



Chapter II

The next time Cass saw Scott, she dropped a tray of strawberry daiquiris.

No! she thought as she watched all that liquor curl through the air with the beauty of an ocean wave. *Stop!* she wanted to scream. *Come back!* For a split second she felt as if she were surfing on that wave of rum-laced bliss, in the moment before being crushed beneath its power.

“Goddamn it, Cass.” The manager crouched beside her, hissing into her ear like a fat little goblin as she knelt to corral the sticky shards. “These are expensive goddamn glasses, and I *told* you, one more drop and—”

“I know, I’ll pay for it. Just don’t—”

A shadow moved over them, and she almost yelled at the moron who was suddenly standing in her light, keeping her from cleaning up yet another mess.

“I’ll take care of it.” Scott’s low voice placated the angry little man. “It’s on me.”

“Oh, no, Mr. McGreavy,” the goblin simpered as he staggered up onto his feet, snapping his grimace into a smarmy grin. “We’re just happy to have you and your friends—”

“It’s Rogie’s fault.” Cass could hear the fake smile in Scotty’s voice as she piled broken glass onto her tray. “Girls see him, and

things get dropped. Happens all the time.” He pulled out some bills. “That’s why he keeps me around, to bat cleanup.”

The goblin roared with laughter at this little play on words. “You’re a prince, Mr. McGreavy!” he said loudly, calling attention to his thirty-second friendship with someone moderately famous. “A prince among men!”

It worked. The whole room clapped. Cass knew it would be talked about for weeks by the hardworking patrons and the sad sacks alike. For some it would be the most memorable thing that happened all year. A few would even claim to know Scott from his childhood here in Brighton. But they didn’t, not really.

Scott shifted, his shadow moved, and one last shard came into view. She reached for it, but the goblin pulled at her arm to stand up. “*Thank* him, for chrissake,” he muttered at her.

She stood and faced Scott. “Thanks,” she said. And he was looking at her again, like he had in the car after Ben’s funeral. He tipped his chin at her. *You okay?* his chin asked.

She gave the tiniest of shrugs. People were still watching and she had to keep her job. She always tried to keep her jobs, but now she really had to. So she went up on tiptoes and gave him a little peck on the cheek, playing the grateful damsel, the adoring fan. As expected, the crowd hooted and cheered.

“Go for it, Cassie!” called one of the regulars, and everyone laughed at the absurdity of Cass Macklin, a merely adequate waitress in a fairly run-down bar, kissing Scott McGreavy, a midlevel player on a world-class baseball team. Of course, they didn’t know he would’ve flunked out of high school if his older brother hadn’t written his papers for him. Cass and Scott had walked across the same stage to get their diplomas, one right after the other in alphabetical order. But Cass had written her own papers to get there.

“Isn’t that sweet! Would you like her to be your waitress?” The

goblin would've happily pimped out his granny for big-spending customers.

"Uh . . ." Scotty's face went blank like it did when he was trying not to react to bad news. Cass had seen it many times, usually from the vantage point of being the bearer of that news. "Sure."

She followed him back to the table, mentally prepping herself. *Tips, tips, tips*, she chanted silently. God, she needed the money.

Scott did not introduce her to his friends or even acknowledge that he knew her. His eyes darted around like everything else in the room required his scrutiny.

He's ashamed of me.

It shouldn't have surprised her, and yet it did. In her current state she was seeing all kinds of things more clearly.

Tips, tips, tips, she reminded herself as the sting of his disregard slowly faded. Big smile, hand to chest. "Oh my God, Nick Rogatelli! I didn't know if you were going to make it out alive, but you pulled it off. And Kep Miller! Wow, tonight's my lucky night." Cass did enjoy baseball and, like most true Bostonians, rooted devotedly for the Red Sox, at least till the end of the season, when that devotion might turn to disgust.

Rogatelli grinned back, milk chocolate eyes radiating sly charm. "Thanks to Scotty, here, for paying off your boss. He doesn't usually go all gallant like that." He slapped Scott's chest a couple of times.

Cass said, "Oh, I'm sure he's dropped some change in a few tin cups."

"Scotty?" Miller laughed. "I seriously doubt it. Dropped his *pants*, maybe . . ." Rogatelli burst out with a snorting guffaw and high-fived Miller.

Scott turned red and muttered, "Couple of assholes . . . never shoulda brought you here."

Cass took their drink order and left them to their teasing and trash talking. When she returned with three pints of beer, she

was relieved to find no one at the table. Rogie and Miller were prowling the bar, signing autographs and chatting up a couple of women sporting the exact same overdone boob job. Standing together, their cleavage looked like twin glacial crevasses.

She lowered the pints carefully to the table, willing her hands not to shake. They jittered like windup toys these days. Scott came up beside her just as the last one nearly crash-landed. He raised his eyebrows at her but she ignored it.

“So you’re slumming it?” she said. “Or is this a trip down memory lane?”

“Rogie likes the neighborhood pubs.”

“He’ll get more attention here than at the Ritz Bar, that’s for sure.”

He narrowed his eyes. “How’d you get this job? Pretty sure you don’t have any references you can use. You know the manager?”

“No, but I flirted with him a little, and he gave me a chance.”

Scotty hooked his fingers into little quotation marks. “‘Flirted’?”

“Screw you.”

“Hey, it’s a fair question.”

“I never did anything like that, and you know it.” She flipped a couple of napkins onto the table and walked away.

The bar got crowded fast, as people called their friends to tell them Rogie Rogatelli, star Red Sox relief pitcher, was in the building. He and Kep Miller drank and danced and laughed. Scott mostly stayed at the table talking sports with a couple of obsessed fans.

What was it like to have baseball be your drug of choice? Cass wondered. It had to be a hell of a lot easier than her own.

“...then he Bucknered!” sneered one of the fans.

“Hey,” Scotty said, low and flat, the way he sounded just before he got really mad. “Don’t you ever use his name like that. Billy Buckner was a great player, and all you assholes seem to remember is that one stupid play.”

The two acolytes nodded penitently as if they'd just heard the word of God from a really well-built Moses.

Everyone was happy. Tips were plentiful. Cass struggled to keep her tray steady as she wended her way through the press of bodies, and the smell of a hundred drinks flooded the terrain of her thoughts. But she kept driving her mind back to the growing wad of cash in her apron pocket and smiled as if she were having just as good a time as everyone else.

Occasionally she saw Scott watching her, which was infuriating. Going unnoticed was her preferred mode of travel—so much safer than attracting attention. His surveillance unnerved her, and she needed every last nerve to keep her eye on the prize. She made a *what-the-hell-are-you-looking-at?* face at him, and he turned away.

When it was past midnight and the working crowd had gone home, Scott came up to the bar and stood next to Cass while she waited for an order to be filled.

“What’s with the shaking?” he murmured, eyes locked onto a commercial for discount mattresses on the bar TV. “You quit again?”

She was tempted to tell him to mind his own business, they weren’t friends, they weren’t even semirelated anymore. And he was ashamed of her, for godsake! But it was late and she was tired—so unbelievably tired—and that was a bigger speech than she had energy for.

“Yeah,” she said, because what the hell, he already knew.

“How’s it going?”

“It’s rough.” She took the drinks the bartender passed her and went to serve them.

He was still standing there when she came back for her next order.

“Why’d you quit?” he said and threw a couple of pretzels in his mouth.

Why? How little did he think of her that she had to have a special reason to stop doing something so utterly destructive that it had killed the only person on the planet who loved her?

“Because it’s, um...*bad* for you?”

“Not buying it.”

“Don’t care.” She walked away without collecting her drinks.

As the place thinned out, Cass had more time to stew on Scott’s nosiness. Honestly, why would he bother? She figured it must be some weird residue from Ben’s death. She remembered how Scotty’s chin had trembled. They were brothers, and she knew there had been a bond between them once. Ben had told her about how they would do stuff together when they were younger...shoplift from the penny-candy store...play baseball in the vacant lot behind the gas station down the street...find new places to hide from their father . . .

He misses Ben, she decided. *How strange is that?* There was a word for it on the edge of her mind, a word Ben liked to use . . . *Ironic*.

As she cleared smeary glasses and pocketed tips, something occurred to her, just a thought, but over the course of the next half hour it wrapped around her like some sort of fast-growing vine. And then she couldn’t *not* do it. It would be wrong—a bigger wrong than the vast variety of wrongs she was used to—not to say anything. Because Ben had loved him even when Scott had said *No, I won’t help you, not this time* and *I wish to hell you weren’t my brother*. That last one had hit Ben so hard, but he’d never spoken badly of Scotty, even after that.

Ben would want him to know, she realized. And that settled it.

When Scott headed down the hallway to the men’s room, she waited for him. It was quieter back there, the music not quite so loud, the laughter not quite so invasive.

He came out adjusting his belt. When he saw her, he stopped short. “What,” he said.

Cass took a breath and held it for a second. She hadn't told anyone yet. Maybe hadn't even completely accepted it herself, because words were powerful and she was hesitant now to release them into the realness of the world. She let out her breath.

"I'm pregnant."