brilliant blue color of the PEI skies, and as she continued to stare into them, her whole being was suddenly infused with an overwhelming pull, dragging her very essence, kicking and screaming, deep within them. They were so clear and hypnotizing that for a split second she forgot why she was there. Those eyes, in the span of a fingersnap, had taken her out of reality and into a space of no-thought, where she was frozen in time and captured in their grip. She felt an immediate and total attraction to this stranger – whoever he was – and she sensed her energy field going wild.

But the feeling lasted only a second and giving herself a slight shake, she came back down to earth. Her brain synapses started firing again and her anger returned, washing over her like a tsunami. Juliet's own eyes wandered up and down the troublemaker's lean, tall frame, taking in his ripped khaki shorts, his oversized t-shirt with some beer advertisement emblazoned across it – and the stupidest, biggest smile she'd ever seen on a man.

As she had been appraising him, the troublemaker had also been appraising her. In the time it took to draw in a breath, his blue eyes had slowly and seductively traveled from Juliet's face down the length of her simple white t-shirt, down her low-rise blue jeans covering her long legs, to her red-polished toes peeping out of her sandals and back up her body again where they lingered on her full breasts for a few seconds, before finally coming back up to her face. His smile grew wider, obviously liking what he saw.

Feeling like she'd just been mentally undressed by an experienced pervert, Juliet protectively crossed her arms in front of her chest and was just about to launch into her prepared tirade, when the jerk suddenly exclaimed, "Wow, you're beautiful!" He had to shout out the words because the rock music, blaring from inside his house, was deafening.

Juliet's eyes narrowed on his face. "Look, I'm..."

"I know who you are," he interrupted, throwing her a slow, secret smile this time.

“Tommy told me to expect you.”

“He did?” Her eyebrows shot up in confusion.

“Sure, he told me to expect the unexpected.” His gaze boldly raked the length of her body once more before his compelling eyes refocused on her face. “And you are definitely NOT what I was expecting. Come on in.” He gestured gallantly with his hand as if he was inviting in an honored guest.

Taken aback by his welcoming actions, Juliet was thrown off her game and she stood rooted to the spot, unsure of what was happening. And he’d said that ‘Tommy’ had told him to ‘expect’ her??? Of course – Tommy must have been one of the two morons who’d told her sister off earlier and he’d probably warned this third moron to ‘expect’ another visit from the neighbors tonight.

Romeo gave her a quick wink when she seemed to balk at his invitation. “Oh, come on now, don’t be shy. I won’t bite,” he laughed, before suddenly grabbing Juliet’s arm and pulling her across the threshold into his house.

Stunned and finding herself in the middle of a frat house-style living room, Juliet quickly spun around to face him, suddenly at a loss for words.

As Romeo watched her spin around, his heart was beating fast and he could feel himself getting hard already. Wow! Wow! And Triple Wow!! She looked amazing, one of the most beautiful strippers he had ever seen in his life – and he had seen them all. She looked sweet and pure and real; none of that fake Hollywood glitz that he’d been used to over the years. Examining her delicious body once again, he could tell there wasn’t one fake, plastic-surgery enhanced body part on that luscious frame of hers, and with that casual getup she had on, she was a total and refreshing surprise. Who would have thunk it? The sweet, ‘girl-next-door look’ type-of-stripper! He had to give Tommy his props. He sure knew what his friend liked in the female department and Romeo certainly liked this girl – a lot!

Juliet stared at his grinning face and her jaw clenched in anger. “Look, about your music...” she began, her voice trying to override the loud fracas still blaring from his stereo.

“What?” he shouted, “you like my music?”

“Noooo, I don’t! It’s too loud and...”

“No problem,” he announced, before quickly stepping over to the wall system and turning it off. Silence suddenly permeated the room. “Did you bring your own?” he continued, always with that stupid smile plastered on his face.

“Bring my own?” Juliet parroted in confusion. “Why would I do that?”

“Never mind.” He turned back to his system and put on a soft romantic melody, this time at a decent decibel. He grinned back at her. “Is that more to your liking?”

“I – I guess.” Juliet was taken aback that he would be so compliant and her anger suddenly deflated. Her carefully prepared speech – the one where she was going to give him a piece of her mind with both barrels – went out the window.

The troublemaker approached her again, still with that silly grin on his face. His cobalt blue eyes were even smiling, crinkling at the corners, and he looked liked a big, overgrown puppy waiting to be petted. His aura was radiating friendship and he was acting – well, really nice. This was NOT what Juliet had been expecting and she didn’t know what to do next. She hadn’t prepared for ‘nice’. She’d steeled herself for a big fight and now that she wasn’t getting it, she didn’t quite know how to act.

“What’s your name?” he innocently asked.

“Juliet,” she responded warily.

He burst out laughing. “Juliet? Of course, you are! Who else would you be?”

Her ire flared, insulted that he was laughing at her name. “What’s so funny?” she steamed.

“You’re Juliet – and I’m Romeo. Romeo and Juliet! Get it? It’s perfect.” He shook his head and mumbled, “That Tommy, what a sense of humor on that guy.”

Juliet was completely dumbfounded. She had no idea what he was talking about or what ‘Tommy’ had to do with any of this, and frankly she didn’t care. All she was here for was his loud music and since he had been decent about it and turned it down, her job was now done.

“Look, Romeo…”

“Yes, Juliet?” he whispered back, as he leaned into her, immediately taking over her personal space.

Uncomfortable, she took a step away from him. “I’m glad that we’ve gotten the music situation straightened out.”

“Anything for you, sweetheart.” Suddenly, Romeo went down on one bended knee in front of her in an overly dramatic fashion, and grasping her right hand, brought it to his lips and kissed the back of it. Turning his eyes up at her, he started reciting, “But soft! What light through yonder window breaks? It is the east, and Juliet is the sun! Arise, fair sun, and kill the envious moon, Who is already sick and pale with grief, That thou, her maid, art far more fair than she.”

“Ex – excuse me?” Juliet squeaked, as she stood there staring down into his bottomless, blue eyes. She began to feel a warmth spreading from him into her hand, traveling up her arm and into her body, enlivening every nerve ending in her system. The lulling feeling continued to course up her spine and into her brain, drugging her senses into submission. It felt so good that all she wanted to do at that moment was to give into it, and give into him.

Slowly, uncoiling himself from his lowered position, Romeo stood up and invading her space even more, leaned into her ear and whispered softly, “O, speak again, bright angel! For thou art as glorious to this night, being o’er my head, as is a winged messenger of heaven.”

Juliet felt his breath delicately feathering the contours of her ear and her heart skipped a beat, she swore it did. In fact, he was so close to her that his chest briefly skimmed hers and she felt one of his heartbeats. His magnetic aura was taking her over, wrapping around her like a warm blanket and a surge of excitement raced through her body. What the hell was happening to her?

Romeo bent slightly forward, his lips mere inches away and he smiled into her eyes. “It’s Shakespeare’s Romeo and Juliet from Mrs. Gilbert’s Grade 10 drama class. I played Romeo, of course.” He threw her a quick wink.

Romeo was having fun, loads of it. Of course, she would give herself the fake stripper name of ‘Juliet’, him being Romeo and all – and the sweet, confused, innocent act this hot babe was putting on for him was all part of the show Tommy and Chace had arranged. Maybe those two had even scripted the whole thing? He wouldn’t put it past them. But he was having fun and he was going to go along with whatever game this cutie wanted to play.

His eyes glanced across her face again. God – she was beautiful! Her shiny brown hair skimmed her shoulders in an easy casual style and she was only wearing a bit of mascara and lip gloss, none of that heavy makeup the girls in L.A. always wore. Everything about her was fresh and new and exciting; and if she wanted to play Juliet to his Romeo, then he was all game. In fact, he was raring to go. But why would a girl who looked like mom’s apple pie and exuded that same vibe earn her living as a stripper? The thought suddenly blazed through his brain. Did she need the money? Or did she do it for kicks? Was the wholesome apple pie charm an act or was this who she really was? Romeo’s conscience began to rear up and suddenly, he wasn’t thinking with his lower regions anymore as these thoughts began to seep through his mind.

In a flash, he was gripped with a frantic thought. Was this girl into drugs and maybe that’s why she was stripping – to pay for her habit? Was that it? Lots of strippers were into that and Romeo was not one to pass judgment, but for some reason, he just didn’t want this one to have that problem. His mouth turned down at the corners as he took a step away from her, blurting out at the same time, “Are you using?”

Baffled at his quick change in mood, Juliet snapped out of her stupor and stammered, “Using what?”

His suspicious eyes narrowed on her face. “Drugs; you know – cocaine, crystal meth, heroin – what are you into?”

“Drugs? What drugs?” Juliet was flabbergasted and didn’t know which way was up or down in this conversation. One minute he was quoting Shakespeare and the next he was accusing her of doing drugs? What the hell...?

Romeo’s accusing eyes narrowed in even further on her face. Was she lying? Suddenly, he grabbed her right arm, flipped it over and started to closely examine the delicate skin on the underside.

“What are you doing?” Stunned, Juliet’s words rushed out.

“Looking for needle marks,” he responded, as he continued his close inspection.

“Needle marks? What is wrong with you?” she shouted, before snatching her arm out of his grasp and wanting to put space between herself and his overpowering presence, she, suddenly and without thinking, pushed at his chest with all her might, sending him sprawling backwards. But as Romeo fell back, his ankle caught on one of the coffee table legs and with his arms flailing wildly in the air, his back hit the flat screen TV against the wall, causing the glass to shatter into a spider’s web.

“Ohhhhh,” Romeo moaned, as he crumpled to the floor. For a micro-second, he just lay there and then a grimace of pain crossed his features. “My back, my back,” he yelped, as his hands whipped around to massage his spine. He twisted his head around and saw the damage on his flat screen. “My God, my TV – look at what you did to the screen! You can’t fix that,” he shouted at her.

Juliet was frozen. She hadn’t meant to push him that hard; it had just happened – kind of. “I’m sorry.” She rushed over to him, bending down. “Let me help you.” She grabbed his arm and started pulling him upwards.

“Ohhhhh,” Romeo moaned even louder. “Stop it, you’re killing me! Oh my back...”

Juliet immediately stopped tugging at his arm. “Do you have a history of back problems?”

“No, not until you showed up and threw me into the TV!” he yelled sarcastically,

as beads of sweat formed on his brow.

Juliet's ire began to rise again. "I did not throw you anywhere, sir. It was an accident, one that would never have happened if you hadn't accused me of doing drugs, which I still don't know what that has to do with anything."

"Alright already, maybe that was none of my business. I concede the point. Just help me up, okay – gently this time."

Juliet put her shoulder underneath his armpit and with her legs, tried to haul him up. But as she did that, spears of pain radiated through Romeo's back and he began to moan again. "Ohhh, stop, stop, stop," he shouted.

She instantly helped him crumple back onto the floor and carefully re-positioned him with his back against the wall. "I'm calling an ambulance," she announced.

"Fuck the ambulance and get me a beer," Romeo shouted.

"Gee, Romeo, is that a quote from Shakespeare too?"

Romeo turned sarcastic eyes up at her and gave her a fake smile. "Fuck the ambulance and get me a beer – please, Juliet," he asked in a softer, sweeter tone.

She arched a skeptical eyebrow at him. "If you're really in pain, you'd go to the hospital, but instead you want alcohol. Maybe you're faking?"

Romeo whipped his head around to glare at her. "Faking?"

"Why not? You're mad at me because you think I broke your stupid TV and you want to scare me by pretending that you're hurt."

"Pretending? Does this sweat on my forehead look like I'm pretending?" he yelled, as he wiped the droplets with his hand. Romeo didn't think he could be any angrier at a human being than he was at this very second. How dare she accuse him of 'faking'? He turned his furious eyes back onto her sweet face. "Get me that beer so that I can kill the pain with booze," he gritted through clenched teeth. "Better yet, get me the vodka. It's on the coffee table."

Sighing, Juliet got up from her crouching position and retrieving the bottle, brought it back to him. Ungraciously, he yanked it out of her hand and tried to twist off the cap. "Ahhhh," he yelled, as shards of pain shot through his back again. He took a couple of deep breaths to ease the throbbing before handing the bottle back to her. "I can't – I can't do it. You do it," he huffed.

"This is ridiculous. You need to go to the emergency room and if you drink this, it might interfere with any medications they may give you," Juliet sensibly advised.

She bit her lip as she began to worry. He should have gotten up by now and yet he was claiming he was still in pain. Maybe he had truly hurt himself? At first, she'd thought he might have been dramatizing the situation, but now she was having some doubts. After all, he had hit that screen pretty hard.

Romeo, on the other hand, had no intentions of going to the hospital. If he went, word would certainly get out that he was there and within hours, the news would be all over the tabloids and the internet. He'd come to Prince Edward Island to relax and party, and he didn't want the media to know where he was. He certainly didn't want any paparazzi to come swarming down here and disturb his privacy, and finding out that former A-lister Romeo Boyd was in the hospital would bring them out in droves. Those sharks loved to kick a star when he was down.

"Are you going to open that damn bottle or not?" He glared up at her.

Sighing in resignation, Juliet crouched down beside him and went to twist off the

bottle top. But for some reason, it wouldn't budge. Putting more pressure into it, she huffed as she tried opening it again. "It's stuck."

"Put some muscle into it," he instructed.

Taking in a deep breath, she put all her strength into it and with one good yank, the top suddenly gave way – only – she had put too much force into the motion and the extra momentum traveled from her wrist, up into her arm, causing her elbow to shoot back – right into Romeo's left eye.

"Ahhhh," Romeo screamed, as his hands flew up to his eye. "My eye, oh God, my eye."

Juliet gasped, "I'm sorry. I didn't mean to do that."

"I think you did. In fact, maybe this is how you get your kicks. A little bit of S&M before the show? Is that how it works?" he shouted, as he used one hand to cup his injured eye and the other one to snatch the now opened vodka bottle out of her hands. Bringing it to his lips, he downed a long swig of the potent liquid.

Still crouching in front of him, Juliet sat back on her haunches and frowned. "You're becoming hysterical. You're not making any sense. I didn't mean to hit you, you know."

"I wouldn't put it past you," he accused, before taking another strong measure of the vodka. "I'm going to have a black eye from this."

"Don't be ridiculous. My elbow barely grazed your eye."

"Grazed my eye? Are you kidding me? I've been in bar fights with guys twice my size that have hit me with less force than you just did."

"Bar fights? Why am I not surprised?" Juliet mumbled, as she looked around at the frat-boy style furnishings in the house.

"Man, this hurts. What if I lose my eyesight?"

"Oh, stop being such a crybaby and let me see." Losing patience, Juliet tugged at his hand that was covering the injury but he resisted, continuing to glare at her with his good eye instead. Changing tactics, she dropped her tone of voice to one of a mother speaking to a child and began to cajole him. "Come on now, show it to me and I'll tell you what I see." His good eye narrowed even further on her face and he remained still. She gently tugged at his hand again. "Come on, let me see." He resisted for one second more before she felt him give up the fight and allowed her to pull his hand away.

Coming forward a few more inches and putting both hands on either side of his face to steady him, Juliet began to study the eye. But as she did so, a sensuous light seemed to pass between the both of them and she felt a tingling in the pit of her stomach. Even the air around them seemed electrified. Gasping, she yanked her hands away from him.

He frowned. "Is it that bad?"

"N – no. I just got a shock from the carpet, that's all," she lied. What was wrong with her tonight, Juliet wondered? She gave herself a mental shake before refocusing on his injured eye, but this time she didn't touch him.

She could see his beautiful piercing blue orb peering intently at her, but she could also see a horrible, purple bruise beginning to form all around it with an added swelling that would make it more pronounced as the hours wore on. Oh yeah... that baby would definitely be black by tomorrow morning and possibly swollen beyond recognition by the afternoon.

“Well?” he prompted.

She stood up and shrugged her shoulders. “I don’t see a thing. Not even a scratch.”

Romeo’s eyes narrowed on her lying face. “Oh really? Then how come it hurts like a mother?”

“What can I say? You have sensitive skin.” She gave him a quick smile. What could she say? That the eye would be twice its size by morning and the color of black tar? He’d find out soon enough and she really didn’t want to be around when he did. Truly, she did feel bad about this but everything that had just happened had been an accident. It wasn’t her fault.

Romeo knew she was lying. He knew what a black eye felt like. He’d had enough of them in his lifetime to know that, and judging by the pain that was still shooting out from it into his skull, this one was promising to be a whopper. Yes – she was out and out lying to his face. Probably worried about how this was going to affect her fee and tip. After all, she had gone to all the trouble of coming out from New York City to strip for him and she didn’t want to go home empty-handed.

“I want to see for myself. Help me over there.” He pointed to a large mirror positioned over the couch.

“Why don’t I get you a wet washcloth? We’ll put that over it and...”

“Are you going to help me or do I have to hobble there on my own?” he challenged. Romeo was determined to call her out on her lie. She wasn’t going to get the better of him tonight, although she had damn well near killed him already.

“Alright, fine,” she conceded. Putting her shoulder underneath his armpits again, she began to pull him up slowly.

Using the wall as leverage and Juliet as a crutch, Romeo gingerly began to get up, but waves of pain were still shooting out from his back and he scrunched his face up in a grimace. He drew in a deep breath and let it out slowly.

“Is your back still sore?”

“Take a good look at my flat screen and then ask me that question again,” he snarked back.

Juliet’s eyes flew to the TV and saw that the glass had shattered like a car windshield that had just been in a major wreck. Yes... he’d definitely hit it pretty hard when she’d pushed him away.

As Romeo straightened himself up as best as he could, he watched Juliet’s face intently. She wasn’t the least bit sorry, at least she didn’t look it, he thought. She was one hard-hearted stripper, this one. Not an ounce of sympathy in that beautiful face of hers. It was probably all about the cash, whatever she could get out of her customer – or should he say ‘victim’ – before moving on to the next job.

“Maybe you should lie down instead,” Juliet’s voice broke into his thoughts.

“No, I want to see my eye,” he demanded, like a pouting four year old child. Angry at her for what he believed was still her cold indifference to his pain, he firmly pushed himself away from the wall and leaned on her completely for support, putting as much of his weight on her that he felt she could handle.

Juliet faltered, as his arms came around her and his heavy weight rested on her own slim arms and body. “Whoa,” she let out as she nearly fell over herself. But she caught herself in time and putting all of her concentration on her strength, held him up as

best she could. He was a big guy and although he looked lean, he was muscular and that made him heavy... very heavy. She could feel every rippling muscle on his abdomen underneath his t-shirt pressing against her ribcage as he clenched them to try to ease his back pain.

She looked up then and her gaze was caught by his. Juliet hadn't realized that he had been staring at her as she'd maneuvered him up off the floor. His blue eyes were piercing her with an intensity she'd never felt from a man before. It was as if they were searching for something in her soul, deep inside her, in those secret places she had never allowed anyone to see.

"Let's get this over with," she coldly announced, quickly hiding her raw emotions behind a frozen face.

Romeo smirked to himself. Just as he'd suspected. She was cold as Arctic ice inside and all business.

The couch they had to reach was a good ten feet away and the large mirror was positioned over it. Putting one foot out, Romeo braced himself for the pain that he knew was about to come when he'd put his weight on it, but no matter what, he was determined to do three things in the next three seconds. He was going to walk over there, have a good look at his eye and then call her out on her lie. Those were the only goals that his mind could process right now.

Gingerly putting pressure onto his right foot, he felt a shard of pain shoot up his spine but it wasn't as bad as it had been and the long swigs of vodka he'd downed had deadened some of the sensation. Clutching to Juliet for dear life, he shuffled his other foot out slowly, and together, they began to make their way across the living room.

"Are you okay?" he quipped, trying to sound concerned for her welfare. Intentionally, he let one of his arms slide downwards a bit and 'accidentally' rest against the length of her breasts. He smirked to himself. Hell, why not cop a feel, especially after everything she'd put him through tonight?

"Yeah, fine," Juliet puffed, as she tried valiantly to bear the brunt of his entire weight, not to mention the intense heat his body was giving off. She could feel every straining muscle of his as his entire form was pressed against hers. His arms were both around her shoulders and one of them had dropped against her chest, resting against her breasts – but maybe he didn't realize he was doing that, being in pain and all. Okay, she'd let that one slide. They'd almost reached the couch anyway.

As they both shuffled to the sofa's edge, they came into full view of the mirror. Romeo looked up and on seeing his ravaged reflection, his smirk dropped, "Oh my God! Look at my eye!" he shouted. He could see that the swelling had begun, the eye was shutting and the purple color was turning into a nasty shade of deep eggplant. "My God; I didn't think it was this bad." He looked down at her then. "Look at what you did to me!"

"Romeo, calm down," she intoned rationally, trying to infuse some sanity into the situation.

"Holy shit," he expelled before swinging both of his arms off of Juliet's shoulders and up to his injured eye, trying to feel the damage there.

But with that sudden action, he'd removed the only support holding him up – which was Juliet. Losing his balance, he fell with his full weight against her. Juliet's muscles were still straining with the exertion of having helped him across the room and she didn't have anymore strength left to hold him up. Her knees suddenly buckled and

screaming out, she fell backwards onto the couch with Romeo falling right on top of her. The air whooshed out of her lungs as his weight hit her with full force and she grunted.

Trying to catch her breath, a shocked Juliet stared at his face mere inches away from hers and she could feel every rippling, hard muscle of his sandwiched against her soft contours as she lay beneath him. Her pulse quickened of its own volition. “You lughead, why did you let go of me?” she shouted, suddenly feeling overwhelmed by his powerful presence.

Clearly in pain, Romeo let out a scream of his own as one of his hands flew to his back. “My back – I think I twisted it when I fell. I can’t move.”

“Get off me – now,” Juliet gritted.

“I can’t! I can’t move,” he yelled.

“I don’t care.” She began to squirm, trying to get out from under him. For some reason, every instinct in her was telling her to get away from him and get away now.

“Stop!” he gasped. “You’re making it worse.” His face twisted with pain and she immediately halted her movements.

As they lay there, both breathing heavily, their eyes suddenly locked onto each others with an intensity that surprised them both. Neither could tear away and the seconds stretched into what felt like an eternity. Softly, their labored breathing began to synchronize and they could both feel their heartbeats begin to pound in a coherent rhythm together.

Romeo’s eyes lowered to her rosy full lips and began to study them intently. Even though his back was throbbing, another part of his brain was beginning to register how soft they looked, and pink and juicy and inviting.

Juliet lay still as those eyes of his locked into her again and held her captive. In an instant, the tension in the room was replaced by a quiet anticipation. She watched his brilliant blue orbs travel from her eyes, down to her lips and back up again. What was he thinking, she wondered? Sure, he wasn’t exactly the best looking guy she’d ever seen, especially with all that wild hair and beard. And he certainly dressed and acted like an idiot party boy and the black eye, which was now further swelling shut, didn’t add to his appeal, but there was something about those eyes of his and the way he was looking at her and the way his hard, angular body felt against every inch of hers – there was just something and she was caught in its spell.

Suddenly, the front door bell rang, snapping her back to reality. With all the breath she could muster, Juliet began to yell out. “Help! We’re in here! Help!”

The door opened and Sara rushed in. Quickly looking around, her eyes came to rest on the couch and spotting her big sister lying underneath some strange man, she assumed the worst. Letting out a high-pitched scream, she lunged forward and landed on top of Romeo’s back and started hitting him with her fists. “Get off her, you creep,” she started wailing, as her balled fists flew into him.

Romeo immediately started screaming in pain, unable to defend himself. Juliet started screaming herself, yelling for her sister to stop but Sara kept pounding away at Romeo’s back – punching, kicking and pulling his long hair, anything to save her sister from what looked like a fate worse than death.

“Sara, stop, stop!” Juliet yelled at her.

“What are you doing to my sister?” Sara kept screaming. “Get off her! Get off!”

“Sara, it’s okay. Stop it, stop it. I’m okay. He’s not hurting me.” Juliet tried to

deflect some of Sara's blows to Romeo's head and back as best she could but many of them hit their mark. "Sara, stop it!"

What her sister was saying finally registered in Sara's befuddled mind and she immediately stopped hitting Romeo, but remained on top of him. "What's going on here?" she shouted. "I saw you come into this house and then you weren't coming out, and it was a long time, so I came over and saw him on top of you and I thought he was – attacking you. Juliet?"

Romeo's teeth were clenched in pain and his face was turning red. "Please, get off me," he whispered softly, as he tried to control the new pain that was shooting out from his spine.

"Sara, he hurt his back. Get off of him!"

Sara quickly climbed off of Romeo's back and he grimaced in pain as that action sent more shards of pain coursing through his system.

Out of the blue, all three suddenly heard a strange voice say "Hello" from the open front door. Turning, they saw a woman in her mid-twenties, dressed in a short mini-skirt, matching halter top and thigh-high boots.

"I'm Rosie," she stated flatly and when that didn't get any response from any of them, she turned to Romeo, the only male in the room. "Are you Romeo?"

Confused at who she was exactly, Romeo gave her a quick, "yeah, that's me."

"Tommy sent me but he said this was going to be a private one-on-one session. If these women are going to be involved, then I'll have to charge you extra," she announced.

Shocked, Romeo turned from Rosie to Juliet, who was still pinned underneath him, and back up to Rosie again. "*You're* the stripper?"

Rosie huffed. "Excuse me, the word is exotic dancer."

Romeo turned his stunned gaze back to Juliet. "I thought you were the stripper."

"Me? Do I look like a stripper?" Juliet glared at him, as parts of their strange conversation over the past half hour began to suddenly make sense to her.

"Yeah, you do," he defensively challenged, feeling like a fool about everything that had just happened.

"You're a moron," she pronounced. Angry and not caring whether he died from the pain or not, Juliet squirmed and pushed at his chest with her arms, managing to get out from under him.

"Ow, oww, owwww," he winced, as his back pain returned with a vengeance. He valiantly struggled to maneuver himself into a sitting position as Juliet moved off the couch to stand beside Sara. Romeo glowered at the both of them before turning his attention to Rosie. "If you're the dancer..." he turned back to the sisters, "then who the hell are you two crazy broads?"

Juliet turned her nose up at him, "I told you before – I'm Juliet and this is my sister, Sara. We're your neighbors."

Drawing in a deep breath to steady his rising temper, Romeo slowly raised himself up off of the couch. Funny thing about anger, it was better than any painkiller the pharmaceutical industry had ever invented because all he could feel right now was his red, hot fury at this wildcat of a woman standing before him.

"Why are you in my house – Juliet?" he menacingly gritted out.

"We don't like your music. It's too loud and it's disturbing us. So, if you and your

other loser friends can keep it down, we'd appreciate it – Romeo.”

Romeo smiled dangerously and began to hobble towards his stereo system. With one click of a button, he suddenly changed the soft melody it had been playing to a heavy metal song. Turning the volume knob even more, he began to blast the music at a deafening decibel again.

“Do you mean that music – Juliet?” he yelled over the loud racket.

Knowing that he was challenging her and furious because of it, Juliet glowered at him. “Turn it down – or else.”

“Or else what? You'll kill me next time instead of just maiming me?”

Her eyes narrowed even further on him. “Just do it, mister.”

“No! The music stays, so get used to it, lady.”

Giving him one last evil look, Juliet turned to her sister and imperiously proclaimed, “Let's go, Sara,” before marching towards the front door.

“Oh, sweetcakes?” Romeo called after her. Juliet turned back to him then and he pointed to his damaged flat screen TV. “You're paying for this,” he declared.

“In your dreams, asshole,” Juliet answered, before stalking out of the house.

Sara sheepishly turned to Romeo and gave him a genuine smile. “Sorry about jumping on your back and beating you up and – everything.” She then nodded a quick good-bye to Rosie and followed her sister out.

Chapter 13

“I can’t take this anymore, Sara; I just can’t,” Juliet winced, as she brought both of her hands up to cover her ears. The loud music from next door could clearly be heard through their walls and she was at the end of her rope.

Both sisters were sitting on their living room couch. Juliet had just finished telling Sara everything that had happened since she’d knocked on Romeo’s door a half hour ago and she was now beginning to feel the panic of her predicament. She’d have to declare bankruptcy, for God’s sake, if she didn’t get to finish her book – bankruptcy – and her writing career would be over. What if she never got another book deal again?

“What if you went over there and apologized? Maybe he’d turn it down then,” Sara sheepishly asked.

“Me say sorry to that creep? Sorry for what? That he mistook me for a stripper? Or for him making my life impossible with his frat-boy, drunken lifestyle? The answer is a big, fat, hell no.”

Sara giggled, “It is pretty funny that he thought you were a stripper. Maybe you can switch careers if the book thing doesn’t work out.”

A sly smile played on Juliet’s lips, as she thought back to all the craziness that had happened. “I don’t think I’d get any referrals from Mr. Romeo to help me grow my new business, do you?”

“No, he was pretty steamed with you,” Sara cracked. “He was kind of cute though, don’t you think?”

“Cute?” Juliet gawked at her little sister as if she’d just sprung a set of overgrown donkey ears. “Sure he’s cute, if you compare him to a gorilla.”

Suddenly, those gorgeous, hypnotizing blue eyes of his flashed through her mind and she remembered how they had softly crinkled up at the corners when he’d called her beautiful; and how their intensity had seemed to pierce into her soul when he’d stared at her as she’d tried to help him up; and how they’d focused on her lips when they’d fallen together on the couch; and how her heart had raced at the feel of him on top of her. She gave herself a quick shake. What was wrong with her? He wasn’t cute. No – he was a complete idiot and a hard-partying mess.

Sara’s eyes twinkled mischievously at her sister. “Maybe you should try being nice to him. Nice girls always finish first, you know. Nana always said that, remember?”

“If Nana was in this situation, she would have marched on over there, conked him over the head with a frying pan – cast iron, of course – and that would have been the end of it.” Juliet laughed. “Maybe I should listen to Nana, after all.”

“Judging from the furious look Mr. Romeo gave you when you left his house, I doubt he’s going to let up on the music anytime soon.”

Juliet nodded. “I know what he’s doing. He’s playing a game of chicken but it won’t be me who’s giving in first – bet on it.”

She stood up then and as she walked past the large expanse of windows overlooking the ocean, she suddenly spied her noisy neighbor near his pool, leaning against the back of a lounge chair for support. He had a beer bottle in hand and she watched as he took a long swig of the alcohol as he stood there like a statue, his gaze focused on the glorious sunset before him.

“He’s out there now,” Juliet mumbled, before purposefully walking towards her

back door and flinging it open. Stepping outside, she yelled out, a “Hey you!” at him. As Romeo turned to her, Juliet shouted “Turn it off!” to him, trying to make herself be heard over the loud racket. But all he did was to proudly flip her his middle finger and smile wickedly, challenging her with a ‘what-are-you going-to-do-about-it’ stance.

Juliet’s temper flared at his impertinence. So that’s how he wanted to play it, was it? He wasn’t going to back down and as God was her witness, neither would she. If he wanted a war, then a war was what he was going to get and she knew exactly which cannonball to lob at him next.

She turned and marched back into her house, slamming the door behind her. “I’m calling the police,” she announced boldly.

Chapter 14

Romeo eased himself into the hot bath water and let out a sigh of relief as the heat began to relax his sore back muscles. Reaching across the tub for a washcloth, he dunked it into the water and wringing it out, placed it over his black eye. He let out another long sigh and slid lower into the bath. He'd found some Epsom salts underneath the sink that Carrie Ann had brought with her and he'd liberally thrown a cupful into the water as the tub filled. They were now working their magic and his back was beginning to feel better. At least those shooting shards of pain had subsided and he was able to walk around without screaming obscenities.

Romeo's mind began to wander over what had happened. What a big bitch that Juliet Next-Door Neighbor was. He'd never met a woman who was more cold, nastier and meaner than she had been. If only she'd been polite about the whole thing and asked him in a nice way, he would have complied and turned it down. After all, he wasn't a complete asshole. He suddenly smirked to himself. Well, maybe he was 99% bastard, but if she'd only appealed to his 1% nice guy, he would have been neighborly and complied.

After Juliet stormed off in a huff, Rosie had wanted to start her 'show' but the mood had been completely destroyed for him and considering the excruciating back pain he'd been in, he knew he wasn't going to enjoy anything. So he'd paid Rosie off and sent her on her merry way. He'd given her twice her going rate anyway and she'd been pretty happy about that.

Romeo dunked his long hair into the soothing hot water and then ran his fingers through it, slicking it back. The water felt so good on his skin and all he intended doing for the next 30 minutes was to lie here in peace. Tommy, Chace and the girls wouldn't be back until the clubs closed in the wee hours of the morning and he was going to enjoy this time to himself while he had it. He still had the rock music blasting downstairs, of course, and it would stay like that until 'he' decided to shut it off. He certainly wasn't going to be told what to do by a sharp-tongued, bossy bitch from next door.

Man, what a piece of work that woman was! But he had to admit that she was pretty hot. He could still feel those long, luscious legs of hers pinned beneath him, and the way her firm breasts had felt against his arm when she'd been helping him walk across the room brought a delicious smile to his lips. She was definitely beautiful, stunning even, in a fresh, sweet sort-of-way; until she'd had to spoil everything by opening up her big mouth. Romeo frowned to himself. Why did she have to have the face and body of an angel and the tongue of a she-devil – and have to live only forty feet away from him? This was karma, plain and simple, and life was paying him back for all of his past sins because one thing he knew for sure – that demon witch next door was trouble, big trouble. Look at all the damage she'd done to him in one night. His back was still killing him and his eye was throbbing like a mother.

Slowly, Romeo shifted his weight in the bath water and winced as a sliver of pain reminded him again of what had happened. Yup – that evil woman may look like a sweet dream, but he had an awful feeling in the pit of his stomach that somehow she was going to be his nightmare instead.

Chapter 15

Juliet glanced up at the wall clock near the stairs and her stomach fluttered with anticipation as she watched the second hand move into position at the 11:00 p.m. mark. Finally! It was time! Yes, the music was still blaring next door and yes, her walls were still thumping to the beat – and yes, it was now time to call the police on the troublemaker and have them actually do something about the monstrous noise still going on next door.

As best as she could tell, his friends still hadn't returned from wherever they'd gone and Romeo was alone, unless he'd kept the stripper, of course – which would give the police something else to discuss with him.

Annoyance flashed through her system. Had he kept the stripper? Had she taken her clothes off for him tonight, teased him and cajoled him, given him a lap dance and then finished the evening off with a 'happy ending' in his bed? The loud music certainly sounded like there was a party still going on over there. Was there? Was he still having sex with Rosie, using that hard body of his to give her pleasure? Her mind whirled at the racy images and for some strange reason, it made her madder.

*

Sara walked into the living room carrying a tea tray with empty mugs and cookies. Placing it down on the coffee table, she turned to stare at her sister who had positioned herself at the front window watching the road intently, like a faithful dog waiting for its master to return.

"Did you call the police?" she asked.

Not moving an inch from her post, Juliet responded with a "Yup".

"And they're coming?"

"Yup."

"When they get here, promise me that you won't go over there and cause more problems." Sara was worried her sister was going to make a bad situation even worse.

"If the police do their job and the music is turned off, there's no reason for me to go over, is there?" Juliet mumbled, with her fingers secretly crossed behind her back. And why were her fingers crossed? Because as soon as she saw the police drive up, she had every intention of going over there at the speed of a just-fired cruise missile. After all, she needed to make sure that her side of the story was heard and her complaint taken seriously.

At that moment, the kettle on the stove began whistling. "Good. I'm glad you're being reasonable about this," Sara said, before disappearing into the kitchen.

Sara had no sooner left the room when Juliet saw the police cruiser drive up and park in the jerk's driveway. Rushing out the door, she reached the car just as two burly PEI police officers were getting out. "Hi, I'm the neighbor who called you about the noise." The music could still be heard going on at full force in the background.

One of the officers checked his notebook. "You're Juliet Soma?"

"Yes, sir, that's me."

"Have you asked your neighbors to turn it down, ma'am?"

"Yes, I did and he refused. It's after eleven and I have every right to have this stopped now." She breathed an inward sigh of relief. Finally, somebody was going to do

something about that creep.

*

After his hot bath, Romeo had waddled downstairs and placing several pillows on the couch, he'd positioned himself carefully in the middle of them, relieving some of the pressure off of his sore back. Dressed only in his white terry towel bathrobe and with the alcohol he'd drank earlier to alleviate the pain still coursing through his system, he'd fallen asleep, even with the loud music on – which he was still playing to annoy Juliet.

The doorbell rang, sounding insistent and breaking into his relaxation. Still groggy from sleep, Romeo slipped his feet into a pair of nearby flip-flop sandals. "I'm coming, hang on," he shouted. Had Tommy, Chace and the girls forgotten their key?

Shuffling to the front door, Romeo opened it to find two PEI police officers positioned there and a defiant Juliet standing behind them. His eyes wandered from one face to the other to finally rest on hers and they narrowed dangerously.

"You had to call them, didn't you? You just had to call the cops on me."

Juliet threw him a haughty smile. "Maybe if you had shut down your party at a decent hour like most respectable, considerate, mature people then I wouldn't have had to, you jerk."

One of the officers, the shorter of the two, turned to her then. "Ma'am please, we'll handle this," he instructed. He turned back to Romeo and from his vantage point at the door his eyes began to scour the insides of the house to determine if there were other people there. As police officers, they were trained to always be thinking ahead to what a normal, innocent, everyday situation could suddenly turn into. During his years on the force, he had seen many simple disputes turn into nastier situations in the blink of an eye, and personal safety was always on their minds.

His eyes came to rest back on the man standing in front of him who had opened the door. He appeared to be in his late twenties, with a disheveled appearance, dressed in a white bathrobe and his left eye was a deep shade of grey/black. It was practically swollen shut, possibly from having been punched. The officer's eyes again scanned the interior of the house beyond the homeowner but there appeared to be no one else there.

"Sir, we've received a complaint about your music being played too loud," he stated flatly, then watched as the man in front of him turned to glare at Miss Soma standing behind them before his eyes came back to rest on the officers. The officer continued, "City ordinance declares that excessive noise cease after eleven or else you can face a fine."

The man gave them a tight smile, "I'm sorry, Officer. I fell asleep on the couch and didn't realize what time it was. Of course, I'll turn it off immediately." He turned and walked gingerly, or so it appeared to the police, to the stereo system on the wall and shut the music off. Sudden silence permeated the house.

"Thank you, sir. In the future, please remember that all loud noise must stop at 11 p.m.," the taller officer detailed.

"No problem, and it won't happen again. I'm always willing to do my civic duty." Romeo gave them a friendly smile.

"Thank you, we appreciate that," the shorter of the officers intoned.

Juliet's face suddenly dropped as she heard the pleasant, accommodating, exchange between Romeo and the policemen. Everything it seemed was being resolved

amicably, Romeo was not going to get into trouble and it appeared she was going to have to live with the constant, loud partying of her neighbors every day until 11 p.m. at night. How was she ever going to write her book with this going on all day? This wasn't fair and the police had been so nice to the big jackass that he hadn't even gotten the proverbial slap on the wrist. No – this wasn't fair, at all!

Pushing herself in between the officers, she boldly shouldered past them, past Romeo and into his house. She rushed to the stereo system and pointed at it. “Officers, you don't understand. This went on all day today and I can't take it anymore.”

Angry, Romeo approached her and the officers followed him across the threshold into the house. They were now all standing in Romeo's living room and the police began to scan the room with their eyes, always on the lookout for trouble.

Romeo gritted his teeth as he faced her. “Gee, Juliet, you want more of my blood tonight? You didn't finish the job you started earlier, so you're here for my balls now too?” This woman was just too much, he thought to himself – a real troublemaker!

“Okay, everyone, let's calm down. The problem has been resolved tonight, Miss Soma and that's all we can do. If it should continue, then please give us another call,” the taller of the two sternly told her. The shorter officer was casually walking around the room, taking in everything and still trying to discern if anyone else was in the house.

Juliet wasn't about to be dissuaded. “No, you don't understand, Officer. He's going to keep this up all day, everyday until eleven p.m. just to annoy me, I know it. You've got to help me now. I mean – look at him,” she gave Romeo's rough appearance a disgusted once-over, “he's got to be guilty of something.”

“Are you kidding me?” Romeo shouted back at her, as he invaded her personal space. “How dare you come into my house accusing me and trying to cause problems, all because her High and Mighty Majesty wants things her way.”

Juliet ignored his insult. “Where's your stripper friend, by the way? Did you enjoy her wares tonight? Or maybe you're still enjoying them? Maybe you have her stashed in your bedroom?”

“That's none of your business, unless you're interested in joining us? Maybe you're into threesomes?”

Juliet noticed how he hadn't answered whether Rosie was still there or not and her lips thinned with irritation. “So, you're saying she's still here?” she piped up.

He threw her a lopsided, sexy smile and inched closer. “I wonder what a big bitch like you is into?” he challenged, again ignoring her question. “Do you like to be tied up? Do you like to watch? Do you like girls?” He leaned into her more, so that only she could hear his next words. “Tell me and I'll arrange it for you. Don't be shy.”

Juliet felt her cheeks turn crimson just as her heart began hammering in her chest. She could feel the sexual magnetism coming off of him, like heat coming off of black tar on a sweltering summer day. What was happening to her? Each time she saw him, the pull was stronger and it was making her crazy.

She took a step away and reeled in her wandering thoughts. “You're a disgusting pig. Stay away from me and stay away from my sister,” she declared, as she straightened herself with dignity.

Romeo burst out laughing. “Gladly, but it seems you're the one who can't stay away from me. After all, this is the second time today that you've come to my house to see me. I wonder... what exactly should I read into that?”

Juliet took in his wild, unkempt appearance and immediately wondered if the stripper had had anything to do with it. Annoyance lit through her at the thought and for one crazy second, she felt pea-green jealous of the exotic dancer. But why should she be feeling like this about him, of all people? It was insane and the ear-splitting racket she'd had to endure all day was probably to blame. She lifted her chin, proudly meeting his waiting gaze head on. "Sorry to burst your overly inflated opinion of yourself mister, but the caveman look doesn't do a thing for me. Why don't you try a shower and a shave sometime?"

"You really are a big bitch, aren't you, Juliet?" he snorted with a short laugh.

While the pair had been bantering back and forth, the shorter of the two officers had noticed a plastic baggie partially hidden behind the lamp on one of the end tables beside the couch. It contained what looked like dried leaves. Curious he picked it up, opened it and smelled it. He motioned to his partner to come over, who also smelled the contents. They both frowned at each other.

"Sir, is this yours?" the shorter of the two held up the bag towards Romeo.

Both Romeo and Juliet turned then and a silence permeated the room, as their eyes all glommed onto the plastic baggie and its contents.

Romeo knew immediately that he was in big trouble. Those looked like marijuana leaves and it probably belonged to Chace or one of the girls. Damn it! He had told them that he didn't want that garbage in his house. Damn it! Damn it! Damn it! And now he was going to have to answer for it to the police.

He flashed them his best movie star smile. "Officers, I've never seen that before in my life."

"So you're saying it's not yours?"

"No, it's not mine."

"Then whose is it?"

"I don't know, but it's not mine." No matter what, Romeo was not going to rat out one of his friends. Besides, he didn't even know exactly who it belonged to but if he had to take a guess he would say it was Chace's.

"Are you the owner of this house?"

"Yes, I am." Romeo turned slightly and took in the small smile playing across Juliet's lips. Suddenly, his blood pressure soared. Boy, would he love to wipe that smug look off of her face.

The officers gave each other a knowing look before turning back to Romeo. "Is there anyone else in this house right now?"

"No, I'm here alone," he responded. Shit, Romeo thought to himself, as he started to feel droplets of sweat appear on his forehead. This didn't look good for him; this didn't look good at all.

Both officers straightened to their full height and the taller one reached for his handcuffs. "Sir, you're under arrest for possession of marijuana. You have the right to remain silent..."

Romeo backed away and shook his head, "No, it's not mine, you don't understand, it's not mine."

"Sir..."

Suddenly, Romeo exploded, "No, you can't arrest me for drugs, you can't!"

In a flash, the entire room went wild. Before Juliet could process what was

happening, she saw both officers barrel down on Romeo and in a second, he was down on the ground with the two cops twisting his arms behind his back and handcuffing him. One of them had his knee in Romeo's back and Romeo was screaming in pain.

"My back, my back," he shouted but the officers didn't care. Their first priority was their own personal safety. As the cuffs clicked into place, the shorter of the two started frisking Romeo's prone body for any hidden weapons.

Romeo started chanting half to himself and half to the police, "No, you can't do this. I'm not like him. I'm not like him. I'm not like him. I'm not like him."

Both officers hauled him up, each grabbing an arm and then one of them shouted, "And we're adding resisting arrest to your drug charge too." They held him up, with hands cuffed behind his back. His hair had gotten even wilder because of the scuffle, his black eye looked blacker still and his bathrobe was disheveled and starting to part open. He looked a total mess.

Romeo wasn't even paying attention anymore. He seemed to be in his own little world where he kept mumbling to himself, "I'm not like him. I'm not like him," and he kept shaking his head 'no'. He looked like a little boy lost and a shot of sympathy coursed through Juliet. But why should she feel sorry for him? The drug charge had nothing to do with her and if he was doing drugs, which he probably was, then he deserved to be arrested and going to jail.

Suddenly, Romeo seemed to come out of his trance. "You don't understand – the drugs aren't mine. I've never even smoked a joint in my life," he pleaded to the officers.

"Oh come on, who's going to believe that," Juliet mumbled, half to herself but Romeo heard her. He whipped his head around to glare at her fiercely and suddenly, the need in him for revenge was overwhelming. This was all her fault, the big witch. The cops would never have come here if she hadn't called them, and they would never have entered his house if she hadn't barged in first and followed her in. And if they hadn't come into his house, they would never have found the drugs. Well, if he was going down, so would she!

As the officers started to lead the handcuffed Romeo to the front door, he shouted out, "Wait, what about her?" He inclined his head towards Juliet. "She was here earlier and assaulted me. She pushed me into the TV and gave me this black eye."

The officers' gaze traveled from Romeo to the smashed TV screen before landing on Juliet, who was standing there with a sudden look of panic and fear stamped across her face.

"Ma'am, did you push him into the TV and hit him in the eye?"

Feeling as if her breath had been cut off, Juliet stared blankly at the officers who were both waiting for her answer and then her frightened eyes swung to Romeo's face. He was wearing a big smirk, enjoying her predicament.

She shook her head 'no' and her next words choked out of her tight throat. "He's lying. It's not true. I – I shoved him yes, but he tripped and fell into the screen – and – and the eye, it was an accident, I swear. I was opening a bottle and my elbow hit him – I didn't do it on purpose, honest." But they were all looking at her as if she was a cooked goose about to be devoured at a Thanksgiving table. Juliet felt heat rise up into her face and she turned to Romeo. "Tell them what really happened. Tell – tell them it was an accident," she pleaded.

Romeo threw her a withering glare. If he was going to jail, so was Miss High and

Mighty! “She pushed me and then hit me officers, what can I say?” He lied so effortlessly. After all, he was an actor and lying was what he did for a living.

“Do you want to press charges against her?” the shorter officer asked. They all turned to stare at Juliet and the moment was suspended in time.

Juliet’s breath was stuck in her throat again and she couldn’t move, not even to blink her eyes as fear knotted deep inside her. Oh God, how had this whole mess turned around and involved her?

She watched Romeo smile wickedly as he pronounced, “Yes, I do.” Juliet’s mouth dropped open in shock and she gasped.

The shorter of the two officers reached for his own handcuffs and approached her, “Miss Soma, you’re under arrest for assault,” he said before grabbing her arms, spinning her around and cuffing her wrists behind her back.

The sound of steel clicking into place imbedded itself into Juliet’s brain. “What? No! Wait! He’s lying! It was just an accident! He’s lying!” she shouted.

The officer wasn’t paying attention and started leading her out the door. The taller officer followed with a cuffed Romeo.

“Wait, wait!” she shouted. “This can’t be happening to me!”

As Juliet was dragged to the police car, Sara came suddenly running out of their house next door. “Juliet, what’s going on?” she screamed, shocked at seeing her sister handcuffed and being led by a cop.

“They’re arresting me for assault,” Juliet freaked out. “Call Faith and Brad at the store. See if they can get me a lawyer. Please Sara, hurry.”

“Oh my God,” Sara yelled, before running back home to do what her sister had asked.

The officer put his hand on Juliet’s head before pushing her into the back seat of their cruiser. The other officer did the same thing to an equally upset Romeo who let out a low moan as his back pain flared up again as he slid into the car seat next to her.

Chapter 16

With her wrists straining against the handcuffs behind her back, Juliet sat in the back of the police car stunned. Her stomach was clenched tight with fear, her pulse was erratic, sweat had already broken out on her forehead and the only thought that had frozen itself in her brain was that she wasn't going to get to have mint tea with Sara tonight because she was on her way to JAIL!

Oh my God! How could this be happening to her? She, who had never even had a speeding ticket in her life, was now being arrested for assault. Assault! That was a serious charge, wasn't it? People went to jail for that. They got locked away for who knows how many years, made to wear orange jumpsuits, had to eat bologna sandwiches for dinner and forced to have prison girlfriends named Butch. Oh no, that couldn't happen to her, could it?

But it was happening. She was going to jail! And when she finally got there, she'd be booked, fingerprinted and strip-searched. Strip-searched? Yeah – they'd make her get naked and inspect every cavity on her body. Oh my God, oh my God, OH MY GOD!!

She turned to the big moron sitting beside her and her eyes narrowed. With hands also cuffed behind his back and his head resting on the back seat, and with his good eye closed and his injured eye swollen shut, he was blowing out quick, short breaths like a pregnant woman about to deliver her baby. It was clear that he was in pain and was trying to ease some of the throbbing with his breathing.

Juliet seethed with mounting rage. This was all his fault, the big baboon. She hadn't assaulted him and he knew it. Everything that had happened earlier had been an accident, an unfortunate happenstance with no malicious intent whatsoever on her part.

Boiling over with fury, she suddenly found her voice. "You big liar," she yelled at him and then proceeded to shove at him with her upper body weight.

Romeo let out a quick, forceful breath as he felt the push and opened his eyes to glare at her. "How does it feel, Juliet? Where's your superior smirk now, huh?" He hissed at her quietly so that the two officers in the front seat couldn't make out what he was saying.

"Tell them the truth, you monstrous faker," she hissed back. "You know damn well what happened this afternoon. I never hurt you on purpose."

"Really? Then how come I've got the injuries to prove otherwise? The cops certainly believed me, so I've probably got a good case. You're going down – neighbor."

"Listen buster, you're making a false charge and that's against the law. Do you want to add that to your arrest sheet, along with the drug bust?"

At the mention of the drug bust, Romeo let out a forceful whoosh of air and let his head roll back on the seat's neck rest. "Fuck!" he suddenly shouted and then started shaking his head 'no'. "This can't be happening to me! Not for that! Not for that!" In frustration, he kicked the side of the car seat with his knee. "Damn it," he yelled again.

The shorter of the two officers who was in the passenger seat, turned his head back and sternly warned, "Settle down back there unless you want more charges laid."

Romeo quickly shut up and turned his anger inward, causing his face to turn red. He kept thinking back to his deadbeat drug addict father and the hell he'd put the whole family through all those years ago. He remembered the nights he'd had to clean up his father's vomit and the rent money that disappeared into the old man's veins and the

grocery money that never was and the screaming fights he'd had with Romeo's mom over his using. Man, he'd lost count of the times he'd had to watch his mom cry over that asshole, and she'd cried for him until the day she'd died. To this day, he still couldn't stand to see a woman cry. His insides melted at the sight. His old man had done that to him. He had been a complete and total bastard to all of them, and Romeo had vowed to never become like him. Never!

But look at him now. Here he was, in the back of a cop car, on his way to the police station to get booked for drugs – for drugs, damn it! And in 48 hours, the entire world would know that Romeo Boyd, A-list, Hollywood action star had been busted for drugs because it would certainly leak out; and then the paparazzi would descend on the Island in a flash, like flies on shit – and he'd forever be stained with a drug bust attached to his name. Sure, most people probably thought he was a druggie anyway with his constant partying and bad-boy image and that was okay with him, but it was one thing for people to suspect, and quite another for them to know for sure because of an actual arrest.

“Fuck!” Romeo hissed under his breath as he turned back to Juliet. He noticed then that she'd been closely studying him this entire time. What was she thinking, he wondered? Probably that he was a druggie, wasted loser who was now getting what he deserved.

Staring into her big, beautiful brown eyes – they suddenly reminded him of the eyes he'd seen once on a Madonna in a painting at the Louvre in France. Not that he was an egghead art buff or anything, but he'd been in Paris at the time filming a movie and having a free afternoon, he'd decided he wanted to see DaVinci's Mona Lisa hanging at the famous museum. Wandering through the various rooms, he'd come to a painting of a Madonna-type figure sitting by a river in some sort of pastoral landscape, and her eyes had captivated him, trapping him in their hypnotic spell. They were innocent and yet strong, all at the same time. What secrets and thoughts and emotions lay behind them, he'd wondered? Those same big, brown, bottomless eyes were staring at him now, but these were in the face of a real, live woman.

Suddenly, Romeo had an overpowering urge to want her to believe him – that those drugs were not his and he wasn't a pot smoker or drug taker or anything else. He desperately needed someone – her – in this very instant in time, to believe in his innocence.

“That wasn't my stash,” he told her.

“Oh, you mean yours is somewhere else in the house?” she cracked back.

“I don't do drugs,” Romeo lashed out, then watched as she frowned at him, obviously not believing him. Her disbelief spurred him on. “Okay, so maybe I drink too much and party too hard, but I have my limits. I don't do pot or anything else, you have to believe me.”

Juliet did not believe him. “So you're saying what? That you're a drug dealer instead? Or did the drug fairy bring in that bag of marijuana for you?”

At the mention of Romeo possibly being a drug dealer, the officer in the passenger seat cocked his head to the side to hear their conversation better. Romeo saw the movement and clenched his teeth in sudden anger. Drug possession of marijuana was one thing, but drug dealing was a whole different ballgame. He didn't want the police to get anymore ideas about him and add new charges.

“Shut your mouth, please Juliet?”

“Don’t tell me to shut up, you big phony! I’m the innocent party here,” she seethed.

Juliet had had enough of him to last a lifetime. Sitting here beside him in this cramped backseat had exhausted all of her patience. The heat that she could feel emanating from his body was beginning to overpower her and she was having trouble breathing. What was wrong with her? She needed to focus all of her attention on getting out of this jam and not on him. Sure, she’d been curious about him when he’d been silent a little while ago, but now when the enormity of her own predicament hit her full force in her gut, combined with his magnetic aura somehow pulling her to him, she began to really panic and it made her even madder at him than she already was – which, of course, made her next words more vitriolic than they might have been otherwise.

“Look at you. You’re an immature, frat boy still stuck in high school mode. When are you going to get it through that thick, caveman cranium of yours that the party’s over? It’s time to grow up, Romeo, and act like a man instead of some pubescent, spoiled brat.”

“Well, Dr Freud, is that your professional opinion or are you just talking out of your ass.”

“Drop the charges against me, you low-life scum and do the right thing for once in your wasted, pathetic life.”

“Not a chance, sweetheart.” Romeo smiled the smile of a shark just before he opens his mouth to tear your arm off. He’d been a fool to compare this big bitch sitting beside him to that beautiful Madonna he’d appreciated in Paris. What had he been thinking?

“And one more thing,” Juliet continued her rant, “please keep your legs together because your cheap bathrobe keeps parting and I’m not interested in seeing your junk hanging out anymore tonight, thank you.” It had been obvious to Juliet, from the minute they’d been shoved into the police car together, that he had nothing on underneath that terry robe.

Romeo shook his head at her audacity. “I wonder, what’s bigger than a big bitch? Because whatever it is, lady, you’re it.” Then giving her a huge, self-satisfied smile, he intentionally parted his legs even wider making sure his ‘junk’ was in full view for her. Disgusted, Juliet snorted and turned her head to stare out the window instead.

And that’s how they spent the rest of their car ride to jail.

