



RYAN FIELD

THE GHOST AND MR. MOORE

raVinous
romance

The Ghost and Mr. Moore

A Ravenous Romance™ M/M Original Publication

Ryan Field

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This book is a work of fiction, and any resemblance to persons living or dead is purely coincidental.

Chapter One

On a warm Friday afternoon in June, Dexter Moore pulled into the driveway of his new home, Keel Cottage. The thick gravel crunched and cracked beneath the tires. The car rolled to a stop. He parked the black BMW sedan in the middle of a long, narrow driveway and switched off the engine. Then he unfastened his seat belt, ran his fingers through his hair, and took a deep breath. “We’re finally here, Brighton. We made it.”

He turned to his six-year-old daughter in the back seat and smiled. The little girl had already removed her seat belt and was leaning forward so she could look out the window. She stared up at an old house with gray shingled turrets and bright white trim and said, “It’s huge, Dad. And it’s nothing like our old house in Hollywood.” A small, white Bichon Frise jumped onto her lap and barked a few times. “Calm down, Cleo,” she said. “I can’t open the door or the window. Dad has them locked again.”

Dexter took a deep breath and raised his eyebrows. He felt like yawning; his eyelids were heavy and his legs felt stiff. “Wait until I get out, Brighton,” he said. It had been a long trip from New York. He’d stopped in Manhattan for the night, and traffic had been heavy all the way up to the tip of the Cape. But that had been only part of the trip. He was exhausted because he’d been driving for days—all the way from Hollywood, California.

When he unlocked the doors and pulled the key from the ignition, Brighton pointed to the house and shouted, “There’s Marion. She’s standing on the porch waiting

for us.” Brighton opened her door, jumped out of the car, and ran toward the house. It would have been futile for Dexter to try to stop her. She hadn’t seen Marion in two weeks. Cleo followed her up the green lawn and past two large black urns filled with blood-red geraniums. Cleo was the kind of dog that didn’t need to be on a leash all the time. He never wandered, and he always listened to commands.

Dexter opened the car door and watched Brighton run to the house. He smiled and shook his head. Marion had been their housekeeper for five years, and she’d practically raised Brighton. They hadn’t seen Marion in a while because she had flown to Cape Cod earlier to prepare the house for their arrival.

On his way to the front porch, Dexter thought he saw someone standing up on the widow’s walk, beside the cupola. He looked down at the path for a second so he wouldn’t trip on the unfamiliar lawn. But when he looked up again the widow’s walk was empty. He chalked it up to his imagination and lack of sleep; he’d been driving too long.

When he reached the house, Brighton was already on the porch. She was jumping up and down and Marion was laughing, trying to calm her. Marion’s hands were clasped together and resting on her ample waist; her head was tipped to the side and her eyes were gleaming. She was wearing a pale blue cotton dress with a thick, white apron. Her shoes were black leather with large gold buckles and chunky three-inch heels. Dexter smiled and lifted his hand to his mouth so she wouldn’t notice. Marion had been raised in New England, but she’d lived in Southern California almost all her adult life and she’d resisted moving to Cape Cod. Now she looked as if she’d never left New England and California was on another planet.

“It’s so good to see you, Marion,” Dexter said. “I don’t think I want to get into a car for the next month.”

Marion smiled. “You just leave everything to me,” she said. “I’ll take care of the car, and I’ll bring all the bags upstairs. You just go up to your room and take a good, long nap, Mr. Moore. I’ll leave your bags outside your door in the upstairs hall.”

Marion had never called him or his ex-partner by their first names. She could have and it wouldn’t have mattered, but she was old school in this respect. “I made a nice Yankee pot roast for dinner and a Cape Cod cranberry pie for dessert.”

He reached for the banister and walked up four wooden steps to the porch. This was the first time he’d actually seen his new house. He’d purchased it long distance from a photo he’d seen online. The trim on the wide, wraparound porch was painted bright white, the planked floor was dove gray, and the bead board ceiling was a traditional sky blue. He looked at the white wicker furniture with apple green cushions and smiled. He tilted his head and stared at the copper light fixtures hanging from chains on the porch ceiling. The oversized front door was made out of thick walnut and it was supposedly original to the house.

Above the door, a brass sign read, *Keel Cottage, 1897*. Dexter had been told by his Realtor that Cape Cod had been called “Cape of Keel” by the original explorers, and the sea captain who had built the house in the nineteenth century had named the house Keel Cottage.

The white trim was glossy and smooth. He ran the tips of his fingers along the front rail and said, “I think I made a good decision, Marion. I like what I see so far. I was

worried the house wouldn't look like it did in the photos. But now I see that it's even better than I imagined it would be."

Marion frowned and smoothed the front of her apron.

When Dexter noticed the serious expression on her face, he asked, "What's wrong?" After five years, he knew how to read all her moods.

She forced a smile; she wouldn't look him in the eye. "Nothing serious," she said. "It's a fine old house, Mr. Moore. It's just that I've noticed a few things, is all. Peculiar things." Her voice was low, almost apologetic.

Dexter took a deep breath and sighed. "Have you been listening to local gossip, Marion?" Dexter knew what Marion was talking about and he didn't want to discuss it in front of Brighton. So he patted Brighton on the back and said, "Why don't you go upstairs and check out your new bedroom, sweetie? Turn right at the top of the stairs, and it's the last door on the right. Marion will be up there in a minute." He'd studied the floor plans of Keel Cottage on the Internet.

Brighton smiled and looked down at Cleo. "C'mon," she said, "I'll race you upstairs." Then she rushed through the wide doorway and headed for the staircase with the little dog in tow.

When she was gone, Marion pressed her palm to her chest and said, "Each morning when I go downstairs, there's a cupboard door wide open. I know I close them all at night, and yet one of them is wide open in the morning. And the butcher, Mr. Klinger, asked me if I'd seen any ghosts yet. The things he told me about this house, Mr. Moore." She put her hands on his hips, pressed her lips together, and shook her head back and forth.

Dexter smiled. “Marion, I know all about the ghost stories. The real estate agent who sold me this house said it was rumored to be haunted. It’s just urban legend and folklore. There’s no basis to these stories. Every small town like Provincetown has at least one haunted house.” He didn’t tell her he’d purchased the house at an extremely low price because the previous owners also thought the house was haunted. The straight couple, two interior decorators from Boston, had renovated the entire place and they’d only been there a year. Dexter had fallen in love with the photos of the house, and then when he compared the price of Keel Cottage to other properties in Provincetown that weren’t even half as nice, he realized it was the buy of a lifetime. He didn’t believe in ghosts, witches, or vampires. He only believed in what he could see. But he knew Marion was extremely superstitious and he didn’t tell her about the ridiculous ghost stories because he didn’t want to alarm her.

Marion forced a smile and said, “I’m sure you’re right, Mr. Moore. It’s probably my imagination running away with me. Big old houses like this can be very quiet at night. I’m glad you’re both here.”

“That’s more like it, Marion,” he said. “I think I’ll go upstairs now and check out my room. And nice long nap sounds like a great idea. Will you be okay with Brighton?” He didn’t have to ask; he knew she couldn’t wait to be with Brighton again. The two had always been inseparable.

She smiled and waved her wide arm. “We’ll be just fine. Mr. Moore. You go on up and rest, and I’ll call you when supper is ready.”

When Marion went back into the house to find Brighton, he crossed into the entrance hall and looked around. The refinished hardwood floors gleamed, the white trim

sparkled, and the walls were a pale shade of sage green. The dining room was to his left. The house had been sold fully furnished and there was a long mahogany table with Chippendale chairs, five on each side and two on the ends. The sideboard was Hepplewhite and the breakfront was built into a wall. Even though the house was Victorian, it was classic New England and very simple. The trim and the crown molding were solid and straight, without swirls, ornate carvings, or gingerbread. He took a deep breath and smiled. The whole place smelled like a combination of old wood, furniture polish, and the salty sea air.

Dexter turned to his right and crossed into a huge double parlor. The walls were painted light taupe and the trim was white like the rest of the house. There were two elegant Chippendale sofas beside a walk-in fireplace. They were the most ornate pieces of furniture in the room, with white cotton slipcovers and ball and clawed feet. The other furniture was simple. Two club chairs with sage and white striped slipcovers balanced the sofas, a black baby grand piano had been angled at the other end of the room, and the side tables and accessories mixed periods. He liked the modern rectangular coffee table with a two-inch-thick glass top that separated the sofas. The entire room was a balance of old and new, but everything had neat, tailored lines and worked well together. It's a good thing the previous owners had been decorators, because he knew that he would never have been able to pull this off on his own.

He put his hands in his pockets and walked toward the fireplace. Above the tall, white mantle, there was a large oval portrait of a handsome man—one of the best-looking men Dexter had ever seen. He couldn't take his eyes off the painting. He leaned forward so he could read a small bronze plaque at the bottom of the thick gold frame. "Captain

Major Lang, 1899.” The real estate agent had told Dexter that Captain Lang had been the original owner of the house. He’d designed Keel Cottage and had it built back when Provincetown had still been an important fishing village and was filled with men whose lives revolved around the sea.

Dexter looked up at the portrait and rubbed his chin a few times. The face in the painting reminded Dexter of Hugh Jackman in the werewolf film. Captain Lang was sitting on a dark, hand-carved chair with his muscular hands folded on his lap. He had wide, square shoulders and what looked like a hard, lean body. His dark blue uniform and his sea captain’s hat made him look distinguished and important, yet his steel blue eyes were soft and mellow. He had a strong, angular face and a dark, well-trimmed beard. Captain Lang wasn’t smiling or frowning. His dark eyebrows weren’t up or down. And his overall expression could only be described as pleasantly amused, as if sitting for a portrait had been self-indulgent and silly.

Dexter leaned in closer and whispered, “Damn, you must have broken more than a few hearts in your day, man. You’re the hottest freaking sea captain *I’ve* ever seen.” He stared at the lips in the portrait and whistled.

While he was whistling, he felt a warm breeze and he stepped back from the fireplace. He turned to the right and watched a rush of wind pass through one of the tall front windows. It blew the white cotton draperies forward and knocked over a pewter candlestick that had been sitting on a round cherry table. Dexter crossed to the table, lifted the candlestick, and closed the window. Then he covered his mouth and yawned. On his way out of the room, he looked up at the portrait again and made a mental note to

do some research on Captain Lang. Supposedly, he'd been very well known and slightly notorious, and Dexter was curious.

When Dexter was upstairs, he heard Brighton and Marion. They were down the hall in Brighton's bedroom, and they were laughing about something. It was good to hear Brighton laugh again. In the past year, Dexter had experienced many sleepless nights worrying about her. When Dexter's ex-partner, Michael, had left them to move in with a nineteen-year-old guy, Brighton had been devastated. Her grades had gone down, she'd stopped seeing her friends, and all she did was watch television. Dexter had tried to put up a good front, but he'd been devastated, too. But he'd worked hard to keep his separation with Michael amicable for Brighton's sake. After all, although Michael wasn't much of a father, he was Brighton's other father and she loved him in spite of his flaws.

The sound of their laughter at the other end of the hall made Dexter smile. And for the first time since he'd decided to move to Cape Cod, he felt a warm, comfortable feeling pass through his body. Starting over wasn't going to be easy, but at least it felt right.

Dexter had read the floor plans of Keel Cottage so many times he knew exactly where he was going. He crossed to the other end of the long hallway and opened the door to his bedroom. It was the largest bedroom on the second floor. There were four others on the second floor, including Brighton's bedroom, and three more on the third floor. Marion's private bedroom was on the first floor, off the kitchen.

His room was the one above the dining room, where the front of the house rounded to form a turret. The turret was lined with tall windows flanked with cream colored cotton draperies. He went inside, closed the door, and turned the old skeleton key

to lock it. His heels clicked on the wooden floor as he walked through the room. There was an antique high boy beside the window seat. He passed a four-poster bed with a white cotton duvet, and a large desk with tons of small drawers. He stood in front of the windows and looked out to the sea. Keel Cottage sat high on a hill in the far West End of Provincetown, at the end of Commercial Street. Even though Keel Cottage wasn't directly on the water, every room in the front of the house had a clear view of the ocean. The Realtor had told him that the only other building with a better ocean view than his was the Pilgrim Monument on High Pole Hill Road.

Dexter yawned again and walked to the bed. He sat on the edge of the mattress so he could remove his shoes and socks, then stood up and removed the rest of his clothes. When he was naked, he went into the bathroom and turned on the shower. It was a simple bathroom, with white subway tiles, a white marble floor, and white marble counters. He looked at his body in a full-length mirror and sighed because he hadn't had a chance to work out since a week before he'd left Hollywood. He'd lost a few pounds, and the muscles in his arms looked smaller. Dexter had a naturally lean, defined body. When he worked out with weights, his compact muscles popped and rounded with definition. Even though he was thirty-two years old, he still looked like he was in his twenties. Now that he was single again, after twelve years of being in a monogamous relationship with Michael, he wanted to hold on to his looks for as long as he could.

When the water was hot, he stepped into the shower and closed his eyes. The hot water saturated his short blond hair and coated his naked body. His legs were smooth and tan, and his ass was round and firm. Dexter didn't have much body hair, and the little he

did have below his waist he trimmed and shaved regularly. He always kept a small patch of blond above his penis, a triangle that pointed down.

He reached for the soap with his left hand and grabbed his penis with his right. He was already semi-hard and a full erection was forming fast. He hadn't had sex with anyone since Michael had left him. And he hadn't masturbated in weeks because he'd been on the road with Brighton. His balls felt low and heavy; the tip of his penis was already dripping with clear pre-come. He usually masturbated at least once a day, and this was the longest he'd gone without coming in his entire adult life. So he leaned back against the tiled shower, spread his smooth legs wider, and started to jerk his dick. The water splashed against his body; he arched his back and closed his eyes. When he pictured Captain Lang's face from the portrait in the double parlor, his balls tightened and the head of his penis expanded. He usually fantasized about a porn movie he'd seen, or a famous actor from a recent film. But for some reason, Captain Lang's strong, masculine face entered his mind. A minute later, he rubbed out a load that was so intense it smacked into the white tiles on the other side of the shower and left his legs trembling.

When his body was clean again, he stepped out of the shower and dried off with thick white towels. These were his towels. He'd had them and a few other personal things shipped to Provincetown ahead of time so he'd feel at home. He'd hated leaving his house in the Hollywood Hills, but there hadn't been a choice. Dexter lived on money he'd made as a child actor, and Michael handled all his finances. He could afford to not work as long as he lived within his means. In the years that he'd lived with Michael in the Hollywood Hills, property values had increased so much that when it was time to sell the house, he couldn't afford to buy Michael out without dipping into his capital. So when

they split up, they sold their home and divided the money in half. Dexter bought Keel Cottage with his half and he didn't have to touch his capital. And the fact that Keel Cottage had been listed at such an outrageously low price allowed him to own a beautifully restored home for a fraction of what he normally would have paid.

When he was finished in the bathroom, he went back into the bedroom and double checked to make sure his bedroom door was locked and shut tight. He wanted to take his nap in the nude, and he didn't want Brighton or Marion walking in on him by mistake.

Then he walked to the bed and went down on top of the white duvet cover. He plopped hard in the middle of the bed, on his stomach, and spread his legs. He took a deep breath and closed his eyes. The light cotton duvet felt smooth against his balls and the mattress was firm, but not too hard.

And just before he dropped off into a deep sleep, he thought he heard a whistle. Not just any whistle. This was a soft, clear whistle that sounded like an old song he'd once heard. But he couldn't remember the title. He wanted to lift his head and turn around, but his feet began to tingle and he couldn't lift his eyelids. He was so relaxed he just drifted off to sleep with the whistle running through his head.

Chapter Two

On his first morning in Keel Cottage, Dexter woke to the sounds gulls squawking and cars creeping down the narrow, one-way path of Commercial Street. He opened his eyes and pulled the white duvet cover up to his chin. The antique clock on the mantel over his bedroom fireplace said seven o'clock. He looked to the right and saw he'd left one of the front windows in his room wide open all night long. A cool, early summer breeze was blowing in from the bay. But the sun was shining, the sky was vivid blue, and he knew it would be warmer by noon. Though he was a native Californian, he knew the climate well. Dexter and his former partner had taken many summertime vacations to Provincetown. They usually went during the fourth of July, when all the good-looking young circuit boys were in town. Michael had insisted on going then.

Dexter rubbed his eyes and looked at the open window again. He tilted his head and twisted his lips. Though he'd gone to bed late the night before, he could have sworn he'd closed the window. He always slept in the nude, and he knew Provincetown mornings tended to be cool that time of year.

Then a strong breeze blew the drapes forward. It passed over his bed, touched his face, and caused his erection to jump. He closed his eyes and smiled. A quick release before breakfast always put him in a good mood for the rest of the day. But when he reached down to wrap his hand around his penis there was a hard knock on his bedroom door. The door was locked. Even though the rule in the house had always been to knock

before entering bathrooms or bedrooms, he would have never taken the chance that his daughter would walk in on him.

“Dad,” Brighton shouted. “Are you awake?” Her soft voice was high, with an excited, musical lilt.

Dexter smiled and rolled his eyes. “Yes, sweetie, I’m awake.”

“Good,” she shouted, “because Marion is making cream cheese omelets for breakfast, with little sausages and fried bread.” She pronounced omelets, *om-a-leds*.

Dexter smiled and rubbed his eyes again. “Okay, sweetie, I’ll be down in ten minutes. I just want to jump into the shower and get dressed first. You go down and I’ll join you.”

He heard Cleo bark. Then Brighton said, “I’ll see you downstairs, Dad.”

When he heard her scamper down the hall to the stairs, he pulled back the covers and looked down at his naked body. His erection was already shrinking. Having children, he’d learned, tended to do that. But he didn’t care. His daughter was the most important person in his life, and he knew she was excited about being in a new place. He didn’t want to miss the expression on her small, innocent face when she ate her first breakfast in the new house; he didn’t want to miss her wide eyes when they took their first walk up Commercial Street after breakfast. Dexter and Michael had adopted Brighton at birth, and he’d never missed a single event in her life. He’d fed Brighton her first spoonful of solid food, he’d been there for her first steps, and he’d never missed a school function. Michael had missed more than a few events, but Dexter had always been there for everything, and he always would.

So he jumped out of bed and jogged into the bathroom. His semi-erect penis smacked against his leg. He had to reach down and hold it because the head was still sensitive.

Then he showered and dressed fast. And when he left his bedroom and reached the top of the staircase, he smelled fresh coffee and frying sausage. Marion was a tremendous cook, and Dexter was lucky that he'd always been thin and never had to worry about what he ate.

Brighton was sitting at the white antique kitchen table with a bowl of cereal and a tall glass of orange juice. The massive kitchen in this house had been totally renovated, with stainless steel appliances, white shaker cabinets, and white marble counters. The original hardwood floor had been sanded and refinished just like those in the rest of the house. There was a large eating area on one side of a long center island, and the cooking side was on the other.

Dexter sat down across from Brighton and smiled. Marion was cooking on the other side of the island, staring down into the frying pan. Dexter smiled and said, "Marion, you look like one of those chefs on TV in this huge kitchen." Their kitchen in Hollywood had been a long, narrow galley kitchen, with a small table at the end. The house had been very modern.

Marion looked up and smiled. "Maybe I should dress for breakfast then. I'll wear my diamonds tomorrow, Mr. Moore." Then she laughed and told Cleo to move over. Dexter couldn't see the little dog, but he knew he was sitting in front of the cook top, waiting for a small morsel to fall off the counter. For such a small dog, he had an enormous appetite.

When Dexter looked to the right, he noticed some of the cabinet doors were open. They were at the end, near the refrigerator. “Marion,” he said, “why are those doors open like that?”

Marion didn’t look up at him. She was ready to flip an omelet. “I didn’t notice it, Mr. Moore. I know all the doors were shut last night when I went to bed.”

Dexter pressed his lips together and lifted an eyebrow. “I see,” he said. He didn’t want to discuss it in front of Brighton, but he knew by the look on her face that she was referring to this imaginary ghost. He also knew she’d left the doors open so he’d see them. “You can close them when you get a chance and we’ll talk about it later.”

Marion lifted the pan, flipped the omelet over and smiled. “Yes, Mr. Moore.”

After breakfast, Brighton wanted to go into town. But Dexter said, “Let’s go up and check out the widow’s walk first, then we can take a long walk all the way up to the east end.” In all the years he’d been coming to Provincetown, he’d stayed in guest houses and rental condos. But he’d never actually been up on a widow’s walk. Now that he had one of his own, he wanted to check it out first hand.

Brighton tilted her head and said, “What’s the *window’s* walk?”

Marion laughed so hard she dropped a breakfast sausage on the floor and Cleo ran for it. He scooped it up and ran out of the room as fast as his little legs would take him.

Dexter smiled. He wanted to explain it in simple terms. He said, “It’s not ‘window’s walk,’ sweetie. It’s the *widow’s* walk. It’s like a roof deck at the very top of the house. A lot of the old houses on Cape Cod have them. When the sailors used to go away to sea for long stretches of time, their wives used to go up to the top of the house, to the widow’s walk, and watch for their husbands’ return. They could see all the way out to

the ocean for miles and miles.” His lifted his arm and spread it out wide. He didn’t tell her that most of the time, the women were waiting for men who had died at sea and would never return.

Brighton jumped off her chair and rubbed her palms together. “I want to see it, Dad. Let’s go. Maybe we’ll see some boats...or even some whales.” Then she grabbed his hand and pulled it toward her small body. She was wearing his favorite pink T-shirt that morning, with a pair of jeans and pink sneakers. The front of the T-shirt read, “Live Life Like A Butterfly: Always Fly with Gentle, Graceful Wings.”

Dexter stood up. “Okay, sweetie. But we have a new rule here in Provincetown. You only go up there with me or Marion. You are never to go up there alone.” Then he turned to Marion. “I’m going to make sure there’s a lock put on the door to the stairwell this week, just to be sure.” He knew Brighton would listen, but he’d also learned that with small children you should never assume anything.

“Good idea, Mr. Moore,” Marion said. Then she turned to Brighton and said, “This is an important new rule, Brighton. Your father is right. You are never to go up there alone. Do you understand?”

Brighton frowned and stared down at her shoes. She didn’t like restrictions, and was too young to realize this one was for her own good. “Yes, I understand.” Then she grabbed Dexter’s hand and said, “Let’s go now, Dad. I want to see where the widows walked to look for their husbands.”

The entrance to the widow’s walk at Keel Cottage was on the third floor. A doorway in the center of the hallway led into a narrow stairwell with semi-circular staircase that had the old-fashioned pie slice steps. When they reached the door, Dexter

frowned because as he had predicted, there was no lock. He made a mental note to call a locksmith that morning to get a good, strong deadbolt put on the door so Brighton wouldn't be able to go exploring on her own.

When they reached the top of the steps, they entered a small, square cupola with a door that led outside. He frowned again; there was no lock on that door either. Evidently, the former owners hadn't had children.

Dexter opened the door and they stepped outside onto a gray painted deck that was surrounded with a glossy white rail. It was a smaller version of the white railing all over the house. He looked out to the sea and put his hand on his hips. Then he took a deep breath, inhaled the salt air, and said, "It's even more beautiful than I thought it would be." Beyond the tree tops—in the front, on the left, and on the right—he had ocean views. "I'll bet if we wait long enough we'll see a whale or two."

While he was staring at the ocean, Brighton stepped forward to get a better look. Her favorite bedtime story had been about a lost whale who couldn't find his mother. When she crossed to the edge, Dexter wasn't worried. The rail came up to her chest.

First she looked up, then looked down. She pointed to the front yard. "Look down there, Dad. Marion is walking back from the mailbox at the end of the driveway. Cleo is with her." She lifted her arm and waved at Marion, shouting Marion's name at the top of her lungs.

Marion looked up and pressed her palm to her throat with one hand and waved with the other. She shook her head back and forth and shouted. "You be careful up there. I get chills just looking up at you that high." Then Cleo ran around in a circle and barked a few times.

“I will,” Brighton shouted. “I’m safe. I’m with Dad.”

Dexter raised his arm and waved. Marion looked small and she seemed so far away. He could barely see her features or the stack of letters she was carrying. But he saw she was smiling and that the wind was blowing a loose strand of gray hair next to her ear.

While he was waving at Marion, Brighton leaned forward and pressed her weight against the white rail. Dexter heard a quick snap and the rail cracked. When the rail went forward, Brighton followed. She fell off the roof so fast it seemed like she went down in slow motion. He reached down to grab Brighton’s pink T-shirt, but he wasn’t fast enough to keep her from falling.

Cleo barked first, and it sounded like a long, deep howl from the bottom of his gut. Then Marion dropped the mail on the driveway and pressed her palms to her face. At the same time she screamed, Dexter reached forward with both arms outstretched and shouted, “*Brighton!*” His heart stopped beating; his legs became wobbly and he went down to his knees. For a second, he couldn’t move—the entire world stopped moving. A force of heat passed through his body and made his ears ring. When he looked up again, he saw Marion down on the driveway with both arms outstretched and her mouth wide open. She looked up at him and tried to open her mouth to speak. But nothing came out.

He ran down all three staircases, taking two at a time. When he reached the front hall, he knocked over a table with a lamp and pushed the screen door open with both hands. His stomach thumped and his heart raced. The images that ran through his head were too awful to even consider.

Cleo was running in circles on the grass, barking up toward the porch. Marion was standing on the grass, in front of the porch, reaching up with both arms to the top of a tall, square shrub. It was a yew, with soft, cushiony evergreens that had been pruned so many times over the years the flat surface was almost completely solid.

When Marion saw him, she said, “I can’t reach her. I’m going to call an ambulance.”

“I’m okay,” Brighton said. “I just can’t get up.”

He looked up and saw Brighton on her back against the yew, struggling to move forward. Without thinking twice, he leaned into the yew and slipped one hand under her neck and the other under her legs. Then he lifted her body and pulled her to his chest. He held her as tightly as he could, and tears poured from his eyes and ran down the sides of his face. When he started to sob, Brighton patted his shoulder and said, “I’m fine, Dad. Stop crying. I’m not hurt.”

Dexter looked at Marion. She pulled a tissue from her apron and wiped a few tears away from her eyes. She shrugged her shoulders and said, “I’ve never seen anything like it, Mr. Moore. When she fell over the side, she didn’t come crashing down. I couldn’t move, but I saw it all. I’m not imagining this, Mr. Moore. She went down in slow motion and landed in this shrub, as if something or someone was holding her safely all the way down.” She wiped her eyes again. “It’s a miracle.”

Dexter kissed Brighton on the cheek and said, “I think we should take her to the hospital down in Hyannis, Marion. You get the keys to the car and drive and I’ll hold her in the back seat.” He held her even tighter. He didn’t want to let go of her.

But Brighton smiled and said, “Dad. I’m fine. Nothing hurts. Put me down so we can go for a walk into town now. I want to get my purse in the house.” She’d just started carrying a purse, and she never went anywhere without it.

Her voice sounded normal, and she seemed to be moving around without a problem. He looked at Marion, and Marion looked back and shrugged her shoulders.

So he slowly lowered her to the grass. “Don’t move too much, sweetie. Something could be broken.”

But when her small feet were planted firmly on the ground, she reached back, brushed a few pieces of yew off her jeans, and sprinted up the front steps. Cleo followed her into the house.

Marion and Dexter looked at each other. “She seems fine,” Dexter said.

Marion crossed to the steps and shook her head. “I’ll go inside and check her out just to be safe, Mr. Moore. You never know.”

“Keep her busy for a while, Marion,” he said. “I have to make a few phone calls before we go into town this morning. I want a lock on that door, I want that railing fixed, and I want to know why the former owners left it in such disrepair.” He was still thankful that Brighton hadn’t been harmed. But when he thought about what could have happened because of the broken rail, he clenched his fists.

While Marion was with Brighton in the kitchen, Dexter went upstairs to the study. It was the room next to his bedroom, at the far end of the second floor. This room was part of another three-story turret on the left side of the house. The furniture was dark and heavy, the walls were imported panels from an English Castle, and there was a huge telescope that looked out to sea. From what Dexter had been told by his Realtor, this had

been Captain Lang's favorite room in the house. A few of Captain Lang's books were still in the bookcases that flanked the fireplace, and a large steering wheel from a ship was stationed on a platform in front of the telescope.

The first phone call Dexter made was to his Realtor. When he told her about the rail and what had just happened, he clenched the phone so hard his knuckles turned white. The real estate agent listened to his anxious voice, in complete shock. Then she quietly explained that Dexter had voluntarily waived all home inspections and that he'd purchased the house "as is." This was a major part of the agreement, and the only way the former owners would have agreed to sell the house at such a low price. It was all legal, and Dexter had signed all the papers without thinking twice. There was nothing he could do now, except be thankful Brighton hadn't been killed and fix it himself.

The agent gave him the name of a reliable local handyman and a good locksmith. When he hung up with her, he called them and asked them to come out that day. Getting a lock on the door that led to the widow's walk was top priority. After the handyman fixed the railing, Dexter wanted him to inspect the entire house for anything else that might be dangerous. He told both the handyman and the locksmith that he'd pay double to get them in and out as quickly as possible. Dexter was usually more conservative with money. He knew that if he squandered his savings he'd have to go back to work in show business, and the thought of doing that made his legs weak. But he wanted these things fixed as fast as possible for Brighton's sake.

Chapter Three

In the weeks that followed, nothing terribly strange or frightening happened.

Dexter and Brighton settled into a pleasant summertime routine. They took long walks into town each morning to get the newspaper, they ate lunch outside on the summer porch off the kitchen, and in the afternoons Brighton played with a little boy her age that lived next door. While she was playing with the neighbor, Dexter left her with Marion and he went to the beach. In California he'd never gone to the beach, partly because he'd grown up there and he'd taken it for granted, and partly because there had never been time.

His life in California had been hectic. It had moved so fast he'd never had time to sit back and relax next to his own swimming pool. If he wasn't doing something with Brighton, he was going to one social event after the other with Michael. Dexter and Michael had decided that if Dexter ever did go back into show business, it would be when Brighton was grown. He wanted to raise his child and take care of his house the old-fashioned way. Michael was always working on different projects and he was gone a good deal of the time. Dexter didn't want Brighton growing up with two absentee parents like other children he'd seen in Hollywood. Besides, as a child actor Dexter had earned his money the hard way. Though he wasn't a billionaire, he had made enough money to enjoy the luxury of being a full-time stay-at-home Dad.

Going to the beach in Provincetown turned out to be an unusual experience. The first few days he went to Herring Cove Beach he sat with all the straight people, staring down at his watch every five minutes and yawning. But while he sat there he noticed that

groups of gay men were entering at Herring Cove, passing him by, and heading down into the dunes. On his third visit to the beach, he followed a group of four gay guys toward the dunes. It was a long walk and the sand was thick and hot and awkward to navigate. But the more he distanced himself from Herring Cove, the more interesting things became. The beachgoers in the dunes were all gay men, and they all wore skimpy swim trunks or nothing at all. Some gay couples huddled on beach towels and kissed, while others walked up and down the tops of the dunes totally naked, with full erections, looking for quick hook-ups.

After walking for twenty minutes in the sand, Dexter spotted an empty section in one of the dunes and he spread out his black beach towel. There was a young gay couple in a higher dune to his right, there was a group of good-looking young gay men in a lower dune on his left, and there was a sexy weightlifter type in the dune in front of him. They were all close enough to see, but far enough away to create an invisible line. Dexter's heart began to race and his breathing increased. He had never been promiscuous in his life—he could count his lovers on one hand with fingers left to spare—and he hadn't had sex in a long time. But he did have one quiet little kink—or fundamental flaw, depending on how it was perceived—that he kept to himself. He loved exhibitionism. He'd always wanted to be a stripper, but because of his career as an actor he'd never been able to do it. He had a clean-cut image to maintain.

But sometimes, especially when he was very lonely, it felt good to be naughty. And his kink was simple and safe: Dexter liked removing his clothes in front of other guys, and the dunes in Provincetown turned out to be his dream come true.

He knew the guys were all watching him. The gay couple was whispering to each other, the weightlifter was wearing dark glasses, and the group of young guys stopped talking completely and looked in his direction. Dexter was new in town, and his spectacular body was drawing attention. So he took a deep breath and slowly removed his clothes. He kicked off his shorts and his full erection bounced; he lifted his arms to stretch and his back arched.

After that first day, he went to the beach as often as he could. He didn't cruise for sex and he didn't allow anyone to cruise him. There was no physical contact at all. But he always put on a good strip show for the guys around him. Best of all, what happened in the Provincetown dunes between gay men remained in the dunes. If he spotted someone in town who had seen one of his blatant amateur strip shows, it was never mentioned. They just nodded, smiled, and continued walking.

Aside from all this, Dexter's first month in Keel Cottage was quiet and simple. He slept better than he'd ever slept in his life, and in the mornings he always woke up with a smile on his face and huge erection between his legs. He masturbated in bed, then took a long hot shower. He was satisfied. He wasn't interested in meeting guys. If he had been, there would have been plenty in Provincetown, especially on the beach. But Dexter was more interested in getting settled and being with Brighton.

When local people and neighbors joked about Keel Cottage being haunted, Dexter smiled and laughed with them. They told him stories about how terrified former owners had been, and how the house always wound up empty eventually. Everyone said it was the ghost of Captain Lang chasing intruders out of his beloved Keel Cottage. So far, he hadn't seen any chairs flying through the house and he hadn't heard any moans or howls

in the middle of the night. He could not understand why anyone would ever leave a house that was so restful.

But it wasn't all perfect. There *were* a few strange things he couldn't explain. At least one kitchen cabinet door would be open in the morning, windows he thought he'd closed would be wide open when he least expected it, and sometimes his iPhone would wind up under the bed without a plausible explanation. One morning he couldn't find his underwear. He'd left a pair of boxers on the bed and had gone into the bathroom to take a shower. When he'd returned, the boxers were gone. And every so often, Cleo would act creepy. He'd sit and stare at nothing, tilting his head from side to side as if he saw something the rest of them couldn't see. But nothing ghoulish ever happened that would make any of them run out the front door with their arms flying in the air.

By early July, Dexter had a deep tan and his muscles were popping again. He'd joined a gym on Bradford Street and he'd started to work out five times a week. He wanted to look good for the Fourth of July weekend. Michael, his ex-partner, was coming to Provincetown for a quick visit to see the new house and to visit Brighton. He was coming alone, without his nineteen-year-old boyfriend.

On the first Friday in July, Dexter and Brighton drove out to Provincetown airport to meet Michael's plane. He'd flown to Boston, then taken a smaller plane to The Cape. The Fourth fell on a Saturday, and Michael was only staying until Monday morning. Brighton was so excited to see him she couldn't stop talking in the back seat of the car. Her legs moved too much and she kept tugging at the top of her seat belt. Dexter bit the inside of his mouth and forced a smile. He wanted to put up a good front for Brighton's sake. But he thought that since Michael hadn't seen his own daughter in well over a

month, he should have planned to spend at least week in Provincetown. Dexter had no idea when Michael would be back for another visit.

When they arrived, Michael was already waiting for them. He was standing on the pavement with two Gucci bags in his hands. Dexter took one look at him and sighed. Michael was wearing tight black jeans, a skintight white shirt, and heavy black boots with pointy toes. His dark brown hair was a little longer and he hadn't shaved in a few days, probably on purpose. Dexter pulled up to where he was standing and took a deep breath. Michael was still as handsome and sexy as he'd always been. When the car stopped, Brighton unhooked her seat belt and jumped out of the car to greet him. Her reaction to Michael always made Dexter wonder. No matter how many times Michael disappointed her, Brighton never stopped worshipping him.

Dexter got out and opened the trunk. He turned around, looked at Michael, and smiled. "How was your flight?" he asked. Now that he was closer he noticed that Michael had a new tattoo on his right arm: a small black band, with swirls and turns, wrapped around his bicep. He was also wearing large diamond studs in both ears. Dexter looked down into the empty trunk and frowned.

Michael lifted his bags and walked to the back of the car. He put his hand on the small of Dexter's back and said, "Hey, baby, how about a hug for Daddy?" Then he put his arms around Dexter's body and squeezed hard. "You look good, baby. Give Daddy a hug now." He knew Dexter liked to be pushed around with a rough hand in bed.

When Michael finally let go, Dexter smiled and stepped back. No one had touched him like that since the last time he'd been with Michael, before Michael had moved out. "It's good to see you, Michael," he said. "Brighton was so excited this

morning she couldn't even eat." He wanted to sound casual and light. He didn't want Michael to know that his heart was pounding, that his knees felt weak, and that he was ready to pull down his pants and bend over the hood of the car.

Brighton reached for Michael's hand and said, "Let's go. You have to see our new house, Dad. It's really great."

Michael patted her head and stared at Dexter. He looked him up and down and said, "You are looking really good, baby." Then he whistled back and added, "Almost too good."

Dexter smiled and said, "You look good too, Michael." But he was lying. He thought the tattoo looked silly and the earrings looked even more ridiculous.

While Dexter put the suitcases into the trunk, Michael strapped Brighton into the back seat. Then Michael closed her door and walked to the back of the car. The trunk lid was still open and she couldn't see or hear them. He grabbed Dexter by the back of the head and kissed him hard. His tongue slipped into Dexter's mouth and probed for a second. When he pulled his head back he whispered, "You taste good, baby." Then he patted Dexter on the ass and walked back to the front of the car.

Dexter stood there with his mouth dropping open. He hadn't expected anything like that to happen.

When they reached the house, Michael got out of the car and stared. He rubbed his jaw and lifted his eyebrows. "This house is something else, baby. I didn't expect to see this. It must have cleaned you out. How could you afford it?"

Dexter got out of the car and opened the trunk. "I decided to put all the money I got from the old house into this house. I don't have a mortgage. I got a good deal here."

Michael pressed his lips together and frowned, and Brighton grabbed his hand and said, “C’mon, Dad. I’ll show you my room, and then I’ll show you your bedroom.”

“Go ahead,” Dexter said. “I’ll get your bags. And be nice to Marion when you see her.” Michael and Marion had never been close. If it hadn’t been for Brighton, Michael would have fired her years earlier.

Later that night, Dexter put Brighton to bed and went downstairs to sit with Michael on the front porch. He wasn’t looking forward to being alone with him, but he didn’t have much of a choice. Brighton’s bedtime was eight o’clock, and Marion announced she was going to her room to read. She had been civil with Michael all through dinner, but it was obvious she wanted to avoid him. She’d barely said three words to him since he’d arrived. And Dexter knew she never read before she went to bed.

When Dexter crossed out to the porch, Michael was sitting on a brand-new white loveseat. The handyman whom Dexter had hired had made the loveseat by hand, with apple green cushions to match the rest of the porch furniture. Michael smoked a cigarette and his legs were stretched out and spread apart. Dexter didn’t allow smoking in the house, but he’d given Michael an old, chipped ashtray to use on the front porch. The chip was sharp and pointy, and Dexter had warned him about it. “Are you all settled in your room, Michael? Do you need anything?” Dexter asked. He wanted to keep the conversation as superficial as possible.

Michael smiled and patted the empty side of the loveseat. “I’m fine,” he said. “Come over here and sit down next to me so I can put my arm around you, baby.” His voice was low and deep. The bulge between his legs stood out.

Dexter hesitated for a moment. When they'd been a couple he'd liked it when Michael had called him "baby." But now it sounded peculiar, almost insulting. He stood there staring at Michael's thick biceps and large, strong hands. Dexter's body was aching to be touched by a strong man like Michael. And even though he and Michael were polar opposites, they'd always shared an outrageous erotic connection. But he lifted his chin and said, "I should sit alone. I don't think your new young lover would like it very much if you put your arm around me. We both have new lives now, Michael."

Michael smiled and shrugged his shoulders. His dark gypsy eyes narrowed. "He's gone, baby. I'm all over him now, and I'm all alone."

Dexter's eyebrows went up and his head went back. "I see," he said. He wondered if the nineteen-year-old had dumped Michael for someone else. But he didn't ask. It didn't really matter anymore.

Michael patted the empty seat again and said, "Come over here and sit next to me, baby." Then he yanked down his zipper, pulled out his long, thick penis, and waved it at Dexter. He was baiting him; Michael had never been able to resist his penis.

Dexter wet his lips and took a shallow breath. He hadn't planned on doing anything with Michael. But now that they were alone and Michael's beautiful penis was right there in front of him, he wasn't sure he'd be able to resist the strong temptation to suck him off. He hadn't had a man in so long he'd almost forgotten what dick tasted like.

While Michael was waving his penis, a gust of wind blew across the porch. It knocked over a potted plant and blew a magazine off the table. The ashtray on the table next to Michael moved. Michael reached forward so it wouldn't fall on the floor. When he tried to grab the ashtray, the new loveseat lunged forward. The back legs of the

loveseat went up, Michael went down on the gray painted floor, and the entire loveseat landed on top of him.

Michael shouted for help; he was scrunched up in a ball and he couldn't move.

Dexter ran over and tried to right the loveseat. But it was so heavy and awkward it took him a few minutes to lift it off Michael's body. He couldn't understand how something so heavy could just blow over. The wind hadn't been that strong.

When Dexter finally lifted it, he helped Michael to his feet and asked, "Are you okay?"

"My dick hurts," Michael said. He was still holding his penis in his hand.

Dexter looked down between Michael's legs. He stepped forward and said, "Let go of it and let me see." Michael had always been such a baby about these things. The slightest cut on his finger sent him into a dramatic tailspin.

Michael lifted his hand and his heavy penis plopped down against his legs. It hung out from the opening of his jeans. Dexter squatted, leaned in, and frowned. When the loveseat went over, Michael's penis must have rubbed against the chipped ashtray. There was a long, red slash on the shaft just below the head, and a few drops of blood dripped from the wound. But it didn't look serious.

Michael was terrified; he wouldn't look down between his legs and his hands started to shake. "What happened?" he asked. "Is my dick okay?"

Dexter shook his head and said, "You're fine. You cut your penis on the chipped ashtray. I don't think you'll need stitches, but you're not going to be using your dick for at least a week or two." For some reason, he smiled when he said this.

Then there was another strong gust of wind. It blew the back of Dexter's hair forward and he thought he heard the sound of distant laughter. Though Marion would have taken pleasure in seeing Michael's penis damaged, she wasn't the one laughing. This was the sound of a man laughing, mixed with the sound of blowing wind. Dexter figured it was one of his neighbors or someone down on Commercial Street.

After that, Dexter wrapped Michael's penis in gauze and Michael spent the rest of the weekend either sitting in a chair or walking very slowly with his legs spread apart. Dexter told Brighton that Michael had sprained his ankle. But he told Marion the truth on Saturday morning when they were alone in the kitchen. She laughed so hard she ran cross-legged to the bathroom.

On Sunday afternoon, about two hours before Dexter had to take Michael back to the airport, Michael asked to speak to him alone. They went upstairs to the study and Michael sat down very slowly on a brown leather wing chair. He couldn't move fast because when his underwear rubbed against the cut on his penis, it burned.

Dexter sat behind his desk and shrugged his shoulders. "What's so important?" he asked.

Michael frowned. "First, I can't find my cell phone, all my underwear is missing, and every night I go to bed with the covers pulled up to my neck and I wake up a few hours later freezing because the covers are down around my ankles. There's something very creepy about this place, and it's freaking me out, man."

Dexter tilted his head sideways and shrugged his shoulders. "You must have misplaced your underwear and cell phone, and you probably got hot during the night and kicked the covers off yourself."

“Maybe,” Michael said. “But I heard someone whistle, too, last night.”

Dexter laughed and waved his arm. “You were probably dreaming, Michael. Is this all you wanted to talk about?”

Michael took a deep breath and frowned. “No, there’s something else. I’ve been putting it off all weekend.” He stared down at his shoes and said, “I’m just going to come right out with it.” He took a deep breath and shrugged his shoulders. “We’re broke, baby. The money is gone.”

Dexter started. “How can we be broke? That’s impossible.” He had always thought he had enough money to last him the rest of his life. He knew Michael had made a few investments with his money, but nothing too risky.

Michael wouldn’t look him in the eye. “Remember that deal I told you about? The deal with Preview Pictures?”

“Yes,” Dexter said. He remembered something about investing money in a new motion picture company. But he wasn’t sure how much money Michael was planning to invest. He’d always trusted Michael to handle all their finances and manage his money, and he’d never had to worry about anything.

“It all crashed and burned, baby,” Michael said. “The company folded and everyone lost their money.”

“How much did you invest?” Dexter asked. His heart began to pound in his ears and his hands felt shaky.

Michael lifted his head and looked into his eyes. He shrugged his shoulders and said, “Everything we had, baby. It’s all gone.” He sat forward and lifted his hands, palm up. “But don’t freak out yet. This is why I came here this weekend. I want to get back

together, baby. I made a huge mistake when I left you, and I want us to be a family again.”

Dexter looked into his eyes. His heart started to race and a lump formed in his throat. He’d waited so long for Michael to say these words. But before he could open his mouth to reply, a floor lamp next to Michael’s chair toppled over and landed in Michael’s lap.

Michael jumped up from the chair and pointed to the lamp. “You see,” he shouted. “This is the sort of thing that’s been happening to me all weekend. That lamp tried to kill me.”

Dexter wanted to laugh. Michael looked so pathetic, standing there staring at a floor lamp as if it were ready to jump up and smack him in the head. “The lamp is old, Michael. It’s probably not balanced.”

Michael looked down at the lamp with raised eyebrows and slowly stepped away from the chair. He crossed to the desk and placed his hands on the surface. He leaned forward, looked into Dexter’s eyes, and said, “We can sell this place for a huge profit, go back to Hollywood and buy a condo, and pick up just where we left off, baby.” He reached for Dexter’s hand. “We’re good together, we always have been.” Then he grabbed his crotch and said, “And if that fucking ashtray hadn’t cut my dick, I would have been fucking you all weekend to prove it. Rough and hard, just the way you like it, baby. You’re tongue would have been hanging out of your mouth. I know what you like in bed, Dexter. I know what you need, baby.”

Dexter pressed his lips together and smiled. He’d fantasized about this moment for almost a year, the day Michael would come back to him. But then he looked over

Michael's shoulder and gazed at the smooth walnut fireplace mantel. He couldn't wait for cold weather so he could build his first fire in Keel Cottage. When he looked to the left, he took a deep breath because the sky looked so blue and clear through the long thin windows at the front of the turret. He'd always dreamed of having a house with a circular room. He'd always dreamed of living in a place where no one cared that he'd once been a famous TV star. There were other famous people living quiet lives in Provincetown, playwrights and poets. Dexter was nothing compared to them.

Michael squeezed his hand. "What do you say? Are you coming back to Hollywood?"

Dexter lowered his head and frowned. "I'll think about it," he said. Then he pulled his hand back, stood up from his desk, and said, "We'd better get moving. You don't want to miss your flight." He didn't want to argue about the money; he was still in shock. And he also knew that it was his own fault. When they'd separated, they should have divided up all their assets like married couples did in a divorce. Dexter had refused to do that because it would have meant they were never getting back together. And he hadn't been ready to face that fact when he'd left Los Angeles.

Chapter Four

On Monday afternoon, Dexter made phone calls to Los Angeles. He would have called earlier, but because of the three-hour time difference he had to wait until at least noon. The first call was to his accountant in Los Angeles to check his finances. When Dexter told the accountant what Michael said, the man hesitated. He'd been Dexter's accountant for more than ten years and they knew each other socially. Then he confirmed what Michael had already told Dexter. Their money was gone and Dexter and Michael were broke.

Dexter hung up and stared out the window for a few minutes. He'd heard stories about Hollywood actors losing their money, but never imagined it would happen to him. His stomach turned and his fingers felt numb. He'd never had to worry about money. And in the same respect, he'd never been one to waste money either. He'd always shopped for bargains, he'd never spoiled Brighton with extravagant gifts, and there was always a nice reserve in his checking account for an emergency. (Michael didn't know about this money; it had always been Dexter's little secret.) If Dexter lived frugally for the next year, there was enough money in his checking account to cover all his monthly living expenses. And, thankfully, he didn't have to worry about mortgage payments with Keel Cottage, and he'd already paid his property taxes for the year. His accountant had wanted him to take out a mortgage for tax purposes. But he'd refused. Dexter had wanted to own the house outright, and he was glad he'd insisted.

When he realized all this, that he wasn't totally broke, he took a deep breath and sighed. But that spare money would only last for a year or so with a very prudent lifestyle. And he knew there was no way he could live with that kind of anxiety. Whether he sold Keel Cottage or not, he still had to think about his financial future. He had a daughter to support; it was time to get serious. So the last phone call he made that morning was to his agent in Hollywood. Dexter hadn't actually worked in show business in years, but he still kept in touch with his agent and they'd always had a good relationship—he'd learned not to burn bridges in Hollywood. Working as an actor again was the last thing he wanted to do, but he didn't know how to do anything else. If he wanted to hold on to his life, he didn't have much of a choice.

His agent was so thrilled to hear from him he almost gushed into the telephone. Dexter wasn't like most childhood television stars are as adults. He was better-looking now than he was then, he'd never done anything that would hurt his public reputation, and he'd always attracted the best publicity without controversy. His agent told him about an opportunity he'd just heard about that might be interesting. One of the newer, aggressive Hollywood TV personalities was branching out into production, and he was looking for an angle to do a new reality show. He wanted to film the life of a well-known star for three months, but he wasn't having much success getting a star. This producer wanted someone interesting, someone who would attract ratings, a character who the public loved. All the interesting people in Hollywood were turning him down because they thought it was beneath them. There was a long list of C-listers lobbying for this reality show, but the producer wasn't interested in them and he was almost ready to disregard the entire concept.

At first, Dexter flatly refused. The thought of being followed by a film crew day and night for months made him nauseated. But when his agent told him how much money he'd make doing a reality show, he stopped and took a deep breath. With that kind of money he'd be safe again. And it would be his own money, not Michael's. It was an offer too good to refuse, and he was too desperate to be above any offers now. So he closed his eyes tightly and told his agent to get him the job, and to ask for even more money. Dexter had learned how to play hardball in Hollywood, and he wasn't shy about asking anyone for anything.

A few hours later, Dexter's agent called back. Dexter had just returned from the beach and he was undressing so he could take a nap before dinner. When the phone rang, he'd just removed his shoes and swim trunks. He knew it was his agent because he had voice-activated caller ID. He crossed to the nightstand next to his bed, wearing nothing but a black T-shirt. But the phone wasn't there. He lowered his head and followed the sound of the ring to the floor. He got down on his hands and knees and lifted the dust ruffle. The phone must have fallen off the nightstand and slid beneath the bed. He reached under the bed fast and pressed the talk button.

When Dexter pressed the phone to his ear, his agent told him the producer was thrilled to hear Dexter was willing to do the reality show. They made the deal that day, and for more money than Dexter had even imagined. Dexter closed his eyes and sighed, then thanked his agent and told him to send all the paperwork.

After the phone call, Dexter got up from the floor and sat down on the bed. He pulled off his T-shirt and rested his elbows on his knees. He wasn't thrilled about turning his home into a public spectacle, but he smiled anyway. He knew he'd been lucky and the

timing had been perfect. If he hadn't called his agent, he might have missed the opportunity. A year earlier, the first person he would have called would have been Michael. But this time he stared at the telephone and shook his head back and forth. Dexter and Michael weren't a couple anymore, and Michael could find out about the new reality show just like everybody else—when the announcement was made public.

Dexter also wasn't thrilled at the thought of Brighton getting remotely involved in any kind of show business. When he thought about his lost childhood, his heart sank. But she wasn't going to be subjected to the pressures of a long-running TV series, they wouldn't be filming in a studio, and she wouldn't miss any school. Besides, he knew Brighton well. He had a feeling that when she found out about the reality show, she'd fall asleep with a smile on her face for the next six months.

Dexter stretched his arms in the air and yawned. He hadn't slept well the night before and his body was sore from swimming. But while he was yawning he thought he heard something. It sounded like a man clearing his throat. Dexter turned to his left and saw that the door was closed. He'd checked it twice to make sure it was locked, so he knew no one else was in the room.

Then he heard it again. It was definitely a man's deep voice clearing his throat, louder this time. Dexter turned to his right and looked at the fireplace. His eyes opened wide and his jaw dropped. He jumped sideways and pressed his naked back against the headboard. There was a man with a beard sitting in one of the tall-backed leather wing chairs that flanked the fireplace. His legs were crossed at the knees, his elbow was resting on the arm, and his chin was in his palm. He stared at Michael and winked, then stood

up from the chair, walked to the foot of the bed, and looked down at Michael's naked body with a wide, nasty grin.

Dexter reached for the phone and said, "Who are you? What are you doing in here? I'm calling the police right now." He pulled the duvet cover up with his other hand to conceal his private parts. His naked legs and torso were still showing. But at least his genitals were covered.

The man laughed and rubbed his beard. "Put down that silly contraption. You know who I am." The man's voice was deep and strong. He spoke with an old New England accent that almost sounded British.

Dexter lowered the telephone and leaned forward. He shook his head back and forth and his eyes blinked. The man looked exactly like Captain Major Lang from the painting over the parlor fireplace. He was wearing the same sea captain's uniform and his eyes were the same vivid blue. "I know who you look *like*," Dexter said, "but I want to know who you *are*. This isn't funny, man. Did Michael put you up to this so I'd get scared and sell the house? Because it's not going to work, whoever you are."

The man turned to the right and looked out the window. He laughed and waved his arm. "That loser Michael isn't creative or smart enough to think of something that clever." He turned back and looked into Dexter's eyes. "This isn't a joke. I'm Captain Major Lang." Then he laughed and stared at Dexter's naked legs. He sucked in his bottom lip and said, "Did anyone ever tell you that you are magnificent when you're naked?"

Dexter ignored the compliment and moved toward the middle of the bed. "I don't believe in ghosts," he said. "So you'd better tell me who you are, and fast."

“Do you remember your first morning in Keel Cottage?” Captain Lang asked.

“Who do you think stopped your daughter from falling to her death? I knew those two buffoons from Boston who sold you the house hadn’t fixed that railing on the widow’s walk. They said you were getting the house cheap enough, and they didn’t want to invest another dime in it. I followed you and your daughter up there that day to make sure nothing catastrophic would happen to either of you.”

“You’re lying,” Dexter shouted. “Get out of my house. I won’t press charges if you leave right now.”

Captain Lang gave him a stern look. “This is *my* house, young man. You’re the one trespassing.”

“That’s it,” Dexter said. “I’m calling the police.” He wasn’t going to play games with a lunatic.

When he turned the phone on, Captain Lang said, “Who do you think pushed that loveseat over and pinned the loser, Michael, to the porch floor? I didn’t plan on his dick getting cut, but it was a nice added touch. It kept him from sleeping with you all weekend. And who do you think opens the kitchen cabinet every morning to frighten your housekeeper? I know you sleep in the nude and I know what you do to yourself every morning when you wake up. I enjoy watching you, especially when you call out my name when you climax. The first time you saw my portrait, you made a comment about how attractive I am. You only whispered this, but I heard you. I’ve been with you and I’ve been watching you since the first day you arrived at Keel Cottage.”

Dexter held the phone near his cheek and stared at Captain Lang. “You heard me speak to your portrait that first day? You’ve been *spying* on me?”

Captain Lang laughed and rubbed his beard. He took a few steps toward Dexter. “Forgive me, but this is all new to me, too. In my day, there were plenty of young men willing to pull down their pants for me. I took them all without thinking twice. There were more men than I care to count. But sex between two men was all done very secretively, and there was never an open opportunity to have a young man as beautiful as you actually live here in Keel Cottage. It just wasn’t done in those days. So excuse me for eavesdropping, Dexter. I know it’s not polite, but when I saw you were the new owner of the house, I just couldn’t help myself.”

Dexter stopped dialing the police. He put the phone down on the bed and tilted his head. He didn’t believe in ghosts, but who else could have known these things? No one knew he’d been calling Captain Lang’s name out loud while he’d been jerking off each morning. “Okay,” he said, “if you are Captain Lang, then why haven’t you been scaring us away? From what I’ve heard, that’s what you do to all the new owners of this house. Thanks to you, the previous owners were so terrified they practically gave the house away. And why would you save my daughter from falling to the ground? You’re supposed to be an evil ghost.”

Captain Lang smiled and shrugged his wide shoulders. “Because I *like* you. I never liked anyone else who lived here.”

Dexter raised an eyebrow. “Do something ghost-like. Walk through a wall or something. Prove it to me.”

Captain Lang took a deep breath and sighed. “Very well,” he said. He turned away from the window and went to the fireplace. He lifted his right arm, flicked his wrist, and stepped right into the mantel.

A second later, he stepped back into the room with a huge grin on his face. This time he was naked. His torso was lean and strong, with well-developed abdominal muscles and large, square chest muscles. There was a fine layer of dark hair on his chest and legs. Above his long, thick penis there was a thicker, untrimmed patch of hair.

Dexter let go of the duvet cover and pressed one hand on his stomach and the other over his mouth. "Either I'm seeing things and I've finally lost my mind, or you really are the ghost of Captain Lang."

Captain Lang walked to the end of the bed and looked down at Dexter's smooth, tan body. When he'd dropped the cover, Dexter was completely naked again. Lang smiled and said, "Call me Lang. Captain Lang is much too formal for two people who know each other so well."

Dexter pulled the cover up again and said, "I don't know you at all. I've only seen your portrait, and heard all the ghost stories about you. And I had no idea you were gay."

"I guess that's true," Captain Lang said. "How could you have known? When I was alive, no one knew my sexual preference. I was considered a bachelor. But I do know *you* well. I've been with you since the first day you removed your clothes in this room. And you're the most beautiful young man who has ever been in this house." Then he stepped toward the bed and rested his large hand on Dexter's right knee.

Dexter felt his hand. It didn't feel like the cold hand of a ghost. It was warm and strong and it made Dexter's balls tighten. "If you are a ghost, then why is it that I can see you and feel you? I thought ghosts were transparent...on another wavelength or frequency. I'm not psychic and I have no special abilities."

Captain Lang laughed. “Don’t believe all the nonsense you hear on television from fake seers. I have no idea what wavelengths or frequencies are. The reason you can see me and feel me is because I’m allowing you to see me and feel me. I could disappear at any time, and I’d be invisible to you again and you wouldn’t be able to feel me.” Then he sat down on the bed and slid his hand up the back of Dexter’s leg. When the tips of his fingers reached the bottom of Dexter’s ass, he closed his eyes and sighed. “I’ve wanted to do this since the first day I saw you...even before you undressed.”

Dexter’s heart began to race. “You’ve been watching me undress? You’ve seen me masturbate?”

Lang nodded yes and continued to grope his ass.

Dexter lifted his leg so Lang wouldn’t stop. “Why didn’t you do this sooner?”

“You weren’t ready,” Lang said. “I wanted to give you time to get used to the house and to get used to having me in the house. You knew, deep down, that I’ve been here. I’ve been leaving you signs too obvious to ignore.”

If this was really happening, Dexter now had an explanation for all the peculiar things that had been happening around the house. “Thank you for saving my daughter. She could have been killed.”

Lang squeezed the back of Dexter’s thigh and said, “She’s a wonderful child, and what the former owners did was wrong. I never liked them. That’s why I got rid of them. The wife was a loud mouth, and the husband was her meek little toy. They never had sex, and when he masturbated he watched young girls, children, on television. I wanted to burn the house down the first time I saw it happen. They were repulsive people.”

Dexter had never been more confused in his life. A ghost with morals? He still thought he was losing his mind. But instead of pulling away from Captain Lang, he spread his legs wider and moved forward on the bed. When he rested his head on the pillow, Captain Lang's hand went up the crack of his ass.

Maybe this was the ultimate jerk-off fantasy. He'd jerked off to the image of Captain Lang's portrait before, and now he was dreaming about Captain Lang sitting on his bed, naked, feeling his ass. He looked into Captain Lang's eyes and said, "Tell me I'm dreaming all this and that I'm not going crazy. Tell me I'll be fine."

Captain Lang smiled. "You are fine, and you are safe. But you are not dreaming. This is real." Then he climbed on top of Dexter and put his strong arms around him. "I'd like to make love to you now. But only if you want me to. If you're not ready, I can wait for as long as it takes, Dexter."

Dexter's head went back and he closed his eyes. He lifted his legs, bent them at the knee, and arched his back in complete submission. Captain Lang's beard was pressed to his cheek by then, and he could feel Captain Lang's solid erection poking the tender spot between his legs. Lang's beard was rough and it gave Dexter an erection; Lang's penis was huge and it was searching for an open, willing hole to penetrate. Dexter placed his palms on Captain Lang's shoulders and said, "Yes. Make love to me. I don't care what you are, ghost or human or dream. I want to do this."

Captain Lang kissed him on the lips. He shoved his tongue into Dexter's mouth, probed as deeply as he could, and sucked so hard Dexter's cheeks went into his jaw. His beard made Dexter's heart beat faster; his strong grip made Dexter's chest heave with

desire. When Lang reached down and guided the tip of his penis to Dexter's small, tight opening, Dexter whispered, "Do you have a condom? I only have safe sex."

Lang kissed his earlobe and said, "I'm a ghost. There is no need for a condom or any lubrication. I know how to enter you so you'll never feel an ounce of discomfort or pain. And I know how to fill you with pleasure you never knew existed." He stuck his tongue into Dexter's ear and rolled it around a few times. "Will you allow me to enter your body?"

No one had ever asked for permission before, not even Michael. The few guys he'd been with had just poked around and shoved it into him. This one gentle act made Dexter feel special, as if he possessed something magical of his own. He smiled and nodded. "Yes, I want you inside me."

When the tip of Lang's penis entered Dexter's body, Lang's mouth opened and he moaned. When the entire erection was buried as deeply as it would go, Lang kissed him on the lips again. Dexter closed his eyes and saw sparks and flashes; his entire body tingled and the tips of his toes felt numb with pleasure. Captain Lang had been correct. Dexter didn't feel an ounce of discomfort or pain. The thick, long shaft had slipped into his opening with one simple thrust. Dexter spread his legs as wide as they would go and said, "If I'm dreaming all this and I am losing my mind, it certainly was worth it."

Then Captain Lang began to buck his hips with a slow rhythm. His erection passed in and out of Dexter's hole with an easiness Dexter hadn't known was possible. The friction made Dexter's eyelids flutter; the pounding made his nipples hard. As the rhythm increased and Lang slammed into him with louder smacks, Dexter reached down

with his right hand and grabbed his own penis. He gripped his erection and whispered to Lang, "Please don't stop."

After what seemed like an hour of absolute ecstasy, Dexter couldn't hold back. Lang's rigid erection touched all his most sensitive spots, both inside his body and around the rim of his anus. He'd been on the edge for a while, and it finally became too intense to control. "I'm coming," he whispered. "I can't hold back any longer." Captain Lang was fucking him so hard now his legs were bouncing up and down and the bed was rocking away from the wall.

"Don't hold back," Lang said.

They both climaxed at the same time. Dexter exploded all over his own chest. He wanted to shout at the top of his lungs, but he couldn't because Marion and Brighton were downstairs working on supper. Captain Lang grunted a few times, moaned Dexter's name in a stage whisper, and fell on top of his body.

Dexter ran his fingers across Lang's muscular back. There were ripples and ridges; it was that glorious, masculine mix of firm and smooth. If this really was Captain Lang, he had the body of a real man who had gained his muscle through hard work and long hours spent on the deck of a ship. Dexter's legs were still up and bent at the knees, and Lang was still inside his body. He opened his eyes and said, "If I'm dreaming all this, why are you still here? And how is it that I can still feel you inside me?"

Lang laughed. "It's because you're not dreaming, Dexter."

Dexter looked over Lang's shoulder at the clock on his nightstand. It was almost seven o'clock and he had to get ready for dinner. He tapped Lang's shoulders and said, "I

can't believe what time it is. You have to pull out and get up. I have to get ready for supper."

Lang bucked his hips again and his erection went deeper. "That's right. You missed your nap today. You always take a nap between five and six, then you get ready for dinner at seven."

The magnitude of all this finally hit Dexter. Captain Lang had been watching him all along. Lang knew his routine and he knew his life. "You know everything about me, and yet I know nothing about you," he said.

Lang slapped his ass hard and pulled back. When his penis slid out of Dexter's body, Dexter felt a chill run down his spine, as if an important part of his own body had been removed too suddenly. "I'll tell you everything," Lang said. "But right now you have to get ready." Then he stood up from the bed and crossed back toward the fireplace.

Dexter sat up and lifted his arm. "Wait," he said. "Will you be back?"

Lang lifted his right eyebrow and smiled. Then he rubbed his palms together and said, "Oh, you can be sure I'll be back for more."

Chapter Five

“Have you heard from Dad?” Brighton asked. She was picking and shoving the green beans on her plate, uninterested in food. Brighton had never been a huge eater, and vegetables were at the bottom of her list.

“No, sweetie, I haven’t. But I’m sure he’s fine.” Dexter forced a smile, but he was holding his fork so tightly it started to bend. Michael had promised Brighton that he’d call when he arrived in L.A. to let her know he was okay. But Michael was funny about promises: you never knew whether or not he’d fulfill them.

“Finish your dinner, Brighton,” Marion said. She always ate dinner with them. Dexter had always insisted. Marion was the most important female influence in Brighton’s life, and it made her family.

Brighton gave Marion a look and shoved a green bean into her mouth. She chewed with scrunched lips, and when she swallowed, she gulped so hard the dog’s ears moved.

Dexter put down his fork and sighed. He had to tell them about the TV show and he wasn’t sure how they were going to react. “I have an announcement to make. There’s going to be something very interesting happening here at Keel Cottage very soon.”

Marion and Brighton looked at him with wide eyes. “What is it, Dad?” Brighton asked. She was on the edge of her seat, kicking her right leg back and forth.

“They are going to be filming a TV show here,” Dexter said. “We’re all going to be part of a new reality show.” His voice went up high, with a playful lilt.

Brighton sat up and clapped her hands together. “On TV?” She was smiling and her eyes were glowing. “Is Cleo going to be on TV too?”

Dexter nodded. “Yes,” he said. “Even Marion will be on the show.”

Marion put down her fork and said, “Oh, Mr. Moore. I don’t know about this at all. What kind of reality show?” Marion was a stern, private woman. She avoided crowds and she despised any form of attention. “This doesn’t sound like you at all, Mr. Moore.”

Dexter took a short breath and frowned. Marion knew him well. She knew he craved his privacy just as much as she did, and this outrageous announcement was out of character. “It’s very simple. They are going to follow us around with cameras, day and night. It’s like a daily chronicle of our lives.”

“Oh, Mr. Moore,” Marion said. “Are you sure about this?” She smoothed out her napkin and pressed her lips together.

He shrugged his shoulders. “Marion,” he said. “I don’t have much of a choice. I’ll explain why I’m doing this later. But trust me, it’s not something I’m looking forward to either. It was strictly a financial decision. You have to trust me.”

She stared at him for a moment, then she lifted her eyebrows, smiled, and patted the top of his hand. “I see.”

Brighton jumped off her chair and shouted, “Well, I can’t wait, Dad. I can’t wait to be on TV.” Then she looked down at Cleo, under the table waiting for a piece of food to drop. “And Cleo can’t wait either.”

After dinner, Dexter, Brighton, and Cleo took a walk into town for ice cream. They walked all the way up to a new little ice cream shop in the east end, and then back to Keel Cottage. By the time they were home, it was well past Brighton’s bedtime and

Marion brought her upstairs for her bath. Dexter yawned a few times and told them he was going to bed early, too. He said he wanted to start a new novel that night, and if he waited until later he'd never do it.

But the real reason he was going to bed early was because of what had happened in his room before dinner. He couldn't stop thinking about Captain Lang; he still wasn't sure if it had all been a dream.

When he went into his bedroom, he closed the door and clicked the lock. He looked around the room and saw that it was empty. He gulped and said, "Are you here now? Are you in this room?"

No one answered.

If there really was a ghost, and it was Captain Lang, Dexter knew one simple, direct way to get his attention. Dexter had a feeling he knew what Captain Lang liked, and he was more than willing to give it to him. So he went to the bed and removed his shoes and socks. He pulled off his shirt and dropped his pants. When he was naked, he picked up his clothes and slowly moved to one of the wing chairs in front of the fireplace. He dropped his clothes on a chair, lifted his arms, and stretched. His back arched and his ass rounded out. Then he walked to the bed, pulled back the duvet, and lowered his body to the mattress face down.

When he was flat on the bed, he spread his legs and shoved a pillow beneath his stomach. "If you're watching me right now, come to bed." He couldn't believe he was talking to a ghost.

A minute later, Dexter felt a gentle breeze brush against his naked ass. When he lifted his head and looked back toward the fireplace, he saw Lang standing next to a wing

chair. Lang was also naked, except for his sea captain's hat. The hat tilted down, over his right eyebrow, and covered half his forehead. He was holding a full erection in his massive palm.

This was, indeed, real. And Dexter knew that he hadn't been dreaming.

Lang lowered his chin and said, "I was watching you while you undressed for bed. I wasn't sure if you wanted me to watch."

Dexter rested his cheek against the pillow and spread his legs wider. He said, "I knew you were watching, and that's why I took my time. It's okay." Dexter had never admitted his harmless private exhibitionism to anyone, not even to Michael, and he'd been with Michael for years. "For some reason I can't explain, I feel close to you." Dexter reached back with his right hand and ran it slowly up and down the right side of his smooth ass. His entire body was tan that year. "Are you coming to bed?"

"Do you want me to come to bed?"

Dexter lifted his arms and stretched. "Yes," he said. He wanted to be filled with Lang's erection again; he wanted Lang to rub his beard across the back of his neck. And he wanted to be in Lang's strong, safe arms all night long.

Lang climbed up on the bed and mounted him. He kissed the back of Dexter's neck and said, "You are absolutely the most beautiful young man I've ever known." Then he pressed the tip of his penis into Dexter's anus and plunged all the way to the bottom.

Then Lang fucked Dexter so hard he came for the first time in his entire life without touching his penis. And when Dexter opened his eyes the next morning, he was still on his stomach and Lang was still on top of him. But more than that, Lang's dick was

inside his body again. The lips of Dexter's opening were clamped around the shaft. He smiled and said, "I like waking up like this. You feel so huge. Did you sleep well?"

Lang laughed. "Ghosts don't sleep, Dexter. I was here with you all night, but I didn't sleep."

"What did you do all night?" he asked. "You must have been bored out of your mind." Dexter would never forget that night. They'd fucked for hours, then he'd fallen asleep in Lang's arms.

Lang reached down for a handful of Dexter's ass and said, "It's not like that. Time means nothing to me. That's not a bad thing."

Dexter lifted his head and looked at the clock. It was almost seven and he knew Brighton would be up soon. She'd be looking for him. He took a deep breath and said, "I have to get up and get dressed. Brighton will be knocking on the door, and I have to have a talk with Marion. I have to explain this TV show I'm doing here at Keel Cottage."

Lang frowned. "I'm not happy about this TV show, but I know why you're doing it, Dexter. I heard you talking to Michael. The man should be horse-whipped for losing all your money. In my day he would have walked the plank. I just wish there were some other way for you to make money."

Dexter adjusted his legs. Lang's erection inside his body was making his balls tingle. "Believe me, I'm not looking forward to having Keel Cottage turned into a three-ring circus, but I'll have to sell the house if I don't make money within the next year. I don't know what else to do."

"We can talk about it later," Lang said. "Right now I want to do something else to you." His pelvis began to move, and he licked the back of Dexter's neck and moaned.

Dexter bent his legs at the knee and closed his eyes. The bed began to rock and his erection rubbed against the white sheets. He hadn't had this much sex with anyone since the first week he'd met Michael years earlier. But Lang was better in bed than Michael. His dick was bigger and thicker. And thanks to all his past experiences when he was alive, he knew exactly what to do with it.

Fifteen minutes later, they climaxed together. This was the third time Lang had fucked him and Dexter was curious about something. So when Lang pulled out of his body and stood next to the bed, Dexter asked, "When you climax, do you actually come?" He knew something entered his body, but he was dry by the time he went into the shower.

Captain Lang ran his palm through his dark, wavy hair and said, "It's complicated to explain. But yes, I do come. I experience an orgasm similar to yours, and there is a release similar to yours."

Dexter tilted his head and twisted his lips. He didn't understand. "But I'm always dry when it's over." Dexter had always been the bottom guy—he knew who he was. And Michael had always been the top guy. With Michael, Dexter had never used condoms because they'd been monogamous (there was no sex by the time Michael started cheating on him with the nineteen-year-old), and he'd never been dry after sex.

Dexter laughed. "That's because it all disappears. It's not supposed to be real. I'm not supposed to be real. Yet I am real, and I do orgasm with real come."

Dexter knelt on the bed and put his arms around Lang's wide shoulders. "But you are real. I can feel you now. I don't understand."

Lang lowered his arms and placed his palms on Dexter's firm buttocks. He squeezed and said. "I told you it was complicated. When I'm with you, I am real. But when I'm not with you I don't exist anymore. I'm the real thing, but only in your eyes. You make me real." Then he pressed his middle finger to Dexter's anus and said, "It's like when two people fall in love and come together as one. They look at each other and each believes he is with the most wonderful, beautiful person in the world. To everyone else in the world he could be grotesque and ugly. But what they see is all that matters. The lovers are both magnificent. And that's the magical part."

Dexter still didn't fully understand, and he didn't have time to ask any more questions. "I wish I could stay in bed with you all day, but I have to get dressed. Will you be here later?" Lang's finger was now inside his body. Dexter spread his legs and backed into Lang's hand.

Lang kissed the top of his head. "I'll be here for a while, Dexter."

Dexter licked Lang's beard and started to ride his finger. "You've turned me into a sex maniac. I've never been like this with anyone. I feel like I can't get enough of you."

Lang inserted two more fingers and said, "I feel the same way about you, Dexter. I just hope I haven't made a huge mistake."

Dexter didn't hear his last sentence. His head was back, his mouth was open, and his body was moving up and down.

Chapter Six

After Labor Day, Brighton went back to school and Dexter had his days to himself again. He drove her to school each morning, kissed her goodbye, and went back to Keel Cottage so he could spend the rest of the morning in bed with Captain Lang. He told Marion he was working on a screenplay in the study next to his bedroom and he didn't want to be disturbed. But he was really working on what Captain Lang had between his legs. And Captain Lang wasn't shy about taking what he wanted from Dexter.

In the afternoons, Dexter went to the beach. He didn't go out to the dunes anymore and he didn't strip for other men. Now that he had Captain Lang in his life, he didn't feel the need to show off his body. The only one he wanted to strip for was Captain Lang. So he went to the beach at Herring Cove each day and sat in the sun alone. He watched the ocean and enjoyed the last few weeks of warm weather. He knew from past experience as a tourist in town that some of the best beach days in Provincetown were after Labor Day. It was less crowded and there weren't as many bugs.

Then one breezy afternoon in mid-September, Dexter tripped over a stack of books that had been piled in the sand. He was on his way to an empty section of the beach to set up his towel and he wasn't watching where he was going. His right foot hit the books; he lost his balance and fell down next to a man wearing bright red swim trunks. The man had been lying flat on his back. He bolted forward and asked, "Are you okay?" His voice was high-pitched and nasal. The stack of books was now strewn all over the sand.

Dexter lifted his head and smiled. "I'm sorry," he said. "I wasn't looking where I was going." He got up on his knees and brushed sand off his naked chest. Dexter was wearing black swim trunks, long ones that went down to his knees. He reached to his right and gathered the books into a pile again.

The guy smiled and said, "I've seen you around town. My name is Elliot Bransford." He extended his arm to shake Dexter's hand.

Dexter reached out and said, "I'm Dexter Moore. I just moved to Provincetown this summer." Elliot had a friendly round face, light brown hair, and small green eyes. His nose twisted to the right and his chin had a deep cleft. There was a thick patch of brown hair in the middle of his breastbone, and his short, muscular legs were covered with more hair. He wasn't fat, but he had love handles forming, a slight paunch, and the beginning signs of middle-age man-breasts.

"It's nice to meet you, Dexter," Elliot said. "I've been living here year round for the past five years. I moved up from New York and opened a shop after my lover of ten years died. He had cancer, not AIDS."

Dexter's eyebrows went up and his head jerked back. Elliot's voice sounded defensive.

When he saw the surprised expression on Dexter's face, Elliot lowered his head and smiled. "I'm sorry," he said. "That didn't come out right. It's just that when people hear that a gay man in his thirties died, they automatically assume that it was AIDS. I hate stereotypes. My partner had leukemia, and he suffered for a long time." Then he squared his shoulders and looked into Dexter's eyes.

Dexter shrugged his shoulders. "I understand," he said. "Sorry to hear about your partner. It must have been hard. I was with the same guy for ten years and he left me." He reached for his beach towel and asked, "Do you mind if I park here?"

Elliot patted the sand. "Have a seat," he said. "I hate sitting on the beach alone. I get bored."

They sat together for the rest of the afternoon. Elliot told Dexter he owned a men's clothing store in the middle of town, on Commercial Street, called Naughty, Trendy Bad Boiz. It was one of those shops that catered to young gay men with great bodies and more attitude than money. It was stocked with expensive low-rise jeans, trendy T-shirts, and funky designer shoes. Elliot said he rarely went to the beach during the summer season, and he loved it when September rolled around and he had some free time to just sit and relax. When Dexter told Elliot about his past and his famous role on the TV sitcom, Elliot pressed his palm to his mouth and said he knew there was something familiar about Dexter. But Elliot was more impressed by the fact that Dexter had adopted a child and that he was raising her alone now. Elliot had always wanted a child, but he'd always been apprehensive about going through with it.

When Dexter told Elliot that he was living in Keel Cottage, Elliot laughed and said, "Ah well, you're the guy who bought the haunted house. Everyone in town's been dying of curiosity about you. Provincetown is a very small town, and everyone knows everything. From what I've heard, the previous owners left that house screaming."

Dexter laughed. "Well, everyone in town will be disappointed to know I haven't seen any mean ghosts yet. Actually, I fall in love with the house more each day. I thought the transition from Hollywood to Cape Cod would be hard. But it hasn't been. I feel like

I've lived in Keel Cottage all my life." He wasn't lying. There weren't any mean ghosts, just the attractive ghost of a sea captain who looked like Hugh Jackman and fucked like a porn star.

"You don't have to explain it to me," Elliot said. "I don't believe in ghosts. But people love these urban legends."

Dexter sighed. "Lately I've been wishing there was a mean ghost."

"Why?"

"In two weeks there is going to be a film crew at my doorstep," Dexter said.

"Hollywood is coming to Provincetown to shoot a reality show with me. I'm worried that it's going to be very dull. I haven't worked in years, and I live with my daughter and a housekeeper. Who on earth is going to want to watch a reality TV show like that?" He didn't mention he needed the money. He didn't know Elliot well enough yet.

Elliot lowered his eyebrows and thought for a moment. "You know," he said. "I have an idea that might help you and me both. Are you willing to get involved in some community service work?"

Dexter shrugged. "I guess so." He'd always been involved with charity events and fundraisers in Hollywood.

"I'm the president of the Provincetown Retail Business Association," Elliot said. "We are a new association, just formed this year. And we're preparing to go to battle with the Provincetown Chamber of Commerce. For the past twenty years, the chamber of commerce has been holding an event on Memorial Day. It's a huge fundraiser, everyone in town looks forward to it, and the proceeds all go to helping people with AIDS. But the new president of the chamber just made a motion to cancel this event and hold a large-

scale art festival on Commercial Street instead. But it's not really an art festival. It's more like an outdoor flea market for art vendors and crafters selling their wares. This means Commercial Street will be closed that weekend, and other vendors from all over the country will be out there in the middle of the street, selling their merchandise and competing with the local retail shop owners."

Dexter tilted his head to the right. "Couldn't the town have both functions, but on different holidays?"

"All the major holidays already have planned events," Elliot said. "The new president thinks it's time for a change on Memorial Day weekend and he's fighting hard to get it through. And he's using the love of art as his excuse. The problem is that the restaurants, bars, and hotels are all for the change. They want to stop the fundraiser and do the art show. But the retail businesses are against it. Retail business in Provincetown is hard enough as it is, but to have a flea market up and down Commercial Street with vendors selling their junk is competition we don't need. Not to mention the most important factor: the fundraiser helps out a lot of people with AIDS. These people depend on the money from this fundraiser."

"What kind of fundraiser is this?" Dexter asked. He'd never been to Provincetown on Memorial Day weekend.

"It's a swimming event," Elliot said. "Kind of like a walk-a-thon, but in the water. The new chamber president doesn't think it's important enough for Provincetown. He wants something that will bring, and I quote, 'a more high-end clientele into town.'"

"I still don't fully understand the problem," Dexter said. "Why can't you hold the fundraiser on another weekend?"

“First, because it’s tradition,” Elliot said. “We hold that event each year on Memorial Day. The new president of the chamber is new in town and he has no right to dictate and mess around with town tradition. Second, because this art festival will kill business for the small retail shops in town on a very important business weekend. I’ve seen how these things work in other towns. It’s murder for retail shops. Also, it’s causing a rift between the retail businesses and the service businesses in town. Service businesses don’t need help. Hotels, restaurants, and bars in this town don’t have to worry about surviving. There will always be people spending money on shelter and booze. But try to get them to buy a pair of jeans, or a shirt, or a book. It’s not easy in a rough economy or a good economy. I’ve been in business for over five years and I’ve see more than a few small retail shops fold in that time span.”

“Why can’t you have both events on the same weekend?” Dexter asked.

“If the town allowed us to do it, we’d think about it,” Elliot said. “But the chamber president doesn’t want the fundraiser anymore, and the Board of Selectmen thinks it would cause too much traffic.”

“I see,” Dexter said. He knew nothing about business, but what Elliot was saying made sense. He knew that in his financial situation, he wouldn’t be spending money on clothes, but he would spend money on food and the occasional drink at a bar. “But what could I possibly do to help? I don’t even own a business in town.”

“Join the association and help us fight this,” Elliot said. “You don’t have to own a business in town. You own a home and you’re part of the community now. The new president of the chamber doesn’t own a business either, yet he’s the one trying to cancel the fundraiser. It’s not going to be an easy fight, trust me. But you can get something

interesting for the reality show you're doing. If this controversy builds like I think it will build, there are going to be a lot of interesting moments. With you being a real Hollywood celebrity, we might be able to gain a little power. Plus, we'll get national exposure. Are you interested?"

Dexter took a deep breath and stared out at the ocean. It sounded like a case of the little guys going up against the big guys. And he liked the fact that he'd be fighting for a valid cause that provided money for people with AIDS. So he reached out for Elliot's hand, shook it, and said, "Count me in."

* * * *

The school bus dropped Brighton off at three o'clock. When Dexter walked into the house at five, she was sitting at the kitchen table helping Marion bake an apple pie. She was mixing the apples and sugar and spices with her hands; they were coated with sticky brown goop. Cleo barked and wagged his tail. and Brighton jumped off her chair and ran to the back door to give him a hug. When she wrapped her arms around Dexter's waist, she left imprints of apple pie filling on his black swim trunks.

"Oh, Brighton," Marion said, shaking her head, "Look what you've done to your father's shorts." Marion was spotlessly clean. There wasn't a morsel of apple pie filling on her hands and she was the one making the pie.

Dexter looked down at his shorts. "I'm fine, Marion. They were going into the hamper anyway."

Brighton stepped back with a guilty expression on her face, and then a voice from the other side of the kitchen said, "I think it looks delightful. I wish I could taste food, because I'd lick the mess off your pants."

Captain Lang. He was standing beside Marion, with his hands in the pockets of his dark sea captain's pants.

Dexter looked up at him and said, "You'd better be good. There's a child in the room." But after he spoke, his mouth fell and his eyes opened wide. He knew Marion and Brighton couldn't see or hear Captain Lang. They had no idea to whom he was talking.

Marion stopped mixing the apple pie filling. She gave Dexter a blank look and said, "What did you say, Mr. Moore?"

Captain Lang was standing directly behind Marion now. His hands were above her head and he was waving them back and forth. Marion had no idea he was there.

Dexter cleared his throat fast and said, "That pie had better be good, because I'm starved today for some reason."

Marion lifted a large wooden spoon and waved it in his direction. "My pies are always good, Mr. Moore. I'll give you an extra-large slice after dinner tonight."

Captain Lang raised an eyebrow and said, "I'll give you something extra large, too Dexter."

"C'mon now," Dexter said. "This is just wrong."

"Oh, stop worrying," Lang said. "They can't hear a word I'm saying."

Marion looked up from the bowl and lowered her eyebrows. "What is wrong, Mr. Moore? I don't understand." Then she put down the spoon and asked, "Are you feeling all right?"

"I'm sorry, Marion," Dexter said. "I was just thinking aloud." Then he squatted down so he could look Brighton in the eye. When they were face to face, he smiled and said, "I made a new friend today. His name is Elliot and he owns a clothing store in town.

He's going to get me involved in a very important community problem. There's a hot issue brewing in town between the retail businesses and the chamber of commerce."

Captain Lang put his hands on his hips and frowned. "Is this Elliot fellow good looking, Dexter?"

This time Dexter ignored him. He gave him a look and shook his head.

But Marion said, "You just be careful, Mr. Moore. I know these small New England towns. When they start getting hot over an issue, it can get pretty vicious, let me tell you."

Captain Lang folded his arms across his chest. "How old is this Elliot fellow?"

"It's none of *your* business," Dexter said. He said it with a nice, even tone. He was flirting with Lang. But then he rolled his eyes. It was hard to remember that no one else could see or hear Lang, and it looked as if he was talking to himself. Dexter knew he had to make a conscious effort or they would think he'd lost his mind.

"I know it's none of my business, Mr. Moore," Marion said. "But I grew up in one of these little New England towns. I know what I'm talking about." She was stirring the apple pie filling again. She thought Dexter was talking to her this time. Thankfully, she didn't take offense to his comment.

Dexter kissed Brighton on the cheek and stood up. "I'm going upstairs for a nap now. I'll be down again at seven and we can talk about this during dinner. I'm curious to hear some of your stories about small New England towns, Marion."

She was staring into the pie bowl. But she raised the wooden spoon and said, "Oh, I have plenty, Mr. Moore. You'd be surprised at how mean these things can get."

By the time Dexter reached his bedroom, Captain Lang was already there, standing in front of the middle window in the turret, looking out to sea. He was naked, with his hands on his hips and his legs spread apart. Dexter knew there was a huge penis hanging between his legs on the other side.

Dexter entered the room and smiled. He closed the door and locked it twice to make sure he wouldn't be disturbed. When he saw Captain Lang's wide muscular back his eyes grew wide. And when he looked lower and saw his tight, small buttocks, he licked his lips. From his shoulders down to his waist, his body tapered to a perfect V. "You have the body of a real man," Dexter said. "I'll bet you had a stable of good-looking young guys when you were alive."

Lang's head went back and he laughed. He removed his arms from his hips, placed them behind his back and clasped his hands together. "Not quite," he said, rocking on the balls of his feet. "In my day men like me didn't have the freedom the men of today have. There were no boyfriends, or partners, or relationships. And we didn't walk down the street hand in hand. The experiences I did have were all in dark, secluded places, with little emotion. I had many experiences with many young men. But nothing that ever lasted with even the slightest hint of a future."

Dexter frowned. "I'm sorry."

"There's no need to be sorry," Lang said. "It wasn't your fault. And my experiences were all very pleasurable."

Dexter removed his sandals, pulled down his black swim trunks and walked to the bed. He pulled off his T-shirt and dropped it on the end of the bed. Then he crossed the room, naked, toward the window. When he reached the spot where Lang was standing, he

slowly went down on his knees. Dexter had already given him many blow jobs by then. But each time, for some reason, sucking him off was always a little different. So he leaned forward and kissed both sides of Captain Lang's buttocks, then reached for Lang's thighs and slowly turned him around. His thighs were concrete slabs; the muscles moved as his body turned.

Captain Lang didn't resist him. His body turned until his thick erection was inches from Dexter's lips. Lang reached down and grabbed the shaft with his right hand. He lifted his erection and rubbed the head against Dexter's cheek. "You have soft skin," Lang said, rubbing the tip of his dick up and down the side of Dexter's face.

Dexter adjusted his palms on Lang's upper thighs for support. He knew he was going to need to hold on to something when he started sucking him off. He looked up at Lang and smiled. "I'll bet if you were alive today you'd have a lot of boyfriends. I'd probably get jealous."

Lang gently smacked his erection against Dexter's cheek. "Do you think this Elliot fellow you met today would be as interested in me as he is in you?"

Dexter smiled. Captain Lang sounded jealous of Elliot. Then he stuck out his tongue and licked the head of Lang's penis. "Elliot is just a friend. He's not interested in me sexually and I'm not interested in him sexually either."

Lang lifted his erection and slapped it against Dexter's face harder. "I know you're not interested in him. But I would be surprised to hear he's not interested in you. You're magnificent, with such full, round lips."

Dexter pressed his lips against the tip of Lang's penis. His head went from side to side; his full lips brushed Lang's penis with tender strokes. "But I'm not interested in

him,” Dexter said. “So it doesn’t really matter.” Then he looked into Lang’s eyes and wrapped his lips around the head of his dick. Dexter’s lips were wet and soft; he didn’t clamp down hard on Lang’s dick. He wanted to be gentle at first, then build up pressure so he could suck Lang off to the finish.

The captain’s legs trembled and his head went back. He spread his legs wider and pushed his pelvis forward. Dexter opened his mouth so he could take a few more inches. When it was halfway inside his warm, wet mouth, he stuck out his tongue and ran it across the bottom of the shaft. Lang’s penis had a thick vein; Dexter’s tongue went from left to right.

Lang’s hips bucked forward, but not too fast. His erection slipped all the way into Dexter’s mouth and hit the back of Dexter’s throat. Lang moaned out loud, reached down, and pressed both hands on top of Dexter’s soft head. For a moment, neither one of them moved. Lang’s dick remained buried in Dexter’s mouth, and Dexter’s tongue gently massaged the bottom of Lang’s shaft. Though Lang was slightly larger than Michael, Michael’s dick hadn’t been small. Dexter was used to sucking big cock. He knew how to breathe through his nose; he knew how to take big dick all the way to the back of his throat without gagging or choking.

When Lang moved his hips again, Dexter started sucking. His cheeks indented and his lips puffed out. Lang’s pelvis bucked faster; he guided Dexter’s head with his hands. Dexter relaxed the muscles in his neck and followed with Lang’s moves. When Lang pulled Dexter’s head forward, Dexter sucked with intense pressure. And when Lang moved Dexter’s head back, Dexter released the tension and took deep breaths.

Dexter sucked his dick this way until Lang removed his hands from Dexter's head and pulled back. Lang's erection was halfway inside Dexter's mouth. Lang grabbed the bottom of his own shaft and said, "Jerk off with me. I'm almost there, Dexter." He spoke with a polite, old-fashioned language. He didn't refer to Dexter "man" or "dude" or "baby."

Without removing an inch of Lang's dick from his mouth, Dexter reached down and wrapped his hand around his own erection. He'd been fully erect since he'd gone down on his knees and he knew it wouldn't take long to get off. And the fact that he knew what Lang was about to do to him only made him more excited.

"That's it," Lang said, as he started to jerk his erection. "You have wonderful lips."

Dexter took a deep breath and moaned. While he sucked, Lang jerked the bottom half of his dick faster. Lang's fist went back and forth, between Dexter's lips and his own pubic hair. His large balls started to swing back and forth. He took deeper breaths and his mouth fell open. "I'm almost there," he said in a deep whisper.

Dexter nodded yes, still jerking his own dick. He wanted Lang to explode inside his mouth. He already knew Lang's come would vanish. But it wouldn't vanish instantly. He knew he'd be able to taste some of it, even if it was only for a moment. And while he was sucking Lang's cock, he didn't have to worry about catching any diseases.

A moment later, Captain Lang groaned. The muscle in his right thigh vibrated and he blew a huge load into Dexter's mouth. Dexter was ready for it. He sucked in his cheeks until the sides of his face pinched and he swallowed it all. He gulped it down, trying to catch every drop of Lang's vanishing juice. He felt it inside his mouth; he knew

it was there. When he tasted a slim hint of Lang's come on the back of his tongue, his own dick erupted and his come landed on the instep of Lang's right foot.

Then the taste was gone. Dexter had always swallowed Michael's come and the taste usually lingered in his mouth. Sometimes even after he'd brushed his teeth and gargled. But with Lang the taste disappeared immediately.

When Lang pulled his dick out of Dexter's mouth, Dexter looked down at Lang's right foot and smiled. "I made a mess," he said. "I'm sorry."

Lang looked down at him and smiled. He raised an eyebrow. "You can clean it up for me if you want."

Dexter looked into his eyes. "Really?"

"I'd like to see you do it," Lang said. "But only if you want to do it."

Well. Evidently Captain Lang and Michael had one thing in common. For some reason Dexter couldn't understand, they liked to see him eat his own come. The only difference between Lang and Michael was that Lang was more polite about it. (Michael would have said, "Lick it up, baby.") So Dexter leaned forward and licked his own come off of Lang's foot. He didn't mind the taste of come, especially his own. When he was finished, he looked up at Lang and smiled. "How was that?"

Lang raised both eyebrows. "That was a sight to behold, indeed."

Chapter Seven

When the film crew showed up two weeks later, Marion ran to the back of the house and refused to answer the front door. It was ten in the morning and Brighton was already in school. She'd wanted to stay home that day, but Dexter never allowed her to skip school unless she was sick or there was an unusual emergency.

So Dexter and Cleo answered the front door. Cleo barked and danced in circles. Captain Lang was leaning against the newel post with his arms folded across his chest. Before Dexter opened the door he looked back at Lang and said, "You be good. Without the money from this reality show, I'm going to have to put this house up for sale and move back to LA. Besides, I'm starting to think it might be fun. I've been out of the public eye for along time."

Captain Lang raised his arms and smiled. "I'll be a perfect gentleman," he said.

Dexter gave him a look, then he turned and opened the front door. Jesse Barlow, the show's producer, stood there with a huge smile on his face. Dexter smiled and shook his hand. "It's nice to meet you, Mr. Barlow. I'm a big fan." He wasn't really a fan. He only knew Jesse Barlow from what he'd heard about him through his agent.

Jesse was the host of a successful, highly rated reality show called "Deal Me a Fortune." He'd recently managed to secure his own fortunate deals with the network that allowed him to produce his own reality shows. Dexter admired his tenacity. Jesse was still hosting the popular reality show that had made him famous, produced three other successful reality shows, and now he was doing this one with Dexter. In Hollywood,

Jesse was considered one of the hardest working people in town. Everything he touched turned out to be successful.

Jesse shook his hand and said, "Call me Jesse. It's nice to meet you, too, Dexter. I can't tell you how nice it is to meet you. I've always been a fan of your sitcom. We're about the same age. I grew up watching the show." Then he turned and pointed to the driveway. "While the crew is getting organized, I thought we could get to know each other. I'm producing and directing this one. I'm on hiatus right now from my show, and I wanted to handle this one myself to make sure everything is perfect."

Dexter stepped to the side and said, "Please come in. Welcome to Keel Cottage."

Jesse crossed the entrance and looked up and down. He rubbed his jaw and smiled. "So far I like what I see," he said. "This house will film well." He walked to a table next to the staircase. Standing next to the ghost of Captain Lang, he examined the hand-carved wood work on the banister. "It's so East Coast mariner. I love it."

"Well, that's where you are, you idiot, on the East Coast," Captain Lang said, looking Jesse up and down. "You're not in Mexico."

Dexter almost said something to Captain Lang. But he stopped short and squared his shoulders. Then he smiled at Jesse. "Let's go into the living room and sit down."

While Jesse walked into the living room, Dexter noticed he was better-looking in person than he was on television. He had short sandy brown hair and a small, compact body. His low-rise jeans were tight and he had a nice round bulge between his legs. But he wasn't very tall, about five foot six, and he wore pointy alligator shoes that looked peculiar with jeans.

Jesse moved to the fireplace and looked up at the portrait of Captain Lang. Cleo was at his heels, sniffing his ankles. Jesse folded his arms across his chest and pointed to the portrait. “Who is *this* old guy? He doesn’t look very friendly.” Then he laughed and cleared his throat.

“Ah well,” Captain Lang said. “I’m going to have fun with this fool.” He’d followed them into the room and he was standing in front of the window.

Dexter gave Captain Lang a long, serious look and said, “Be good.”

Jesse turned fast and said, “Pardon me?”

Dexter cleared his throat and corrected himself. “I was about to say that it’s going to *be good* doing this show. I’m looking forward to it.”

Jesse smiled, then looked Dexter up and down. “I think so, too,” he said. “So far I’m getting good energy all around me. The house is perfect.” Then he lowered his eyes to Dexter’s chest muscles and said, “I think you’re going to look very good on camera, too. We’re going to take a lot of shots of you without your shirt. I’d like to see a few without your pants, too. You have a hot body. Do you like to walk around the house in your underwear?”

“What an outrage. I’m going to lift a chair, carry it across the room, and dump it on his head,” Captain Lang shouted. “Did you hear what that blithering idiot just said to you? He has no manners! He’s a swine. He’ll run out of this house with his arms in the air like all the others after I get finished with him.” Then he slammed his fist on a table near the window and the candlestick rattled.

Cleo jumped up on the wing chair and barked.

Jesse's head turned fast. He looked at the table shaking and watched the candlestick wobble back and forth.

"It was a breeze," Dexter said. Thankfully, the window was open. "It happens sometimes. We get these quick breezes from the ocean without warning." Then he lifted his eyebrows and looked at Lang with a pleading expression. He pressed his palms together and shook his head back and forth to let him know he wasn't fooling around anymore. Lang had no choice; he couldn't ruin this for Dexter.

Jesse shrugged his shoulders and sat down in a wing chair. He smiled and said, "So, are you willing to remove a few articles of clothing for the show? The more skin you show, the better the ratings will be. And from what I can see, you have a great body."

Dexter had a feeling Jesse might be flirting with him, but he wasn't sure. He'd heard rumors that Jesse was gay. But he was one of those fading Hollywood types who never confirm it in public, even though no one really cared. "Thank you, Jesse," Dexter said. "I'm open to anything that you think will make this show work. But I want to do it tastefully. I have a daughter and I don't walk around the house in my underwear. I've always managed to maintain a good image in public. I have no skeletons in my closet. And I want to keep it that way."

Dexter wasn't a fool. He knew he'd have to do a few sexy scenes. And he knew those scenes would involve removing a certain amount of clothing. But he'd do the scenes on his terms and within the context of his daily routine, where it worked and looked natural. He also knew how to deal with the Jesse Barlows of Hollywood probably better than Jesse Barlow did. Jesse was still the new boy in town. But Dexter had been around since he was ten years old and he'd seen it all.

When the crew was ready to begin shooting, they knocked on the door and Dexter let them into the house. He raised his eyebrows and tilted his head at first. The “crew” consisted of one cameraman and his young assistant. Cleo barked at the strangers and hid behind Dexter’s legs. Captain Lang stood on the first step of the staircase glaring them, with his hands in his pockets and his eyebrows knitted together. He didn’t like intruders in the house.

Jesse introduced them. “Dexter, this is Kellan and his assistant, Paige.” Kellan had all the camera equipment and Paige was carrying a large canvas bag. Kellan was tall and thin, with long, straight hair and a scruffy goatee. His jeans hung from his bony hips and his chest looked like it was sinking into his body. Paige had a warm smile and quiet brown eyes covered with thick eyeglasses. She wore her straight black hair in a ponytail. Her low-rise jeans were two sizes too small and her stomach bulged out over the waistband.

Dexter smiled. “It’s nice to meet you both.” He shook their hands and turned to Jesse. “I have to admit I was expecting something more complicated and intrusive. I pictured cameras all over the house and hot lights.”

Jesse smiled. “This is it,” he said. “I want it to look as real as possible. After all, it’s a reality show. I’m not doing hidden cameras like some shows do. I’ve seen them hide the cameras all over the house, including bathrooms. I don’t think it’s an asset and I think it makes the subjects act out of character. We’ll only be using this camera or a smaller one, and you’ll always know when we’re shooting.”

Captain Lang groaned over Dexter’s shoulder. “If you ask me, this is intrusive enough. It’s preposterous.”

Dexter ignored him. He looked at Jesse and asked, “What should I do now?”

“What would you normally do?”

Dexter shrugged his shoulders. “It’s a nice day. We’re having an Indian summer. I’d change into swim trunks and take advantage of one of the few good remaining beach days.”

Jesse clapped his hands together and said, “Then do it. I want you to pretend that we’re not here.”

“Won’t that be boring?” Dexter asked.

“He wants to get into your pants,” Captain Lang said. “The swine can’t wait for you to take them off.”

Dexter made believe Lang wasn’t there. But he smiled at the hint of jealousy in Lang’s voice.

Jesse took a shallow breath and put his hands on Dexter’s shoulders. “Don’t worry about what’s boring. I’ll take care of that. I know what I’m doing, seriously.” Then he grabbed Dexter’s shoulders and said, “Now let’s all go upstairs and start shooting.”

They turned the camera on and followed Dexter up to his bedroom. Jesse remained in the background, behind Kellan and Paige, watching everything. One arm held up his elbow, the other held his chin.

Dexter went into what he’d always called his performing state of mind. He ignored the camera and the people, and became a character in his own home. He put up an invisible fourth wall and concentrated on his actions. He’d been trained well; it wasn’t hard to do. He went to his dresser and opened the middle drawer. He pulled out a pair of white swim trunks and a black T-shirt.

Captain Lang walked out of the fireplace and said. “I do hope you’re not going to change your clothes in front of these strangers.”

Dexter ignored him. He pulled off his shoes and socks, then unzipped his jeans and pulled them down to his ankles. Then he stepped out of his pants and picked them up off the floor. He was wearing a loose, white polo shirt and tight, white boxer briefs that hugged his private parts. The shirt was long and the bottom covered the bulge in his underwear for a moment. But when he rested his jeans over the arm of a wing chair he purposely made sure the back of the shirt went up so the camera could get a good shot of his round butt in tight underwear.

Dexter knew what he was doing. He was baiting and teasing the camera. This was part of his daily routine and it was within the context of reality television. He’d worked hard to keep his body in good shape and he was proud of it. But more than that, he had watched enough reality television to know that the male body was never exposed as much as the female body. Time and again he’d watched shots of women showing off huge fake breasts on reality TV. The people who created these TV shows thought nothing of showing off all parts of the female body. But when it came time to show off the male bodies they always fell short. The men only showed off their arm muscles and chest muscles. The bottom half of their bodies was always ignored. With this reality show, Dexter wanted to turn things around. He didn’t want to disappoint the female viewers or the gay male viewers—the very people he knew would be watching the show when it aired.

When his jeans were neatly folded and resting on the arm of the chair, Dexter went back to the end of the bed where he'd left his swim trunks. He wasn't going to remove his underwear. But he did lift up his shirt and pull it over his head.

Captain Lang slammed his hand on the table. His eye bulged and his lips pursed. Then he kicked the heavy table and shouted, "This is an outrage. I'm leaving." When he turned toward the fireplace and walked through the wall, a strong breeze passed through the bedroom window and blew Dexter's swim trunks right off the bed.

Jesse and the crew stared at the rocking table with wide eyes. The camera focused on the way it was tilting back and forth. Jesse pressed his palm to his mouth and shouted, "Cut."

Dexter frowned. He should have warned Captain Lang about the possibility of showing off his body in a few of the scenes. He looked at Jesse and shrugged his shoulders. He had to say something about the rocking table. So he shrugged his naked shoulders and said, "There goes another one of those unexpected ocean breezes." He smiled, but he had a feeling there were more ocean breezes to come.

Jesse grabbed Kellan's arm. "Did you get that? Did you get a shot of the table moving and the shorts blowing off the bed?" His eyes were wide and his voice was high.

Kellan nodded. "I got it all." He didn't seem to get excited about much. It was all part of the job.

Dexter stood there watching them. With the camera off, he felt awkward standing there in his skimpy boxer briefs. For the first time since he'd dropped his pants, he felt naked. "Is everything okay?"

Jesse turned to him and smiled. He looked at Dexter's body and said, "Everything is perfect. Just keep doing what you're doing, man."

When the camera was on again, Dexter relaxed. The invisible fourth wall went back up, and he took his time putting on his swim trunks. He yawned and stretched his arms, then turned around slowly so the camera would get every angle of his naked body. While he posed, he thought about Captain Lang. He knew he was going to have to explain all this to him later, and he wasn't looking forward to it.

When Dexter was dressed for the beach, the crew followed him to Herring Cove and got plenty of great shots of the Provincetown beach. Elliot was there, so when Dexter sat down next to him, the camera followed their conversation about how the president of the Chamber of Commerce was going to cancel the fundraiser for AIDS. There was an important meeting in town that night with the Provincetown Board of Selectmen. The board was going to listen to the arguments for and against canceling the fundraiser so the Chamber of Commerce could do the art festival instead. Dexter was now a member of the Provincetown Retail Business Association, and he was speaking to the Board of Selectmen that night on behalf of the association in support of the annual AIDS fundraiser.

When Jesse heard this for the first time, he stopped the camera from rolling and said, "Are you really speaking tonight, seriously?"

Dexter shrugged. He patted Elliot's shoulder and said, "My new friend here kind of got me into this and I can't back out. I hope this is okay for the TV show. It's a very good cause. If the town cancels this fundraiser, a lot of people will be disappointed." When he'd joined the association and he'd learned just how important the AIDS

fundraiser was to so many people, he'd become passionate about the cause, and he was going to do anything in his power to convince the Board of Selectmen not to cancel it for a frivolous art festival.

Jesse smiled. "It's absolutely wonderful, Dexter. You just keep doing what you normally do and make believe we're not even here."

They went back to the house and Dexter introduced Jesse and the crew to Marion and Brighton. Brighton was home from school by then and she was smiling so wide you could see her gums. Marion smiled, but she wouldn't look anyone in the eye. She just nodded at them and pulled Dexter aside. "I'm making chicken stew tonight. I'll make extra. It wouldn't be right to have them watching us while we eat without offering them something."

He told her that was a good idea and listened to her grumble all the way back to the kitchen. Then he told Jesse he was going upstairs to review his speech, shower, and take a short nap. He said it was part of his normal routine and he wasn't going to change it. So Jesse and the others followed him upstairs, watched him study his speech, and got a few good shots of him removing his swim trunks so he could take a quick shower. They didn't follow him into the shower. But the final shot before they left him alone in his room was of Dexter going face down in the middle of his bed. He wasn't wearing underwear—just a short, skimpy towel wrapped around his waist like a loincloth.

Then they left him alone and went downstairs to get a few shots of Marion and Brighton. Jesse said he wanted to focus as much on family as he did on other things. Dexter smiled and shook his head. He knew Brighton would give them wonderful

material to work with, but he also knew Marion probably wouldn't look up from her stove the entire time.

A few minutes after they left, Captain Lang appeared in front of the window. Dexter hadn't fallen asleep yet. He'd been waiting for Lang to appear. Lang was fully clothed and his arms were folded across his chest. He pointed at Dexter. "I shouldn't have been so upset this afternoon. I shouldn't have left the way I did." His voice was low, apologetic.

Dexter sat up on the bed. The towel fell from his hips and exposed his naked body. "I'm sorry I didn't explain everything to you. I should have let you know ahead of time that there have to be a few sexy scenes. It makes a difference with shows like this. If I didn't need the money, I wouldn't be doing it."

Captain Lang took a deep breath and frowned. "I wish you didn't need the money. But I'm a very pragmatic man and I understand. I won't get in your way." He rubbed his jaw a few times and sat down on the edge of the bed. He placed his large palm on Dexter's naked thigh and asked, "How far will you go? Will they follow you around *totally* naked?"

Dexter laughed. Lang clearly didn't understand reality television. "Of course not," he said. "This is for TV. I'd never do anything that would compromise my reputation that way. As it is I'm taking chances by stripping down to my underwear."

Lang raised an eyebrow. "What about his Jesse fellow? I think he wants to take you to bed. I know that look in his eyes."

Dexter got up from the bed and sat down on Captain Lang's lap. He put his arms around Lang's wide shoulders and said. "You don't have to worry about that. I have no

intention of taking Jesse, or anyone else, to bed with me. You're the only one I want."

Then he kissed him on the cheek. "So please try not to get jealous. This is work. It's all about money. When it's finished I'm never doing anything like it again.

Dexter sighed. "But I have to be honest about one thing. I kind of like being in front of the camera again. I didn't realize how much I've missed it. And I'm looking forward to helping the retail association tonight. It's strange. I've lost all my money, my life partner left me for a nineteen-year-old, and I couldn't care less. Since I moved here, everything has been an adventure." Then he turned and wrapped his naked legs around Captain Lang's waist, pressing his body against Lang's heavy sea captain's uniform.

"And the best part of it all is you. I've never met a man like you."

Captain Lang reached down and rested his large hands on Dexter's ass. He pushed Dexter higher and sighed so loud his chest heaved. "I've never met anyone like you either, Dexter."

Chapter Eight

The meeting in town that night was considered a “Special Town Meeting.” The Board of Selectmen had voted during one of their earlier board meetings to hold this Special Town Meeting at the Veterans Memorial Elementary School. They did this for all special issues. It was big doings in a town so small.

Dexter drove to Elliot’s house first so they could arrive together. Jesse and the crew followed in a black SUV. Kellan was using a smaller, less conspicuous camera that night so he wouldn’t disrupt the meeting. Jesse told Dexter he wanted the footage to look as if it had been filmed by an amateur on a simple point-and-shoot camera. He added he didn’t want anyone to know they were filming the meeting.

Jesse also said that while Dexter had been napping, he had phoned the town clerk to get permission to film the meeting. The town clerk told him that as long as he didn’t cause any disruptions, it was fine. Jesse said he might have to block out a few faces for legal reasons, but he was mainly interested in getting shots of Dexter fighting for a cause in which he believed.

When Dexter pulled his BMW into a parking space at the school on Mayflower Lane, Elliot moaned and rolled his eyes. “What’s wrong?” Dexter asked. He’d parked next to a white SUV with Pennsylvania license plates. It was the only space left. The entire lot was filled with cars and there were bicycles lined in front of the entrance.

“You just parked next to the enemy,” Elliot said. “Fred Collette and Steve White. Fred is the president of the chamber, the one who wants to cancel the fundraiser. Steve is

his partner. They've been together for a long time. They like being thought of as a power couple." He spoke too fast, as if he were trying to get a lot of information in with a limited amount of time.

Dexter switched off the engine and pulled the keys out of the ignition. "Should I say something to them?"

Elliot turned and looked out of his window. When Steve and Fred saw him in the black BMW, they smiled and flapped their hands. Elliot smiled back. But he said, "You're not going to have a choice. These two are the vicious types, but with smiles on their faces. They've been dying to meet you. Just be friendly, but don't trust them and don't take anything they say seriously. Especially when it comes to Fred. He's the type who will hug you and tell you you look spectacular on the day you look your worst."

Dexter raised his eyebrows and nodded. "Ah well, I see," he said. "Fred's a cunt."

Elliot smiled. "You've got the picture."

When they got out of the car, Fred and Steve were standing at the end of their SUV waiting for them. Fred walked over to Elliot, hugged him, and said, "It's so good to see you, Elliot. We love you so much." His voice rose with a false, planned lilt.

Steve was less obnoxious. He hugged Elliot and said, "It's nice to see you again."

Elliot smiled at them both. "I'd like you both to meet my new friend and the newest member of the Provincetown Retail Business Association, Dexter Moore."

Fred smiled. His eyes bugged and his lips pursed. "It's so nice to meet you, Dexter. We've heard about you. You just bought Keel Cottage on the west end of town. We just love that house. We really do."

Dexter smiled and reached out to shake Fred's hand. "It's nice to meet you, Fred."

Then he turned to shake Steve's hand. "Hi," he said.

He tried to focus on their faces, but it wasn't easy to do. Steve had the body and clothes of a twenty-year-old, but he had the face of a sixty-year-old. His short spiked hair was dyed light blond and it looked stiff. From the neck down, his stomach was flat, his low-rise jeans hugged his slim hips to perfection, and his pointy Italian shoes looked expensive. But from the neck up, he looked like someone's grandfather after the facelift and Botox injections.

Fred must have been about ten years younger. He had darker hair with graying sides, but it was too short for someone with a nose so large. His outfit looked as if he'd raided Madonna's 1980s closet. He wore a shiny silver shirt covered with a shiny bronze vest. His parachute pants were made out of some kind of plastic material and his shoes were black quarter-boots with three-inch Cuban heels. Dexter hadn't seen anyone dress like that in years.

Elliot smiled. "Dexter is somewhat famous, Fred." He named the sitcom that Dexter had been in and mentioned the reality show that was being filmed that night.

Fred smiled. "I thought you looked familiar, Dexter," he said. "We loved that show. We love you in that show."

Steve removed his hands from his pockets and said, "We're going to be on TV tonight?"

"I have a film crew following *me*," Dexter said. "I'm going to be on the show, and the meeting is going to be on the show. But they are going to block out all faces and a names to protect everyone's privacy." Dexter wanted them to know he wasn't trying to be dishonest, and that they had nothing to worry about.

But when Steve heard that he wasn't going to be on TV, he frowned. Evidently, he wouldn't have minded being part of the show.

Fred smiled and said, "I guess we should go inside now." He didn't seem to care about the film crew or the show.

Dexter said, "We'll be inside in a moment. I want to get something out of the trunk. "You guys go on ahead of us." He didn't like them. Fred used the word "love" much too freely. And when Fred smiled, he reminded Dexter of Madam the puppet.

When they were gone, Dexter and Elliot walked over to Jesse and the film crew. They'd parked way back, on the other side of the parking lot. Dexter smiled at Jesse and said, "Wish me luck, guys. I'm starting to get a little nervous about this speech."

"Just keep it real," Jesse said. "We'll be in the back getting it all on camera."

Dexter frowned. "You're sure you're not going to get anyone's face or name?"

Jesse raised his hands and said, "Man, trust me. I'm not looking for any lawsuits. I know what I'm doing. This all comes down to careful shots and great editing. It's all about you, Dexter, and the general cause."

Dexter took a deep breath and sighed. "I haven't given a public speech in years."

Elliot patted his back. "You'll be great. I've seen how hard you've worked to learn what this is all about in such a short time. I have faith in you."

When they entered the multipurpose room where the meeting was being held, they headed toward a group of people sitting toward the front, on the right side of the room. Elliot knew where he was going. He said the people they were sitting with were a few other members of the retail association. They had been saving seats for Elliot and Dexter, waiting for them to arrive. The entire room was filled, with standing room only.

Elliot said that he hadn't seen such a large turnout for a Special Town Meeting since the last time the sewers had backed up in Provincetown.

Dexter smiled and sat down next to a large man wearing a baseball cap. He looked around the room and sighed. Everyone's expression was pinched and serious. And there was a clear division in the room. Fred and Steve had taken seats on the left side of the room. It looked like those in favor of losing the fundraiser were on the left, and those in favor of keeping it as a town tradition were on the right. They were all passing nasty looks across the room to each other. Some were even sneering.

When the Board of Selectmen took their seats at the front of the room and the meeting began, they started listening to arguments from the Chamber of Commerce about how having an art festival in town would improve business and enhance Provincetown's reputation as an art colony. Fred, the president of the chamber, spoke first. He began by saying, "The chamber *loves* this town. We *love* everyone in it." His voice rang out with a singsong lilt, and he smiled and used exaggerated gestures as if he were giving a sermon in church. And he hadn't memorized his speech. He was looking up and down, between the papers in his hands and the people in the room.

Dexter frowned and stared down at his lap. It was hard to watch. Even if you could forgive the fact that he hadn't memorized his speech, Fred was one of those amateur public speakers who try so hard they come off looking ridiculous and fake.

Elliot poked Dexter in the ribs and whispered, "Have you noticed that Fred just *loves* everyone and everything? Trust me, when he tells you how much he *loves* you, that's the time to watch out because there's a knife in your back."

Dexter smiled. He whispered back, "He does seem a bit insincere."

When someone on the right side of the room shouted, “Hey, this is bullshit! You’re giving us all a great speech about how much the town needs this so-called art festival, but you’re not mentioning the fact that you want to cancel a longtime Provincetown tradition to do this. And you’re not mentioning all the people who will suffer disappointment if this fundraiser is canceled. There are people who depend on this, you asshole.”

Dexter frowned again. He’d expected a more civil meeting. Marion had warned him that things could get testy. But he’d thought she’d been exaggerating.

Everyone on the right side of the room roared and applauded the man’s comment. The left side of the room started shouting at them. The chairman of the Board of Selectmen had to quiet the crowd by banging a gavel. Fred just stood there and smiled with his hands clasped together; his eyes were wide and his expression was innocent. When he smiled with tight lips, it looked as if he’d just smelled a rotten fish.

After Fred spoke, Dexter stood up and read his speech. He’d written it himself, and he’d memorized it so he wouldn’t have to be distracted by shuffling papers. First, he thanked Fred for presenting his side of the argument. Then he introduced himself to the people in the audience by telling them he was new in town and that he’d just moved there from Hollywood. He mentioned he’d been the child actor on a well-known sitcom. When he named the sitcom, everyone applauded, even the people on the other side of the room. He’d known most of the town knew nothing about him, and he wanted to use his small amount of celebrity to his advantage.

After that, he started speaking about how necessary the fundraiser was to people with AIDS and to the community of Provincetown. He used all his training as an actor

and public speaker. The fact that he truly did believe what he was saying made him even more convincing.

No one on the other side of the room interrupted him. He took command of the audience and held their attention until the last line of his speech.

When he was finished speaking, he thanked them all for listening and sat down. But before his ass even hit the seat, someone from his side of the room shouted, “We’re tired of being pushed around by powerful restaurant and hotel owners, and a Chamber of Commerce that knows nothing about small retail business in this town. We don’t want an art festival and we’re going to fight all the way to stop it.” The man raised his fist in the air and the crowd roared. Dexter sighed and shook his head. He felt as if the hard work he’d done to promote solidarity had all been ruined.

The meeting became a shouting match between the Chamber of Commerce and the Retail Association. Insults were exchanged and more than a few pejoratives were passed around. The Board of Selectmen tried to control the meeting, but it got ugly. The passion ran so thick that one member of the Retail Association crossed the room and grabbed a member of the Chamber of Commerce by his collar. A couple of police officers had to break them up and drag them out of the room.

Then the Board of Selectmen decided it was time to adjourn the meeting. The chairman stood up and said, “Due to the strong emotions on this topic, we’ve decided to hold off on a decision at this time. We’ll call another special meeting and give a final decision then. The next special meeting will be decided at our regular board meeting. This meeting is adjourned.”

The crowd, on both sides of the room, began to shout and boo. Dexter turned to Elliot and asked, “What does this mean? I thought we’d get a decision tonight.”

“It means,” Elliot said, “that they don’t want to commit to anything right now. They want to drag this out because they don’t want to make a decision and turn half the town against them. I’ve seen it before. It’s all political. Some of them are up for re-election this year.”

On the way outside, Jesse met Elliot and Dexter at the exit. “Kellan shot your entire speech. It was wonderful. It reminded me of something from an old movie and you were the small-town hero. I have a feeling this show is going to be the best one I’ve ever done.”

Dexter had almost forgotten about the TV show. He shrugged his shoulders and said, “I’m doing my best.” But he wasn’t sure how the rest of the show would be. Now that the meeting was over, he still had to face the fact that his life was not very interesting. He turned to Elliot and asked, “Are we going to do any kind of campaign to get the support of other members of the community?”

Elliot gave him a blank stare. “I’m not sure. I don’t have anything planned.”

“If we’re going to win this thing,” Dexter said, “We should start educating people in town. I know this was a large turnout for a meeting, but I’m sure we’re not reaching everyone in Provincetown. If we’re going to win over the board, we’d better start lobbying for more support.”

Elliot smiled and slapped his back. “You’re right,” he said. “We need a chairperson. And I’m nominating you for the position. From now on, you’re in charge of organizing and educating so more people become aware and involved.”

“This is great,” Jesse shouted. “The network is going to love it. It’s just like an old-fashioned movie and you’re Jimmy Stewart.” Jesse had a tendency to repeat himself when he was excited.

Dexter just stood there smiling and nodding. He didn’t feel like Jimmy Stewart. He knew Jimmy Stewart had never removed his clothes on purpose and walked around in his underwear to gain TV ratings. And the last thing Dexter wanted was to be the chairman of this committee, but the camera was on and he couldn’t refuse. He’d never been very political. All he’d ever wanted was a quiet, private life, and now here he was, caught in the middle of a political explosion in the town where he thought he’d be able to find the privacy he’d always craved.

By the time he got home that night, it was almost eleven o’clock. He knew Brighton was in bed sleeping, and Marion was probably in her own room watching television. He got out of the car and looked up at the house. He heard a whistle and looked up higher. The moon was full and he could see all the way up to the widow’s walk. Captain Lang was standing there, naked, smiling down at him. Dexter laughed and shook his head, then closed the car door and ran all the way up to the top of the house. He couldn’t wait to put his arms around Lang’s strong shoulders. And he couldn’t wait to take his clothes off outside.

On the first floor, he patted Cleo’s head. Cleo had heard his car pull into the driveway and he’d run to the front door to greet him. He removed his shoes on the second floor so no one would hear him running through the hall. When he reached the top floor and unlocked the door that led up to the widow’s walk, he stepped into the stairwell, locked the door behind him, and ran up the stairs to meet Captain Lang.

Lang was stretched out on a long, double-wide lounge chair that Dexter had placed up there so he could sit and watch the ocean. Lang's hairy legs were spread wide and his semi-erect penis was resting on his left thigh. He smiled at Dexter and said, "Where are all your TV people?"

Dexter leaned forward and rested his hands on his knees. He was breathing fast; his chest rose and fell with each puff he took. "They are staying in a hotel down in Hyannis," he said. "Jesse thinks it's best for them to keep a low profile in town while they're filming the show and they want to keep a distance."

Lang spread his legs wider. "I've been waiting for you."

Dexter straightened up and said, "I see that." He looked down between Captain Lang's legs and licked his lips, then removed his clothes as fast as he could.

When he was naked, he approached the lounge chair. He climbed up on Captain Lang's lap, put his arms around Lang's shoulders, and rested the bottom of his ass on top of Lang's erection. This was his favorite position with Lang, and Lang didn't seem to mind the repetition. He wiggled his hips a few times to find a comfortable position, then leaned forward and kissed Lang on the lips. "I wish you could have been there with me tonight," he said. "The speech went well, but the crowd was awful. These people want blood. And I met these two creepy gay guys, Fred and Steve."

Captain Lang grabbed both sides of his ass and squeezed. "I don't want to discuss the meeting," he said. "I want you all to myself right now."

Dexter licked his beard and smiled. "And I know what you want, Captain. And I'm going to give it to you." He sat up and reached back for Lang's erection. He wrapped his hand around the shaft and spread his legs wider. When the tip of Lang's dick found

Dexter's opening, Dexter slowly lowered his body. Lang's dick slipped into his hole with ease; it went all the way to the deepest part of his body without the slightest hint of discomfort. With a human man, Dexter would have needed lube with a dick this large. But with Lang, lube wasn't necessary. He knew it was supernatural, like the way Lang could walk through walls without explanation, but he still didn't fully understand it.

Captain Lang closed his eyes and bit his bottom lip. Dexter arched his back and wiggled his hips with slow semi-circular movements. He kissed Lang on the lips and asked, "How is this?"

"Ah," Lang said. "It's not bad at all. You're very soft inside." He pressed his large hands to Dexter's thighs and ran them up and down the tops of Dexter's smooth, tanned legs. He rubbed hard. His fingers were strong and solid.

"And you're very hard, Captain," Dexter said. He stuck out his tongue and licked Lang's bottom lip, then shoved his tongue all the way into Lang's mouth and rolled it around in circles.

While they sucked each other's tongues, Dexter placed his own palms on top of Lang's hands and he started to ride Lang's penis. His hips went up and down and the lounge chair rocked against the wooden deck with soft, hollow clicks. Lang's thick erection slid in and out of his hole, and the friction it caused around the lips of Dexter's anus tightened around Lang's shaft. He couldn't get enough of Lang's tongue; he couldn't get Lang's dick into his body deeply enough.

At first, Dexter rode him with a slow, even rhythm. Lang guided his smooth hips and remained still, with his tongue pressed to Dexter's. But as the rhythm increased and

Dexter started riding his dick faster, Lang's eyes opened wide and he started slapping Dexter's ass with both hands. The faster Dexter rode, the harder Lang slapped.

A few minutes later, Captain Lang pulled his tongue out of Dexter's mouth and said, "I'm ready to come, Dexter."

Dexter sat up higher and arched his back, but he didn't break his rhythm once. He grabbed his own penis and started jerking it. "Come inside me. I want to feel and experience as much of you as I can."

Lang came first. His head went back and his mouth opened wide. He wasn't loud, but he moaned and bucked his hips into Dexter's ass with bangs so loud and so hard, Dexter's entire body began to vibrate with pre-orgasmic sensations.

A moment later, Dexter's penis exploded all over Lang's right shoulder. If Lang hadn't moved his head when he did, Dexter's come would have landed on his lips.

When Captain Lang finally opened his eyes again, Dexter was still rocking back and forth on his dick. Lang tilted his head sideways and lowered his eyes to his shoulder. He looked at the mess Dexter had made and he said, "Are you going to do that thing I like to watch you do?"

Dexter smiled and licked his lips. He knew what Lang wanted him to do. So he lowered his head to Lang's shoulder and licked his own come. He stuck his tongue all the way out and licked with long, slow laps until Lang's shoulder was clean. Captain Lang pursed his lips and watched.

Then Dexter sat up. He was about to lower his right leg so he could climb off of Lang's dick, but Lang sat up and grabbed his neck. He pulled Dexter's face to his and shoved his tongue back into Dexter's mouth. He kissed him for a long time; his chin

moved up and down. When he stopped kissing and he pulled back, he smiled. “That was nice. I can’t actually taste anything because I’m a ghost. But your tongue felt different that time. It’s hard to explain. In the future, I’d like to try something I’ve never done before. It’s something I’ve always wanted to do.”

“What’s that?” Dexter was curious.

“You’ll see,” Lang said. “I think you’ll like it, too. But I’m not telling you right now.” Then he slapped Dexter’s ass so hard he scared a bird right out of a tree.

Chapter Ten

At their next regular meeting, the Board of Selectmen rescheduled another Special Town Meeting for the Memorial Day issue in mid-November. This gave Dexter and the rest of the Retail Association at least six weeks to get the word out to the community and to prepare for battle against the chamber. Dexter knew Fred and the town chamber would also be working hard to spread their information, and he knew the Retail Association would have to work twice as hard to be taken seriously.

It also became one of the main focuses of the TV show. Jesse Barlow flew back and forth from Los Angeles. Kellan and Paige were the ones putting it all together. But Jesse knew a good thing when he saw it, so he used the Memorial Day issue to his advantage. When he left town, he told Kellan and Paige to get as much about Dexter's fight to save the fundraiser as possible.

But the TV show wasn't Dexter's top priority. He was fighting to save the traditional Memorial Day Weekend fundraiser because he'd come to believe in the issue and he didn't want to see an important fundraiser end for something as frivolous as an arts festival. He also wanted to help the small retail businesses of Provincetown so they wouldn't be swallowed up in a counter-productive event that would jeopardize their already small incomes.

Dexter created fliers and walked them door to door until his feet ached. He spent long hours in his study with Elliot. They set up a blog, a Facebook page, and a Twitter account about what they were doing. Most nights he couldn't keep his eyes open, but he

wanted Internet presence with this issue. There were a lot of younger people in town who didn't read newspapers anymore and Dexter figured he could catch their attention by using more current methods of communication. He set up Google alerts to see if Fred and the chamber were doing anything on the Internet. And every morning when he checked the Google alerts, he found the chamber was completely ignoring the Internet. This didn't raise his eyebrows in the least. Though Fred talked a good game, Dexter knew he was an amateur.

By the end of October, Michael called Dexter on a Monday night. He'd just read about the new reality show that Dexter was doing and he was curious to hear more. "Hey, baby. Why didn't you tell me about this gig?" He hadn't called since they'd last seen him on the Fourth of July. "Why did you keep it from me?" He was talking as if Dexter was still his partner.

Dexter sighed. It was late and he was in his office with Captain Lang. Dexter had just finished a blog post about saving the fundraiser and Lang was rubbing his shoulders. He shrugged and said, "I haven't told anyone except the people around me. I'm not too thrilled about doing it in the first place. The only reason I did it is because I need the money." He wasn't a mean person. He didn't throw out the fact that Michael had lost all their money. But he wanted Michael to know this wasn't about having fun.

"You're being much too kind to this idiot," Captain Lang said. "Don't tell him how much money you're making. Let him wonder. If he hadn't been such an idiot, you wouldn't have to do this."

Dexter looked up at Lang and said, "I'm not."

"What?" Michael asked. "Are you alone?" He couldn't hear Lang.

Dexter shook his head. “Yes, I’m alone. I was just thinking aloud.” Then he gave Lang a look and pressed his index finger to his lips. No one else could hear Lang, but Dexter could barely keep his eyes open and he didn’t want to get confused.

“I was wondering about when I’m going to see Brighton next,” Michael said. “It’s been a while, and I am her father, too.”

Dexter rolled his eyes. He wanted to maintain a good relationship with Michael because Brighton adored him, and Brighton had been asking about Michael for weeks. Dexter didn’t have a problem with her seeing Michael, but he didn’t want Michael around while the reality show was being filmed. He knew Michael—he’d try to take over. He’d walk into Keel Cottage as if he owned it and he’d start bossing everyone around. So Dexter took a deep breath and said, “Brighton misses you. Why don’t I send her out to Hollywood this weekend? Halloween is on a Thursday this year, which means she can go out in her costume with her friends that night. On Friday I’ll drive Marion and Brighton up to Boston. They can fly out and spend the whole weekend with you.”

Michael hesitated for a moment, then said, “Why don’t *you* come with her?” He laughed in to the phone and said, “My dick is all healed now. I’ll take good care of you, baby.”

Dexter frowned. “I’m under contract right now with the reality show. They are following me around everywhere. I can’t get away.” His voice was steady, without emotion. He still had feelings for Michael, but they weren’t sexual anymore.

“Let them follow you out here, to Hollywood,” he said. “I’ve seen that done many times on reality shows.”

Dexter rolled his eyes again. He didn't want the entire country watching him fly out to Hollywood to visit his ex-partner. It was too personal and it still made his stomach turn to think he was single again after all those years of being in a relationship. Michael had not been mentioned at all on the show, and Dexter wanted to keep it that way. "I just can't leave right now. I'm working on something important with a local retail association, and it's just not a good time. If you don't want to see Brighton, that's fine." He knew it was mean to use guilt, but Michael hadn't always been the best father.

"No," Michael said. "Send them out. I bought a small condo in Hollywood with the money from the sale of our house in the hills. And I have a guest room already set up for Brighton. I miss her."

Dexter shook his head. Though Michael had done a lot to hurt him, the fact that he'd set up a room for Brighton was nice. "I'll call you in the middle of the week and give you the itinerary," Dexter said. "Brighton is going to be thrilled."

When he hung up the phone, Lang reached down and grabbed his chest muscles. He pinched Dexter's nipples and said, "The man is a complete waste. You should just ignore him completely. You and Brighton are better off without him."

Dexter closed his eyes and arched his back. His nipples had always been sensitive. "I can't do that. Michael is her father and she loves him. And he's not all that bad. I wouldn't have been with him all those years if he was. Give me some credit." He yawned and rubbed his eyes. "Before Michael met the nineteen-year-old, he never cheated and things were fine. Maybe he had a pre-mid-life crisis. I don't know."

Captain Lange bent over and kissed his earlobe. "I never thought of it that way. Maybe he's just a fool, but not a bad fool." Then he squeezed Dexter's nipples harder and said, "At least we'll have the entire house to ourselves every night this coming weekend."

Dexter reached behind the leather office chair and grabbed Lang's dick. He was planning to suck him off. "I didn't think about that. But you're right. This will be the first time we've ever been alone in the house. This is going to work out fine. Brighton will see her father, and everyone is happy."

But when he told Marion the news during breakfast, she didn't smile. Kellan and Paige had the camera pointed at Marion's face when Dexter told her she was going to California for the weekend. Jesse was still in Los Angeles and he wasn't returning until later in the week. And Captain Lang was standing at the end of the center island, not far from Marion.

When Lang saw Marion frown, he knocked over the salt and pepper grinders and laughed. No one but Dexter could see him or hear him. It looked as if the grinders fallen over by themselves. Marion put her hands on her hips and looked at both grinders; Kellan and Paige looked at each other and shrugged. It wasn't the first time they'd seen something strange happen in Keel Cottage. Lang was always doing little things like this to Marion. He took pleasure in teasing her.

Marion picked the grinders up and said, "Did you see that, Mr. Moore? They just fell over by themselves, plain as day." She pointed to Kellan and Paige. "I hope you got that on camera. There's something very unusual about this house."

Kellan and Paige looked at each other and shrugged. They'd become invisible intruders in the house and they knew Marion's outburst to them would be edited out of

the show. They remained in the background and never offered an opinion about anything. Sometimes Dexter felt as if he had three ghosts instead of one.

Dexter faked a laugh and waved his arm. "You probably hit it by accident," he said, then gave Captain Lang a dirty look and shook his head.

Marion and Brighton were making pancakes that morning. When Brighton heard she was going out to see her father, she jumped off her chair and ran to hug Dexter. Marion dropped the wooden spoon into the pancake batter and gave him a long, hard stare. Then Marion forced a smile for the camera and said, "I'll start packing on Thursday morning, Mr. Moore."

Dexter put his hands into his pockets and frowned. "There will also be a nice bonus with your check on Friday, too, Marion." He knew she wasn't happy about going back to Hollywood, especially the part about spending the weekend at Michael's.

Marion looked down at Brighton and smiled. She was petting Cleo, telling him she was going to visit her father that weekend. Then Marion looked up at Dexter and said, "Thank you, Mr. Moore. I appreciate it. And after seeing the expression on Brighton's face, I think this will be a good trip for her. I'm looking forward to it."

Dexter sat down at the table to wait for his pancakes. He opened his napkin and placed it on his lap. "Oh, and Marion," he said. "I won't be home for dinner tonight. I'm going to a small dinner party with Elliot."

Marion nodded and smiled, pouring pancake batter onto a hot buttered grill. She never questioned his personal life.

But Captain Lang crossed to the table. He raised his eyebrows and said, "What kind of dinner party? You didn't mention it to *me*."

Dexter shrugged and said, “I was invited to Fred and Steve’s house.”

Marion flipped a pancake and stared at him. “Fred and Steve? Aren’t they the ones who you’re fighting in this battle to save the fundraiser?” She thought he was talking to her.

Dexter shrugged his shoulders. He smiled at Lang, then looked at Marion and said, “I ran into Fred yesterday in the market. He invited Elliot and me to dinner, and said he didn’t want the issue over Memorial Day weekend to become personal. He wants to be friends.”

At the same time, Captain Lang and Marion both said, “They sound like strange people to me.”

Dexter blinked. He wasn’t sure where to look. He stared at his lap and said, “I don’t know. I guess I’ll find out tonight, and I’ll fill you all in tomorrow.”

* * * *

At seven o’clock, Dexter picked up Elliot and they drove to Shank Painter Road where Fred and Steve lived. Elliot directed him. They had to cross Bradford Street and Dexter still wasn’t familiar with that part of town yet. In Provincetown, everything seemed to revolve around Commercial Street. And if you lived on Commercial Street, you rarely ventured into other parts of town unless there was a specific reason.

As they drove down Shank Painter, the homes resembled classic Cape Cod cottages with gray shingles and white trim. But when they approached a newer home and Elliot told him to pull into the driveway and park, Dexter’s jaw dropped. He switched off the engine and stared wide-eyed at Fred and Steve’s house. In the midst of all the Cape Cods stood a white stucco tract house with two large concrete lions on the doorstep. It

looked like one of those homes you'd see in a cookie-cutter development somewhere in the New Jersey suburbs. The lawn was lush with green sod, the driveway was paved with smooth black macadam, and there were all kinds of perfectly trimmed topiaries. The topiaries that flanked the front door were tall corkscrews. The mailbox at the end of the driveway was a scaled-down version of the actual house.

Dexter turned to Elliot and said, "This is where they live?"

Elliot shrugged his shoulders. "I know," he said. "It's awful. It sticks out like a pimple on the end of a big nose."

When they knocked on the front door, Fred answered it and said, "I'm so glad you could both make it. *We love* you both so much. We really do." He was wearing acid-washed jeans with pegged legs, a red and white striped T-shirt, and thick red socks. He'd been in Madonna's closet again and he'd forgotten to raid the shoe shelf. His hair was slicked and stiff with product and his eyebrows had been freshly plucked into thin arches.

Elliot poked Dexter in the ribs and said, "*We love* you, too. We really do."

The entire interior of the house was just as out of place in Provincetown as the exterior. The formal furniture was brand new and it had all been purchased from a large department store. The entire house was a conglomerate of well-planned sets. The fabrics on the upholstered furniture matched the custom drapes. The end tables and coffee tables matched the dining room furniture. There were new hardwood floors with glossy factory finishes, and granite countertops in the kitchen with beveled edges.

In a corner of the entrance hall there was a large basket filled with shoes. Fred smiled and pointed to the basket. "You can take off your shoes and put them in the

basket,” he said. “We don’t wear shoes in the house. They scuff the floors and carry germs into the house.”

Dexter widened his eyes and gave Elliot a look. Then he pulled off his shoes and dropped them into the basket. If he’d known, he would have worn slippers.

Fred escorted them to the back of the house to a large great room off the kitchen, where four other shoeless gay men were sitting on matching chairs around a square coffee table. They were all sitting on the edges of their seats, as if they were terrified to sit back and squash one of the polyester accent pillows. Steve asked them what they wanted to drink and Dexter said he wanted a vodka martini. He wasn’t usually a drinker, but he knew he’d need something strong to get him through the night.

After cocktails, they all went into the formal dining room in their stocking feet and took their seats. The drinks had set in by then and the party loosened up. The long Chippendale table was covered with white linen and the starched napkins matched. There were crystal knife rests, gold plastic charger plates, and crystal wine glasses for either red or white wine. They served pumpkin ravioli as the first course, and poached salmon as the main course. Dessert was a light chocolate mousse.

And in spite of the shoe thing, it would have turned out to be a pleasant evening if Fred hadn’t asked Dexter if he wanted a tour of their home.

Steve had just served coffee and one of the guests was telling a joke. Fred crossed to where Dexter was sitting and said, “Do you want to see the house?”

Elliot poked him in the ribs again and said, “You have to see the entire house, Dexter. You don’t want to miss it.” Then Elliot covered his mouth with his napkin. It was hard to tell whether he was laughing or clearing his throat.

Dexter shrugged his shoulders. "Of course I'd like to see the house." What could he say? They'd just served him a nice dinner and they seemed like nice guys.

Fred clapped his hands and smiled. "C'mon Steve," he said. "We're going to show Dexter around."

Steve didn't say anything. He stopped pouring and put the silver coffeepot down on the table. He went to the entrance of the dining room and stood there with a huge grin on his face.

When they were upstairs on the second floor, Fred took him through three well-furnished guest rooms, a home office, and a large media room with black leather theater chairs. Fred did all the talking and Steve smiled and nodded his head. When they finally reached the master bedroom, Fred pushed the double doors open and said, "And here's our room." He smiled, put his arm around Steve's waist, and said, "This is where we have all our sexy fun. This is where it all happens."

Dexter smiled. He thought it was nice that a couple who had been together for so long were still affectionate and sexual. He'd always wanted that with Michael.

But when they crossed into the master bedroom and stood at the foot of the king-sized bed, Dexter felt a hand on his ass. Fred was on his left and Steve was on his right. Then Dexter felt another hand on press into his crotch.

Dexter looked to the left and Fred smiled. He looked to the right and Steve was grinning and his eyes were glazed. Fred leaned into Dexter's neck and licked it, then cupped Dexter's balls in his hand and said, "How would you like to have two expert cock suckers drain that big thick cock of yours dry right now?" His voice became low and dark; his eyes narrowed and he licked his lips. "We both just *love* you."

Dexter's eyes bugged and he raised his arms. He stepped back and said, "Look, guys, I had a really good time tonight. Dinner was great. But I have to get home now. My daughter waits up for me. I always read her a bedtime story. Don't get me wrong. You guys are okay and everything. It's cool. But I really have to get home." He smiled, not wanting to insult them. But he couldn't wait to get out of that house.

Fred shrugged his shoulders and said, "Well, if you are ever interested in two hot mouths sucking you off at the same time, let us know. We'll take real good care of you, Dexter." Then he licked his lips again and said, "And I swallow."

Dexter smiled and started to back out of the room on his heels. "I'll keep it in mind."

When Dexter went back downstairs, he didn't sit down again. He whispered to Elliot, "We're leaving. Right now."

Elliot smiled. He stood up and they said good night to everyone. Fred and Steve walked them to the front door and thanked them for coming. "We *love* you both so much," Fred said. "We really do."

Elliot hugged Fred and smiled. "But we *love* you even more."

Dexter gulped and reached into the shoe basket. He found Elliot's shoes first and handed them to him, then found his own. He held his shoes in his hand and said, "I'll have you guys over to my place real soon. I had a great time tonight."

Then Dexter and Elliot kissed them good night and walked back to the car in their socks. Dexter walked fast. He didn't put his shoes back on until he was inside the car and the engine was running.

Elliot laughed. "Why are we leaving so soon? Did something happen upstairs?"

Dexter put the car into reverse and backed out of the driveway. He looked at Elliot and asked, "Why are you laughing?"

Elliot's shoulders jumped and his hand was over his mouth. "No reason."

Dexter smiled and punched Elliot in the thigh. "You knew they were going to try to get into my pants, didn't you?"

Elliot straightened his shoulders and said, "Don't get mad. Everyone in Provincetown knows by now that they love to do three-ways. They cruise the bars, the dunes, and the dick dock looking for a good-looking third. If you turn them down, they don't take it personally. They don't take anything personally. They *love* everyone."

"I'm not mad," Dexter said. "But you could have warned me, you big ass." He laughed and punched him in the thigh again. "I could have been prepared for it when Fred grabbed my balls and Steve grabbed my ass."

"I thought about warning you," Elliot said, still laughing. "I really did. But then I would have missed the expression on your face when you came downstairs. I'm sorry."

Chapter Eleven

In Hollywood, Dexter had always made Halloween a huge event. He'd done this mostly for Brighton's sake, but also because it was his favorite time of year. He'd given large costume parties for both the children and the adults at the house in the Hollywood Hills. Brighton's costume had always been something she'd chosen on her own, and his costume had always been something that had inspired him during the year. Michael had always worn the same clown costume; the kids had loved it and it hadn't mattered much to him.

Now that Dexter was living in Provincetown year round, Halloween was even more exciting, and it wasn't because there was a film crew following him around. He would have been just as excited if the film crew hadn't been there. This was the Halloween he'd always dreamed about having but could never get right in Southern California. The New England weather had turned cooler, the leaves fell from the trees, and the smell of burning wood rose up from chimneys all over town. It *felt* like fall. After five, the sun went down and there was always a hint of romance in the air. And when the nighttime skies were clear in Provincetown that time of year, the stars seemed brighter and closer than anywhere else he'd ever been.

Brighton decided to wear a princess costume that year. She'd been reading a story book about a princess and she wanted to be the main character. Dexter had frowned at first. He'd been hoping she would choose something more interesting. But Brighton had looked him in the eye and insisted. And he didn't want to force her into wearing a

costume that would make her feel uncomfortable. Dexter was strict, but he knew when to give her freedom to choose without influencing her with his opinions. So he smiled and ordered the materials Marion would need to create the princess costume.

Dexter's costume that year was far from mundane. He'd been so inspired by Captain Lang and some of the old stories Lang had told him about his turbulent days at sea that he had decided to be a pirate. He'd ordered a pirate costume on the Internet, with a long black wig, fake tattoos, and a patch for his eye. But it wasn't just any pirate costume. This one had tight pants and black leather boots that had six-inch high heels. He'd ordered it from one of those sexy costume Web sites, where they sold kinky outfits and sex toys. Though Dexter was now living in New England, it didn't mean he had to tone down his personality. On the surface, Provincetown had all the best aspects of New England. But it wasn't exactly a typical version of a quiet New England town. Most of the guys he knew in town would be wearing drag and campy outfits with large fake breasts. The feather boas, the kinky high heels, and the fishnet stockings would be out in full force that night. The restaurants would all be open for business and the nightclubs would be packed. A normal pirate costume would have been too dull for Provincetown; the one Dexter had ordered was perfect.

He didn't ignore Keel Cottage either. While Kellan and Paige filmed everything he did for the reality show, Dexter and Brighton went to work decorating the house two days before Halloween. He'd always decorated for Halloween in Hollywood, but this year, because of the film crew, he went well beyond the normal routine. He and Brighton carved pumpkins into jack-o'-lanterns that had real candles. They lined the railing on the front porch, the front steps, and the front walk with spooky glowing pumpkins with

whimsical expressions. Dexter drove to Chatham and bought thousands of little orange and green Halloween lights. He wrapped the lights around long strands of corn husk garland and hung them in swags all over the porch railing. He even lit a large corn husk wreath on the front door, then draped more lighted garland on the railing of the widow's walk.

When Brighton thought the entire house was decorated, Dexter pulled out a surprise from the hall closet that made her jump up and down and laugh. While he'd been out buying the Halloween lights, he'd come across a little shop that sold black artificial trees and all sorts of gleaming Halloween glass decorations. There were shiny witches with gold glitter, riding silver brooms. He saw orange pumpkins with green stems and sparkles, in different sizes and shapes. There were hundreds of decorations from which to choose; one was better than the other. So he bought two of each. The thought of having a Halloween tree, like a Christmas tree, had never occurred to him. But when he saw one already set up and decorated in the shop he knew he had to have it.

Dexter and Brighton wrapped the black tree in orange and green lights, hung the decorations, and plugged it in on the front porch to the right of the door. When the lights went on, the ornaments glistened and the front porch lit up with a soft, amber glow. Brighton smiled and threw her arms around Dexter's waist. "This is beautiful, Dad," she said. "Everyone in town is going to see this." She pointed to Commercial Street. People passing by were already stopping and looking up at the decorated house. Kellan and Paige were getting it all on camera. "This is going to be the best Halloween we've ever had."

But Dexter wasn't finished. "Wait here," he said. "I have one more surprise."

He ran to the garage at the back of the house. He pulled a large black cauldron from a box and reached for a Styrofoam container that was in front of the car. When he returned to the front porch, Kellan was standing next to Brighton, whose hands were on her hips as she admired all the decorations on the tree.

Captain Lang had appeared. He was leaning against the railing with his hands in his pockets. Dexter smiled and said, "Wait until you see this," and Brighton thought he was talking to them.

Then he set the cauldron beside the tree and went into the house for a pitcher of very hot water. When he returned, he poured some hot water into the cauldron. After that, he dumped a piece of dry ice into the hot water. When the dry ice hit the water, white smoke formed and rose up from the bottom of the cauldron.

Cleo barked at the smoke. But Brighton's eyes widened and she stared into the cauldron with an open mouth. "How did you do that?" she asked.

"It's dry ice," Dexter said. "And we only do it when I'm around." Then he looked at Marion and said, "I'll put it all away when she goes to bed and I'll bring it out again tomorrow night."

"It's so realistic, Mr. Moore," Marion said. "The whole house looks wonderful. I have to say you really went all out this year. I almost wish I were going to wear a costume." Marion never got dressed up for Halloween.

Captain Lang clapped and said, "Bravo, my man. I couldn't agree more. Brighton is a very lucky little girl to have a father like you. I'm impressed at the lengths you'll go to."

Dexter looked at Captain Lang and smiled. Dexter had worked hard getting all these things together, and he'd spent more money than he should have spent, but it had been worth the time and the money.

He watched Brighton's face. She was still staring at the smoke rising from the cauldron, waving her fingers through the smoke to see how it felt. He'd never seen her so excited and curious at the same time. He ran his hand across the back of his head and said, "Too bad we don't have any real ghosts right now."

Captain Lang's eyebrows went up. He smiled at Dexter and went to where Marion and Brighton were standing. Then he reached out with his right arm and grabbed the Halloween tree. He shook the tree several times in front of them. While the decorations jiggled back and forth, Brighton jumped back and put her arms around Dexter's legs. Marion pressed her palm to her chest and gasped.

"Did you see that, Mr. Moore?" Marion shouted. "That tree just moved by itself."

"Is there a ghost, Dad?" Brighton asked. She was holding Dexter's legs, but she sounded more curious than frightened. "How did the tree move?"

Dexter stared into Captain Lang's eyes and smiled. "Naw," he said, waving his arm. "There's no ghost, sweetie. It's just a breeze passing through."

Kellan and Paige had been standing at the other end of the porch. They were still filming. Paige shook her head and said in a low voice, "But why didn't the breeze blow the smoke, too? It shook the tree. It should have blown the smoke at the same time." She had her right palm pressed to her throat and she was leaning forward.

Dexter laughed. It was the first thing he'd heard Paige say in days. He shrugged his shoulders and said, "You probably just missed the smoke blowing. Our eyes can play tricks on us sometimes, Paige."

Paige's shoulders relaxed and she stepped back. But Marion pressed her index finger to her bottom lip and gave Dexter a look. She wasn't buying his explanation. Marion knew there was something going on at Keel Cottage, and it had nothing to do with random breezes and gusts of wind.

On Halloween night after dinner, Marion helped Brighton get dressed and Dexter put on his costume in his own room. He dressed in front of Captain Lang. Lang had just fucked Dexter and he was still resting on the bed with his legs spread wide. His large penis was still semi-erect and it was pointing down and resting on his balls. Dexter had applied the fake tattoos earlier that day. He'd placed one tattoo of a ship's anchor on his bicep, one with skull and crossbones on his right thigh, and one tattoo of an eagle just above his ass at the small of his back. The tattoos made Lang breathe heavier; he'd licked the skin on Dexter's back around the eagle for a long time.

When Dexter put on the skintight black pants, Lang licked his lips and furrowed his eyebrows. Then he grabbed his penis and stroked it while Dexter put on the sexy, long, sleeveless white shirt. It came down to Dexter's thighs like a tunic, but when he wrapped a wide black belt around his thin waist, the shirt gathered and rose up, exposing Dexter's firm round ass in the tight pants.

Lang smiled and said, "I'd like to see you wear nothing at all but that shirt."

Dexter smiled. "I can do that."

When Dexter put on the long black wig and tied a red bandanna around his head, Captain Lang rubbed his penis a few times without even knowing it. And when Dexter put the black boots with the six-inch high heels on and slowly walked across the room, Captain Lang sat up on the bed and said, "Very nice, indeed. I have to admit that I never once saw a pirate that looked as good as you in my day, but I like it anyway." Then he patted his naked lap. "Come up here and sit down."

Dexter put on his black mask and climbed up on the bed. He spread his legs and straddled Captain Lang's naked waist. Then he leaned forward and kissed Lang. He stuck his tongue into Lang's mouth and ran his fingers through Lang's heavy beard. He only kissed him for a moment. "I have to go downstairs. Brighton is waiting and I'm taking her trick-or-treating all over town with Elliot and a few of her friends."

"When you come back will you wear those boots again?" Lang asked. He was running his large hands up and down Dexter's thighs, squeezing the bottom of Dexter's ass whenever he reached the top of his thigh.

"I can wear them whenever you want," Dexter said. "I'm not renting the costume. I bought it." He'd been hoping Captain Lang would get turned on by it, and he'd had a funny feeling that Lang would especially like the boots. "Tonight, when I get back, I'll wear just the shirt and the boots. And you can lift the shirt up over my head very slowly, Captain."

"I'll be here waiting."

Dexter got up from the bed and went to the front door. The high heels clicked against the hardwood floors. They weren't chunky heels, but they weren't stilettos either.

They were in between, and slanted forward. “You’re not going out to frighten people on Halloween?” he said. “I thought that’s what ghosts were supposed to do.”

Lang smiled and waved his arm. “Please. Do I look like an amateur?”

Dexter looked into his eyes and said, “There is nothing, absolutely *nothing*, amateur about you, Captain Lang.”

Then he went downstairs so he could take Brighton trick-or-treating. She was already out on the front porch with a few of her friends. Since Dexter and Elliot were wearing costumes that night, they had volunteered to escort a few of Brighton’s friends around town. The other parents were thrilled. A lot of the parents in town worked at night in restaurants and their kids would have had to stay home if they hadn’t volunteered.

Kellan and Paige were on the front lawn because they were following everyone into town to film the entire evening. They weren’t wearing costumes, but Elliot was sitting on a wicker chair with his legs crossed at the knee. He was wearing a campy version of a Marilyn Monroe costume he’d rented in town from a drag shop. When Dexter saw him, he couldn’t stop laughing. The red lipstick was smudged; his fake breasts were crooked. Elliot hadn’t even bothered to shave his legs, and he was wearing those awful low-heeled pumps old ladies wore. They were a size too small. His huge, wide feet were bursting from the sides.

They organized the kids and walked up Commercial Street, from the west end of town all the way to the east end. The kids walked up to houses, filled their bags with candy, and Elliot complained about his tight high heels along the way. At one point, while Elliot and Dexter were waiting for the kids at the end of someone’s front walk, a group of good-looking gay men walked by and whistled at Dexter. They stared at his legs

and hooted. One very brazen guy with five o'clock shadow pointed and said, "Hot ass, man. Very nice." Dexter looked down at the gate and smiled. He was flattered, but he didn't make eye contact with them. When they were gone, he looked at Kellan and asked, "Do you think we can cut that shot out of the show?" If he'd been alone, he wouldn't have minded the guys making comments about his ass. But he didn't want the entire country to see that a group of young guys had been hot for his ass. And he didn't want Brighton to see it when it aired on TV.

Kellan smiled and he looked at Paige. "Jesse would kill us," Kellan said. "He loves things like that. But I'll take care of it for you, Mr. Moore. Don't worry. We'll get rid of it."

"Thanks, Kellan," Dexter said. "I appreciate it." He'd established a mutual trust with Kellan and Paige. He knew they wouldn't do anything tasteless.

On the way home, they walked down Bradford Street so the kids could stop at different homes and fill their bags with more candy. By the time Dexter reached Keel Cottage, after walking the other kids home first and walking Elliot to his place, his legs were aching. The high-heeled boots weren't uncomfortable, but he wasn't used to walking like that. His calves were sore and his shins were pinched.

Brighton wanted to stay up longer and go through her candy bag. It wasn't full; a lot of grumpy people had turned out their lights and locked their gates that night. But Dexter kissed her goodnight and walked her up to her room, where Marion was waiting to help her get ready for bed. He didn't want her eating too much candy in one sitting. He also told her he wanted Marion to go through the bag first to make sure all the candy

was safe. Coming from Hollywood, he never took anything for granted, and he wasn't about to let Brighton eat candy from strangers unless he knew it was totally safe.

When Brighton was in her room, he walked Cleo in the front yard, then went back to his own room. He opened the door and saw Captain Lang sitting in a wing chair by the fireplace. He smiled at Lang and locked the door.

"I've been waiting for you," Lang said. He was wearing his dark sea captain's uniform again.

Dexter smiled and crossed to the bathroom. "I'll be right back," he said. "I want to freshen up."

While he was in the bathroom, he removed the black wig and brushed his teeth. Then he pulled off the high-heeled boots, the tight black pants, and the wide black belt. The white sleeveless shirt dropped and the hem rested at the top of his thighs. He reached for the black boots and stepped back into them with his bare feet.

When he walked into the bedroom again, Captain Lang was still sitting in the chair. Dexter crossed the room slowly. The high heels clicked on the floor and Captain Lang uncrossed his legs and adjusted his crotch. Dexter walked to the windows and leaned forward to open the one in the center of the turret. When he leaned his body forward, he lifted his right leg and rested his knee on the window seat. The back of the white shirt rose up and exposed the lower part of his tanned, naked ass. He knew what he was doing; he knew Lang was watching. So he spread his legs, arched his back, and lingered in front of the window.

Less than a second later, he heard Captain Lang get up from the chair and come to the window. When he was standing behind Dexter, Lang lowered his arms. He rested his

palms on the bottom of Dexter's ass and sighed. Then his thick fingers went up, under the white shirt, and stopped at the small of Dexter's back.

Lang massaged Dexter's back for a minute, and then he pushed the white shirt up above Dexter's waist and said, "You look very good in those boots. I like them." He took a deep breath and ran the side of his hand up and down the crack of Dexter's ass.

Dexter's eyes were closed by then. He was still leaning into the window frame and his legs were still apart. But now his heart was beating faster, and his penis had grown into a full erection. He took a deep breath and said, "Your hands feel good. They're strong and firm. When you touch me, my stomach moves and my heart feels like it's ready to jump out of my chest."

"You have soft skin," Captain Lang said. He was squeezing Dexter's hips now. The tips of his fingers pressed hard and he pulled Dexter's ass into his black pants. "You make me feel as if I'm alive again."

Lang never paid Dexter exaggerated, insincere compliments like some of the men Dexter had known. His words were always simple and honest.

Dexter closed his eyes. He moaned and wiggled his hips a few times. When he was having sex with Captain Lang, they usually talked. But it wasn't dirty, raunchy talk. It was talk about their strong emotions, and how they felt about what they were both experiencing. Dexter had never been with a man who talked this way. Michael had been into dirty talk during sex, but he'd never talked about his feelings. As far as Dexter was concerned, dirty talk was okay—sometimes. But nothing compared to talking about true love and emotion while making love.

A minute later, Captain Lang removed his right hand from Dexter's ass. He pulled down his zipper and pulled out his dick, and when he inserted the tip into Dexter's opening, Dexter arched his back higher and sucked in his bottom lip. "Yes. Go in as deep as you can."

Captain Lang pushed the white shirt up to Dexter's shoulders and adjusted his legs. When Lang had established a firm stance, he pounded into Dexter's small hole with one quick thrust. Dexter's eyes rolled back and his mouth opened wide. Instead of what would normally have been initial pain, this sent shivers through his body. When Lang was inside as far as he could go, Dexter felt the fabric of Lang's heavy slacks rub against his soft, bare ass. Dexter leaned forward, pressed his palms on the window seat, and said, "Ah, yes. I could remain this way forever. In this exact position."

But Captain Lang had other plans. He slapped Dexter's ass hard and started bucking his hips. He moved slowly, sliding his dick almost all the way out, then ramming into Dexter's body. He rammed so hard that Dexter had to grab the cushion on the window seat to keep his balance.

By the time they were both ready to climax, Dexter's legs were spread so far apart it felt like Captain Lang was splitting him in half. But Dexter didn't want him to stop; the more the muscles in his legs tightened, the closer he came to climax. A drop of saliva fell from Dexter's lips. He whispered, "More, don't stop. I'm almost there and I'm not even touching myself."

When they climaxed this time, Dexter's whole body clenched. The orgasm began at the lips of his anus, spread through the inside of his lower half, and ignited every muscle he had. When Dexter's penis finally exploded, the muscles in the backs of his

thighs jumped and vibrated. His nipples stiffened and his pectorals pulsed with satisfaction. His entire body went into a grand, outrageous orgasm. It was so intense he actually had to concentrate on his thigh muscles. They started to jerk and convulse on their own. And if he hadn't concentrated hard, he would have lost his balance in the high-heeled boots.

During all this, Captain Lang dumped another temporary load into Dexter's body. He grunted a few times, gave Dexter a couple of hard bangs in the ass, and whispered, "So sweet." Then he sighed and said, "Are you okay, Dexter?"

Dexter was still trying to catch his breath. The white shirt was bunched up in his face. He cleared his throat and said, "I'm good. I've never had an orgasm like that before. I didn't even touch my dick." He knew his leg muscles were overworked and sore from walking through town in the high-heeled boots all evening, and that was why they were so sensitive to the orgasm. But he also knew Captain Lang had something to do with the orgasm he'd experienced, too. So he smiled and said, "I've never felt this way with another man. I'm falling in love with you, Captain."

Captain Lang stopped fucking him. But he didn't pull out. He was silent for a moment, then he said, "You can't fall in love with me. I'm a ghost. We are part of two different worlds, Dexter."

Dexter shook his head. He lifted his foot, rubbed the high heel against Captain Lang's leg, and said, "But you're not a ghost to me. You're a strong, wonderful man. I've been falling in love with you since the first day I saw your painting over the fireplace."

Captain Lang sighed. He stepped back and his dick slipped out of Dexter's body. When he reached down to help Dexter stand up, the white shirt fell down. Lang put his

hand up the shirt and grabbed Dexter's ass, then smiled and kissed him on the lips. He whispered, "I want you to go to bed now and get some sleep. You have to get up very early and drive Brighton and Marion to Boston tomorrow."

Dexter fell into his body; he rested his cheek on Lang's chest. When he wrapped his arms around Lang's wide shoulders, he took a deep breath and sighed. And while Lang continued to play with his ass, he said, "I want to fall asleep in your arms again. And I can't wait for this weekend. We'll have the whole house to ourselves for the first time."

Chapter Twelve

In the morning, Dexter woke up in Captain Lang's arms. He wasn't wearing the white pirate shirt anymore. But he'd been so tired after sex with Lang, he'd fallen asleep in the high-heeled boots. He rubbed his eyes and said, "I feel so trashy, sleeping naked in these kink-ass boots."

Captain Lang was lying on his back. "There's nothing trashy about you, Dexter. You're a gentleman, with a good, gentle heart." His eyes were open; one arm was around Dexter's shoulders and one hand was on Dexter's naked ass.

Dexter opened his eyes and kissed him on the cheek. Lang's beard brushed against his lips and his penis started to grow. He lifted his right leg and stretched it over Lang's thighs. But when he reached down to wrap his fingers around Captain Lang's growing erection, he heard Brighton shout. "Are you up, Dad? We're going downstairs for breakfast. We're all packed and ready to leave."

Dexter sat up. He shook his head and smiled. "I'll be down in a few minutes, sweetie," he shouted to the locked door. "I have to take a quick shower." He knew she was standing outside the door and it made him uncomfortable. He pulled the covers up to his waist. His erection started to shrink and he felt paranoid about the door. He knew he'd locked it. And he knew that if she'd walked inside she'd only see him lying there. He had never before brought a man home to his bed with Brighton in the house, but Captain Lang was a ghost, after all.

Lang slapped his ass and said, “You’d better get moving. She needs you. And while you’re showering, I think I’ll go down to the kitchen and have some fun with Marion.”

Dexter sat up and pulled off the boots, then got out of bed and headed to the bathroom. “Don’t be too hard on her,” he said. “Without Marion here, I don’t know what I’d do.”

Lang waved his arm and laughed. “Don’t be ridiculous. Marion loves it when I play with her. I can tell. She waits for it.”

A half hour later, Dexter went downstairs in a white polo shirt and a pair of faded jeans. His hair was still damp and his face was still moist from the hot shower. When he walked into the kitchen, Marion was buttering toast and Brighton was sitting at the kitchen table. Cleo was sitting at Brighton’s feet, waiting for her to drop food from the table by accident. It was still early. Kellan and Paige hadn’t arrived to start shooting yet.

Marion looked up from the butter dish and frowned. She pointed the butter knife at Dexter and said, “I hope you’ll be okay here all alone, Mr. Moore. Strange things have been happening again this morning.” She pointed the butter knife at the last cabinet on the right. “I keep shutting that door, and it keeps opening up on its own the minute I turn my back. And I saw the butter dish move across the counter all by itself a few minutes ago.”

Captain Lang stood next to Marion, waving at her from the side. The tips of his fingers almost touched her earlobe. Dexter smiled and said, “I’ll be fine, Marion. I’m sure there’s a logical explanation for everything. Besides, the crew will be following me around during the day. So I’ll only be home alone at night.” He looked into Lang’s eyes.

“And, to be honest, I’ve never felt safer living anywhere in my life. So if there is a ghost in this house, it’s a good one and I think he’s here to protect us.”

Captain Lang folded his arms across his chest and smiled. “I’d never let anything happen to any of you,” he said. “You’ll always be safe and happy living in this house. I’ll make sure of it.”

Dexter forgot the others. He smiled at Lang and said, “I know you will. And I know how much you care.”

Marion thought he was talking to her. “I do care, Mr. Moore. And for once I’m glad that annoying film crew will be here with you all weekend. Kellan is a skinny thing, and Paige doesn’t say much. But at least you won’t be all alone.”

After breakfast, Dexter backed the car out of the garage and drove them to Boston. Kellan and Paige had arrived by then and they followed Dexter to the airport in their SUV so they could film Dexter’s entire day. He waited for Marion and Brighton to board the plane. He told Marion to phone him the minute they arrived in Los Angeles. They had a ten o’clock flight, so he knew they’d arrive sometime between four or five his time. He stood in the window and watched the plane take off, then called Michael in Hollywood and told him they’d just left. He knew Michael would be there on time to pick them up, but he wanted Michael to know they were in the air and on their way.

After that, he drove into Boston and did some shopping. He had a whole day with a film crew and he wanted to kill time. Kellan and Paige followed. Dexter didn’t know Boston very well, so he didn’t venture far. He stuck close to Charles Street at the foot of Beacon Hill. He walked everywhere, browsing and window shopping. He didn’t buy much because he didn’t see anything he couldn’t buy back in Provincetown, and he

believed in supporting his local businesses. Besides, he felt awkward walking in and out of shops with Kellan and Paige in tow.

By the time he was back in the car and at the bottom of the Cape, it was nearly five o'clock in the afternoon. He'd forgotten how heavy traffic was on the Cape on Friday afternoons; he should have left Boston sooner. While he was sitting in traffic, his cell phone rang. Marion and Brighton had arrived in L.A. safely. He sighed with relief and said he'd call in the morning to check in on them. Marion told him not to worry and that everything was fine.

Kellan and Paige had stopped filming him after he'd finishing walking around in Boston. They told Dexter they were going back to their hotel early because Jesse Barlow was flying in from Hollywood for a few days and they knew he'd want to go over what they'd been filming while he'd been gone.

It took almost three hours to get from the Sagamore Bridge to his driveway in Provincetown. When he pulled into the garage, it was after eight o'clock. He took a deep breath and sighed. The only thing he wanted to do was go inside, take off all his clothes, and wrap his legs around Captain Lang's body. He didn't care about food; he'd eat in the morning.

Captain Lang and Cleo were waiting for him at the front door. "Where on Earth were you?" Lang asked.

Dexter kissed him on the cheek. "I did some shopping, then I got caught in traffic. I have to take care of Cleo first, and then I'll come upstairs."

Captain Lang reached down and grabbed his ass. He squeezed it and said, "I'll go up and wait for you." He didn't climb the staircase. He walked through the hallway wall and disappeared.

Cleo was barking and running around in circles by then. This was the first time Cleo had been away from Brighton and Marion in a long time and he didn't understand why they weren't with Dexter. The little dog rubbed his head up and down on Dexter's leg, then jumped up, rested his front paws in the windowsill, and looked back and forth to see if Brighton was coming up the front walk. When he didn't see anything, he looked back at Dexter and whimpered.

Dexter bent down and patted his head. "C'mon, boy," he said. "I'll make your dinner and take you out for a long walk." He didn't have to take Cleo outside right away. There was a tiny doggie door at the bottom of the back door in the kitchen that led to a small fenced-in area of the back yard. When they were away for a long time, Cleo always had plenty of water and the freedom to go outside whenever he wanted. But he wanted to give Cleo some attention. He'd been home alone all day.

After he fed Cleo, he went upstairs to his bedroom and Cleo went to Brighton's bedroom, where Dexter knew the dog would wait all weekend. Dexter opened the door and found Captain Lang waiting for him on the bed. He was naked and he was rubbing the bottom of his dick with the back of his right hand. He smiled at Dexter and said, "Put the boots on again."

Dexter rolled his eyes. "Did I hear the word *please*?"

Lang waved his dick at Dexter, lifted his right eyebrow, and said, "Please."

Without closing the bedroom door, Dexter removed all his clothes and pulled the boots out from under the bed where he'd left them earlier that day. He knew for sure this time that he was alone with Captain Lang, and he wasn't worried about the open door.

When he was naked and the boots were on his feet, he climbed onto the mattress at the foot of the bed and pressed his palms on Captain Lang's strong thighs. His legs were spread, his back was arched, and his ass up higher than his head. "Close your eyes," he said, then lowered his head and began to lick Lang's thighs.

Lang rested his head on the pillow and folded his hands at the base of his neck. When Dexter's tongue reached his balls, his body jerked a few times. Dexter opened his mouth and sucked Lang's right testicle past his lips. He sucked with gentle pressure until it was saturated with his saliva. Then the right testicle slipped from his mouth and he started working on the left one. Lang grabbed his own erection with his right hand. He bent his legs at the knee and spread them wider. Dexter released the left testicle. It dropped from his mouth and rested on his bottom lip for a second, and when it finally fell out, he opened his mouth and sucked both balls inside. His cheeks puffed and his lips stuck out. He pressed his tongue beneath Lang's balls and sucked until his lips were swollen and red.

When he stopped sucking Lang's balls and lifted his head. Lang smacked the side of his face with his dick and said, "Don't forget about this."

Dexter smiled. He stuck out his tongue and licked the entire shaft from bottom to top. Then he wrapped his lips around the head of Lang's dick and lowered his face until he could feel Lang's rough pubic hair on his nose.

He sucked him off this way until Lang grabbed the back of his head and said, "Sit on it now. But don't face me. Face the fireplace and put your back toward me. I want to see how it looks going in and out of your body."

Dexter kissed the tip of Lang's dick and smiled. Then he got up on his knees, turned around on the bed, and straddled Lang's body. His ass was facing Lang now; the high-heeled boots were up against Lang's legs. When Lang grabbed the six-inch heels and lifted Dexter's feet higher, Dexter pointed Lang's dick to his hole and sat down on it. It slipped all the way into Dexter's body until the bottom of Dexter's soft ass was pressed against Lang's pelvis. Dexter closed his eyes and lifted his arms in the air as if he were hanging from a trapeze. Lang gripped the heels and said, "I want to watch it slide in and out of your body, Dexter. You look good with me inside you."

Dexter took a deep breath and sighed. He lowered his arms and cupped his own chest muscles in his hands. He heard Cleo barking downstairs, which was unusual. Cleo wasn't an annoying dog that barked for nothing. But he pretended he didn't hear the barking and closed his eyes. He sucked in his bottom lip and started rocking his hips back and forth. He wanted to feel every inch of Captain Lang's penis, and he wanted Lang to watch his ass while it rocked inside his body.

Dexter hadn't been in this position for a while and he liked it. When his ass stopped going in circles, he squeezed his chest harder and started to ride Lang's dick. His nipples were hard; the lips of his anus rubbed against Lang's shaft. But when he started to ride faster, he heard someone sigh outside his bedroom door.

Dexter stopped moving. He looked to the right and saw Jesse Barlow standing in the doorway. Jesse's pants were unzipped and his semi-erect dick was in the palm of his

right hand. Dexter's eyes widened and he shouted, "What are you doing, Jesse?" Anyone else would have walked away without being noticed. But Jesse Barlow wasn't shy about getting what he wanted.

"This is outrageous," said Captain Lang. His dick was still inside Dexter, but he stopped moving.

Dexter looked back at Lang and said, "Can he see this?"

"Just you," Lang said. "He can't see me. He thinks you're having fun all alone."

Jesse stepped forward and crossed to the end of the bed. His eyes were glazed and his brows were pointing down. His dick was now fully erect and he was still holding it. It wasn't long, but it was wider than most. Jesse leaned back and said, "I can see everything, Dexter." Jesse thought Dexter was talking to him. He stared at Dexter's naked body with glaring eyes. "I've been dying to sink my teeth into your sweet ass since the first day you took off your clothes for the camera. You look good in that position."

Dexter rolled his eyes. "What are you doing in here? Why didn't you knock...or call first?" Normally, he would have pulled the covers up. But Lang's dick was still in his body and Lang was on the blankets. There was nothing else close by to use as a cover. And though Jesse couldn't see that Lang's invisible dick was up his ass, Dexter was, for all intents and purposes, in the perfect position to get fucked.

Jesse licked his lips. "I did knock. The dog even barked. But no one answered. So I just came up here on my own to see if you were okay. I think you wanted me to come up." He jerked his dick a few times and stared at Dexter's kinky boots. "This is one hot jerk-off session, man."

Jesse reached out and grabbed Dexter's right nipple. He smiled and shook his dick. "Let's have some fun tonight."

Dexter was about to throw him out. But when Jesse put his hand on Dexter's nipple, Captain Lang lifted Dexter off his dick and got out of the bed. "I've had enough," Lang said.

Dexter got out on the other side of the bed and said to Lang, "I'll take care of this."

Jesse thought Dexter was talking about his dick. "I know you will," he said. "I'll bet you know just how to take care of this."

"And I'm going to take care of *you*," Captain Lang said. He was talking to Jesse. "This guy has it coming, Dexter. How dare he walk in here and wave his dick back and forth at you? Who the hell does he think he is? I'll take care of the presumptuous little fuck so he never does anything like this again for as long as he lives."

"He doesn't mean any harm," Dexter said.

But it was too late. Lang crossed to the door and slammed it shut, then pushed the table next to the door forward. The table was stacked with books. It fell with a loud crash; the books on top of the table scattered all over the floor. And just in case that wasn't enough, he picked the table up and shoved it against the wall as hard as he could.

When the door slammed and the table went over, Jesse's jaw dropped. It looked as if these things were moving on their own. Jesse couldn't catch his breath. He shoved his dick back into his pants and pulled up his zipper. The antique table had uneven legs; it rocked for a long time. Jesse stared at it for a minute, then said, "What the fuck?"

Captain Lang pressed his palm to his stomach and laughed. Then he opened the door as wide as it would go and said, "Now get the hell out of here."

Jesse couldn't hear Captain Lang. But when he saw the door open all by itself, he ran to the doorway and shouted, "I'm out of here. There's something fucking weird about this place. I'll be back with the crew in the morning, Dexter."

Dexter heard Jesse run down the hall, then heard Jesse's feet on the stairs. When Dexter heard the front door slam shut, he turned to the window and looked outside. Jesse ran to his rental car, jumped inside, and switched on the engine. He backed out of the driveway so fast he left indentations in the gravel. Then he pulled away from the curb with such intensity Dexter heard a loud screech and the whish of his tires racing down Commercial Street.

While Dexter was still looking out the window, Captain Lang walked up behind him. He placed his hands on Dexter's hips and said. "Let's finish what we started before that idiot interrupted us." Then Lang lifted his erection and rested it in the center of Dexter's ass.

Dexter sighed. "I'm going to have a lot of explaining to do tomorrow," he said.

Captain Lang pushed him forward with one hand and pushed his legs apart with the other. Then he inserted his penis into Dexter's hole and said, "He'll never repeat what he saw here tonight. And if he does, no one will ever believe him. Besides, he doesn't want anyone to know that he's gay or that he tried to fuck you. Trust me, what happened here tonight will never be repeated. I've run across his kind before."

Dexter smiled and arched his back. “I guess you’re right,” he said. Then he laughed. “You should have seen him running down the walk to his car. Too bad we couldn’t get that on camera.”

Chapter Thirteen

When Marion and Brighton returned to Boston on Sunday night, Dexter stopped for a quick dinner at a small restaurant, then drove right home. It was just the three of them. Kellan and Paige didn't follow Dexter to the airport that day. On Saturday morning, Jesse had called and said they wouldn't be shooting any scenes that weekend. He'd said that he wanted to stay in his hotel with Kellan and Paige and view the scenes he already had. Dexter had a feeling Jesse was upset about what had happened Friday night and he was avoiding Keel Cottage. But Dexter didn't care and he didn't ask questions. Jesse shouldn't have walked into his house unannounced. Besides, Dexter was more than happy to have the entire weekend alone with Captain Lang. Lang had fucked him so many times that weekend, and in so many different parts of the house, he could barely walk.

On the drive back to Provincetown, Brighton talked about her trip to Hollywood in the back seat of the car until her eyes grew heavy and her head fell back. Before she closed her eyes, she said it had been nice seeing Michael, but she'd missed Dexter and Cleo and she was happy to be home.

Marion rode in the front seat with Dexter. Her feet were crossed at the ankles and her fingers were wrapped around the handle on her purse. When Dexter knew Brighton was sleeping, he rubbed his jaw and asked Marion, "How was Michael?"

“He was fine, Mr. Moore,” she said. “We had a lovely time. It was good for Brighton. She loves him very much.” She smiled and stared at the dark road through the windshield.

But Dexter wanted more information. He had a feeling she wasn’t telling him everything. “What is his new condo like? Is it nice?”

Marion frowned and stared down at her pocketbook. She fumbled with the leather handle for a moment, then said, “It’s very small. But it’s nice. He has a room all set up for Brighton. I slept in his bedroom and he slept on the sofa.”

“I see.”

Then Marion took a deep breath and sighed. “I know it’s none of my business, Mr. Moore. But I think he’s having serious trouble with money. The condo is small. I couldn’t help overhearing a few things while he was talking on the phone. I tried not to listen, but he was outside on the balcony. The balcony was right next to the bathroom and I couldn’t get out fast enough.”

Dexter frowned. “It’s okay, Marion,” he said. “I know you’d never eavesdrop on purpose. What did you hear?”

“I know he’s working on a new project,” she said. “It’s some kind of TV show he’s pitching to a few networks next month. But I also heard him talking to someone about the condo he just bought. He has a mortgage and he’s not sure if he’s going to be able to make the payments. I even heard him say he might lose it to the bank.” She sighed and shook her head. “I didn’t want to hear these things, Mr. Moore. It was wrong.”

Dexter took a deep breath and ran his fingers through his hair. “I know you didn’t, Marion. But I’m glad you told me about this. You didn’t do anything wrong, and I’m not going to repeat this to anyone.”

Marion smoothed out her skirt and said, “Thank you, Mr. Moore. It will be so good to sleep in my own bed tonight. I missed Keel Cottage.” She pressed her finger to her lips and hesitated. “If I might ask, Mr. Moore, did anything unusual happen while you were alone this weekend?”

Dexter laughed. “Nothing at all, Marion,” he said. “It was a quiet, boring weekend.”

On Monday morning, Jesse and the crew came back to Keel Cottage and started shooting again. Jesse smiled and joked around as if nothing had ever happened, and Dexter went right along with him. They were in the kitchen sipping coffee and Marion was preparing breakfast for Brighton. Captain Lang stood in the corner of the room, with his arms folded across his chest. Cleo was on the floor by his feet. Lang was quiet, for the most part, but when he thought Dexter wasn’t looking he played a few harmless jokes on Jesse. Whenever Jesse would put down his coffee mug, Lang would push it very slowly to the other side of the counter. When Jesse put his cell phone on the counter, Lang purposely swiped it to the floor. Each time something like this happened, Jesse would just smile and pretend there was nothing wrong. But his eyebrow started to twitch and his voice always went up an octave higher.

Later that day, while the crew was on a lunch break, Dexter went up to his study and phoned Michael. He began by thanking Michael for taking care of Brighton, then slowly worked money into the conversation. He didn’t hold back. He told Michael he

knew about his financial troubles and offered to pay off the mortgage on his condo. Captain Lang stood beside the fireplace and listened. Dexter didn't mind; he had no secrets from Lang.

When Michael refused to take Dexter's money, Captain Lang's eyebrows went up. But Dexter insisted. He told Michael that he wanted him to have a place to live and that he always wanted Brighton to have a safe place to go when she went out to Hollywood to visit him. Michael had a huge ego and a strong stubborn streak; he liked to be the breadwinner and he liked to be in control. It wasn't easy for Dexter to convince him to accept money or any other kind of support.

After an hour of talking, they finally agreed Dexter would pay off the mortgage on Michael's condo and Dexter would pay the monthly condo fees, taxes, and other bills until Michael's new project got off the ground. Michael didn't jump up and down shouting praise, but he did quietly thank Dexter at the end of the conversation. Dexter could tell by the tone of his voice that he was sincere.

When Dexter hung up, Captain Lang frowned. "I have to admit. That was a nice thing to do. I don't think I would have done it."

Dexter shrugged. "We have a child together and I want our relationship to always remain amicable for Brighton's sake. When we split up it was hard on her. There are few things more difficult than telling your child that her happy childhood is over, her family doesn't exist anymore, and that life will never be the same again. She was devastated. But the fact that we've always been able to remain good friends has given her reassurance. Besides, I still love Michael. I know that I'll never go back with him, and I'm not in love with him anymore. But I do have feelings for him. And I don't want to see him suffer.

He's good at production and he has a good reputation in Hollywood. He'll be back on his feet soon enough."

Captain Lang frowned. "I think this is very noble of you," he said. "But I have to ask one thing. If you pay off his home and take on all his bills until he does get back on his feet, how are you going to do it? Did this TV show really pay you that much? I'm not prying. I'm just worried about you, Dexter."

Dexter took a quick, shallow breath. "I'm okay for now," he said. "I can handle Keel Cottage and Michael's bills for a while if I'm careful and I budget well. But I'm still going to have to find another source of income. I need something solid that will provide security." He stood up and crossed to where Captain Lang was standing. He put his arms around Lang's shoulders and rested his head on Lang's chest. "I don't want to have to go back to Hollywood to make money. I want to stay here, in Keel Cottage, where I'm happy."

Later that afternoon, Jesse Barlow wanted to get a scene of Dexter taking down all the Halloween decorations with Brighton. Kellan and Paige stood at the far end of the front porch with the camera, and Jesse directed them from the front lawn. It was a cool, breezy afternoon. Marion's shawl kept falling off her shoulder whenever she lifted her arm to remove the decorations from the Halloween tree. Captain Lang was sitting on a wicker loveseat and Cleo was resting next to his feet.

When the black tree was empty and the Halloween lights had been removed, Dexter took it apart in three sections and shoved it into a large cardboard box. He closed the lid and taped it shut. Brighton was standing next to him, wrapping a strand of lights

around her small wrist. She frowned and said, “I hate to see the tree come down. It was pretty enough to be in a book.”

When Brighton said the word “book,” Captain Lang bolted from the wicker chair and shouted, “I’ve got it, Dexter. I know how you can make a living without leaving Keel Cottage.”

Dexter looked at him and smiled. But he didn’t say anything. He went back to taping the cardboard box.

Captain Lang pressed his palms together and rubbed them back and forth. “I have hundreds of stories to tell about my adventures at sea and the places I’ve been. I’ve been promising to tell you about them anyway, but we haven’t had a chance. Stories that no one else could ever tell except me. I wanted to retire and write about them when I was alive. But I died before I could.” He crossed the porch and stood next to Dexter. He placed his palm on the small of Dexter’s back and said, “You’re going to write a book.”

Dexter looked up. “I’m going to write a book?” He said it out loud.

Marion was removing corn husk garland from the railing. She stopped moving and stared at Dexter. Kellan and Paige moved closer with the camera to see what Dexter was going to say next.

Dexter just stood there staring at them. His knees felt weak; he gulped a few times.

Then Jesse walked toward him, tilted his head, and said, “Well, what kind of book are you going to write?”

Dexter looked at Captain Lang. Lang smiled and shrugged his shoulders. “You’d better tell them. They’ll think you’ve lost your mind if you don’t say something.”

Dexter gave him a look. Then he turned to the others and said, "I'm thinking about writing a book about the man who built this house. His name was Captain Lang. I'll make it fiction, of course, and I'll write about all his adventures." Dexter looked at Lang and raised an eyebrow. "I have a feeling that a man as good looking as Captain Lang left many broken hearts on his travels around the world."

Marion smiled. "I think that's a wonderful idea, Mr. Moore. I'd read a book like that."

Brighton placed a neatly rolled ball of Halloween lights in a box and said, "Sounds good to me, Dad."

"I'm really just thinking about it," Dexter said. "I haven't made up my mind yet."

Captain Lang waved his arm. "Of course you'll do it. I have stories to tell and you need money."

Dexter clenched his fists. He didn't like being forced into anything. He wasn't even sure he knew how to write a book. He'd always been an avid reader and he devoured books. But writing them was something else. He looked at Captain Lang and asked, "How will I get this published?"

Jesse lifted his arm and pointed. He thought Dexter was talking to him. "I know the senior editor at a very large publishing house," he said. "I'll hook you up with him."

"You have to talk to my agent in Hollywood first," Dexter said. "I'm sure he knows a literary agent who can represent me." Dexter had been with his agent for a long time. He never made a professional move without him and he liked to play by the rules.

Captain Lang smiled and patted Dexter on the ass. "See?" he said. "It's meant to be."

Then Lang tried to slide his hand down Dexter's pants in front of everyone. But Dexter stepped back fast and crossed to the other side of the porch with a huge smile on his face. Captain Lang pressed his lips together and walked down to where Jesse was standing on the lawn. He looked Jesse up and down, and gave him a small pat on the ass.

Jesse's body jerked forward and he turned fast to see if anyone was behind him. Dexter leaned over the porch rail and asked, "What's wrong, Jesse?" He'd seen what Captain Lang had done.

Jesse rubbed his eyes and shook his head. "Nothing," he said. "I'm fine."

But he didn't look fine. His face grew pale and his eyebrows furrowed. And for the rest of the day he kept looking behind his back to see if anyone was there.

Chapter Fourteen

A couple of weeks before the special meeting that would decide whether or not the town would continue with the Memorial Day fundraiser, Dexter did an in-depth interview with a popular magazine. It was the kind of magazine that focused on pop culture and entertainment, which was perfect exposure for someone like Dexter. His old TV show had just started coming out again in reruns on a cable channel. The new reality show would air soon. Jesse Barlow had arranged the magazine interview to promote the reality show. But Dexter wanted to take advantage of the publicity to get more local people involved in his cause. His efforts with the Internet and handing out fliers had reached some, but he knew there were plenty more he needed to reach if he was going to sway the Board of Selectmen.

The timing was perfect. The magazine hit all the newsstands a week before the meeting and everyone in town started talking about it. Some people had to drive all the way to Chatham to get a copy because all the copies in Provincetown sold out fast. People stopped Dexter in the street and thanked him for working so hard on something so important to the community. A few people asked for his autograph. The local newspaper interviewed him and he started receiving fan mail. He heard that the Board of Selectmen had been inundated with phone calls and letters from residents in support of the fundraiser.

Dexter gave the magazine an honest interview. He invited the reporter to Keel Cottage and he spent the afternoon with him walking around Provincetown, with Kellan

and Paige not far behind so they could film the interview for the TV show. Dexter was used to having them around by then. He ignored them and told the reporter how much he believed in the fundraiser and how hard he and the Retail Association were working to save it. And instead of focusing on the mundane aspects of the reality show, the reporter focused on how Dexter, a former childhood TV star, was now fighting hard in community service for causes he believed were worthy.

The reporter also brought along a photographer. They took photos of Dexter in the house wearing casual clothes, photos of him talking to other members of the Retail Association, and photos of him walking around half naked on the beach. It had been a bright, sunny day. Though the beach at Herring Cove was empty and the temperature was only in the fifties, Dexter put on a skimpy bathing suit and posed in the sand as if it were still summer. The beach shots had been Jesse Barlow's suggestion. Jesse figured that if people saw how good Dexter still looked they'd buy more magazines and his TV show would get higher ratings when it aired. The reporter from the magazine agreed.

At first, Dexter frowned and refused to do it. He'd always had a more family-oriented image and he wanted to keep it that way. But when he looked to Captain Lang for advice, Lang reminded him he'd be stripping down for a good cause. He frowned and clenched his fists when he talked about Dexter posing this way, but he said the more attention the article received, the better their chances were of saving the fundraiser.

So Dexter agreed, with reservations, and put on a sheer bathing suit so skimpy it almost looked like a thong. If he hadn't shaved his pubic hair, it would have been exposed. His genitalia busted out of the fabric; the ring around the head of his penis was more than evident.

Jesse supplied the bathing suit. When he handed it to Dexter, Dexter's jaw dropped. When he put it on in the car while everyone waited, he almost didn't come out of the car. He had to walk slowly across the beach to keep his balls from falling out, and the back kept riding up his round ass and getting stuck in the crack. At one point, while they were on the beach taking the photos, Jesse pointed to Dexter's crotch and smiled. Dexter looked down and saw that the head of his penis was falling out of the side. He gave Jesse a look and packed his dick back into the bathing suit, wishing he'd never agreed to pose this way at all.

But it worked. His sexy beach photos made the cover of the magazine that week and his story was featured in the centerfold, with more beach photos. The photographer managed to miss getting full frontal shots, and it didn't come off looking as obscene as it could have.

A day after the magazine hit the stands the article was mentioned on several national television shows. Anderson Cooper talked about it on his show. Bill O'Reilly, of all people, called Dexter a "patriot" on his "Pinheads and Patriots" segment because Dexter was working so hard for a good cause. And David Letterman devoted his Top Ten list to Dexter one night, poking fun at Dexter's beach photos. Provincetown's small fight over Memorial Day suddenly became a national topic. Evidently, even though Dexter hadn't been in the public eye for a long time, the public hadn't forgotten about him.

The exposure only lasted a few days, and the national media moved on to other things. But it lasted long enough for Dexter to stand before the Provincetown Board of Selectmen and state his case once again. This time his hands didn't shake and his knees didn't feel weak. He spoke with a clear, well-trained voice and everyone listened.

Dexter's side of the room was jammed with new supporters who wanted to save the Memorial Day fundraiser. Fred and the Chamber of Commerce sat on the other side of the room with wide eyes and sunken expressions. The first meeting had been well balanced, with just as many people in favor of the fundraiser as against it. But that night Dexter's side of the room outnumbered Fred's side of the room by three to one. Fred kept biting his bottom lip and fidgeting with papers on his lap. The Board of Selectmen stared into the crowd and murmured things to each other.

The majority of residents shouted praise and support for Dexter and the Retail Association. The Board of Selectmen sat quietly, giving each other knowing looks, waiting for the Chamber of Commerce to offer a viable rebuttal.

When it was finally time for the chamber to reply, Fred stood up and smiled. But the audience booed and jeered. Arms waved and people stood up on chairs shouting against his proposed plan to end the fundraiser. Fred's face turned red and his hands started to shake. He leaned over, said something to one of the restaurant owners, and then stood up again with his arms in the air. The Board of Selectmen had to bang the gavel to quiet the booing crowd so Fred could speak.

When there was silence, Fred took a deep breath and smiled. He looked around the room and said, "While the Chamber of Commerce thought it was doing something good for the town by offering an Arts and Crafts Festival on Memorial Day weekend, we now see that it's probably best to leave the traditional fundraiser intact, and switch the Arts and Crafts Festival to another weekend." He smiled at the crowd, then he smiled at the Board of Selectmen. "We *love* the Memorial Day fundraiser. We really do. And after seeing how much everyone else in town loves it, we'd like to ask the board if we can

have the Arts and Crafts Festival sometime in the fall. We'll go back and prepare a specific proposal, and then we'll present it to the board in a few weeks."

The crowd roared with applause. Fred smiled and thanked them for their support.

Dexter was sitting beside Elliot, watching everyone praise Fred and the Chamber of Commerce. He leaned in and whispered, "I don't know how he did it, but Fred just became a hero and he was the one who wanted to end the fundraiser in the first place." Then he shook his head and smiled. "I feel like all this work was for nothing now that the chamber is agreeing with us. I wanted to win. I didn't expect them to concede so easily."

Elliot laughed. "Fred always knows how to come out of a bad situation smelling like bay rum on a hot summer night. He's made it an art. And trust me, this wasn't all for nothing. If you hadn't worked this hard to defeat them, they never would have changed their minds."

Dexter sighed. "Ah well," he said. "At least the matter is over, the fundraiser is still a town tradition, and everyone's happy."

When the meeting was adjourned, Dexter ran into Fred and Steve out in the parking lot. At first, Dexter stepped back and shoved his hands into his pockets. But Fred walked over to him and said, "I'm so glad this is all settled. And I'm glad about how it all turned out." Then he put his arms around Dexter, hugged him, and said, "*We love you. We really do.*"

Dexter looked over Fred's shoulder and gave Elliot a look. Elliot smiled and rolled his eyes.

When Dexter returned to Keel Cottage, the lights were blazing and Brighton and Cleo were waiting for him at the front door. Kellan and Paige had followed him home.

They knew Marion had prepared a cake and that everyone was either going to celebrate his victory or mourn his loss, and they wanted to get it all on camera. Jesse was in L.A. that week and he'd told Dexter he wanted a good part of the reality show to concentrate on Dexter's work in the community. And the ending was the most important part.

Marion had received a phone call from a friend and she already knew what had happened at the meeting. She came into the front hall with a wet dish towel in her hands and said, "Well done, Mr. Moore. Congratulations."

Dexter smiled. "Thank you, Marion. It all worked out. But you're right. Small towns aren't easy."

She raised an eyebrow and nodded. "I warned you, Mr. Moore."

Captain Lang appeared in the doorway of the living room. His hands were in his pockets and his captain's hat was tilted to one side. He smiled at Dexter and said, "I'm glad you won, Dexter. I know how important this was to you. I felt your passion for these people."

Dexter couldn't answer him in front of everyone else. But he looked into Lang's eyes and smiled. Everyone else had congratulated him and told him they were proud of him. But Captain Lang had been the only one to say he was happy for him and that he'd known how important it was to him. Lang knew his deepest feelings; no one else did. Lang knew Dexter wasn't thinking about victory. He knew Dexter was thinking about the fact that the fundraiser hadn't been canceled and that all the people who depended on it wouldn't be disappointed next year. Dexter wanted to run over and throw his arms around Captain Lang's shoulders. He wanted to thank him for being the only one who understood why he'd been fighting so hard.

Then Brighton pulled his arm and Cleo barked. “Let’s go have cake, Dad,” she said. “Marion baked it especially for you.” She’d been allowed to stay up beyond her normal bedtime because this was a special event.

Dexter held her hand and said, “I’ll be right in. You guys all go inside and wait for me. I want to take Cleo out for a quick walk.”

When they were all gone, Dexter hooked Cleo’s leash to his collar and stepped out on the porch. Captain Lang was already there waiting for him on the steps. “Why aren’t you inside celebrating with everyone right now?”

Dexter shrugged. “I wanted to see you first,” he said. “I wish there were a way you could celebrate with us. It’s not the same.” He walked down and leaned into Lang’s side. Cleo was out on the front lawn exploring the shrubs with the end of his snout.

Lang put his arm around him and sighed. “I wish there were a way I could come back to life and celebrate with everyone, too. But there isn’t, Dexter. Unfortunately, what’s done is done, and you’ve become involved with something that might not be very good for you.” He pointed to his chest and tapped his finger a few times.

Dexter’s eyebrows lowered and his face scrunched. He reached up, grabbed Captain Lang’s chin, and tilted Lang’s face toward his. “Don’t you ever say that. You’ve been the best thing that’s ever happened to me. I’ve never been happier in my life. I’ve never been more in love with anyone. You’ve changed me. You’ve made me better, and much stronger.”

Captain Lang sighed. Then he forced a smile and said. “You’d better get inside. They’re waiting for you.”

Dexter tugged on Cleo's leash and pulled him to the steps. "I'll see you later," he said. "I have a surprise for you."

Captain Lang laughed. "I have one for you, too. I told you once that there was something I've always wanted to do. Tonight I'm going to do it with *you*."

"Now I'm curious," Dexter said.

Lang smiled. "You'll just have to wait."

* * * *

A few hours later, Dexter went up to his room and locked the door. Captain Lang was already there. He was sitting on a wing chair with his legs crossed and his chin in his palm. When he saw Dexter walk into the room, he raised his head and smiled. He was about to open his mouth to speak but Dexter lifted his arm and stopped him. "I'm going into the bathroom. Wait for me in bed." Then he went into the bathroom and closed the door.

When Dexter came out of the bathroom, Captain Lang was in bed. The covers were pulled up to his waist, his strong, square chest was naked, and one long leg was hanging out of the cover on the right side. He looked at Dexter and smiled, then lifted his right eyebrow and whistled back. "You look very nice," he said. Then he reached under the covers and grabbed his penis.

Dexter was wearing the same skimpy bathing suit he'd worn for the magazine photos. Marion had washed it and thrown it into the clothes dryer. It was even tighter and more revealing than it had been when it was brand new. It hugged Dexter's genitals, and the back pinched his buttocks and made his flesh bust from the seams. Dexter turned sideways and slightly arched his back. He wasn't posing like a cheesy runway model

striking a contrived pose, but he wanted to make sure Lang saw how he looked in the swim trunks before he jumped into bed. He lowered his head, smiled, and said, "I decided to wear this tonight because it's probably the last time I'll ever wear it again."

Captain Lang tilted his head and lowered his chin. "Why is this the last time you'll ever wear it?" His hand was still under the covers; he was staring at Dexter's body and rubbing his dick at the same time.

Dexter spread his legs and pinched his nipples. "Because you're going to rip it wide open in a few seconds."

Then Dexter climbed up on the bed and straddled Lang's body. He pulled the covers down to Lang's ankles and sat down on Lang's erection. He rocked his hips back and forth so the sheer fabric would rub against the bottom of Lang's shaft. He leaned forward and kissed Lang on the mouth for a long time. When he removed his tongue, he whispered, "I love you so much. I didn't know it was possible to love anyone this much."

Captain Lang looked into his eyes. "And I you," he said.

Dexter took Captain Lang's hands in his own. He lifted them up and placed them on both side of his buttocks. He smiled when Lang grabbed and squeezed his flesh. A warm sensation passed through his entire body when Lang ran his large fingers beneath the skimpy swim suit fabric. His heart raced and he had trouble catching his breath. He could barely utter the words: "Rip it off my body."

Captain Lang grabbed the sides of the swim suit. With one quick tug, the entire back of the swimsuit split down the middle. He ripped it wide open and tore the seams on both sides. The tattered fabric fell from Dexter's body onto Lang's hard pelvis. When Dexter's smooth, bare ass was exposed, he closed his eyes and took quick breaths.

Captain Lang pulled the fabric out from beneath Dexter's body and tossed it over Dexter's head. Lang found Dexter's opening fast. He pressed the head of his dick to Dexter's tight hole and shoved it as far into Dexter's body as it would go. Dexter's penis jumped and his nipples stiffened. Then, with Lang's dick buried inside his body, Dexter leaned forward and kissed Lang again. His eyes closed and small dots of white light exploded. While he sucked Lang's tongue, he rocked up and down on Lang's huge cock. He squeezed the lips of his opening and clamped down on Lang's shaft. He didn't even realize he was moaning until Lang started bucking his own hips from below.

Lang rammed him so hard the bed rocked. They remained like this, kissing and fucking at the same time, until Captain Lang's long legs began to move. They didn't move fast, just back and forth a few times, and his feet rubbed against the sheets. Dexter knew he was close to climax. So Dexter sat up and started jerking his own erection. And a few minutes later, without saying a word, they both came together. Captain Lang groaned and sat halfway up, depositing another load into Dexter's body that would eventually disappear. Dexter blasted all over Captain Lang's chest.

While Dexter was catching his breath, Lang slapped his ass and said, "Clean my chest now."

Dexter took a deep breath and smiled. Lang's penis was still deep in his body and he was still experiencing orgasmic sensations. He knew what Lang wanted him to do, so he leaned forward, stuck out his tongue and started licking his own come off Lang's chest.

Lang moved his legs a few times and said, "Don't swallow."

Dexter looked up at him with a confused expression. He didn't lift his head. His tongue was still hanging from his mouth.

“I don’t want you to swallow,” Lang said. “When my chest is clean I want you to kiss me again...before you swallow. I’d like to see if I can taste you. I’ve never done this with anyone else. I’d like to do it with you.”

Now he understood. He nodded yes and finished licking Lang’s chest clean.

When there wasn’t a drop of left, Dexter moved forward and kissed him. Lang opened his mouth and stuck his tongue inside Dexter’s mouth. Then he pressed his tongue against Dexter’s tongue and kissed him gently.

When Dexter finally sat up again, he looked down at Lang and asked, “Are you okay?”

Captain Lang smiled and said, “I think I actually tasted you that time. And from what I can remember about the human sense of taste, you are extremely sweet.”

Dexter readjusted his hips. One of the things he liked most about sex with Captain Lang was that Lang always maintained a full erection after he came. “In the morning, we can do it again.”

Chapter Fifteen

When filming for the reality show stopped in December, Dexter, Brighton, and Marion were actually sorry to see Kellan and Paige go back to the West Coast. Marion said they reminded her of the nice, quiet neighbors she'd had for twenty years. She'd never gotten to know these neighbors, but when they finally moved away she was sorry to see them go.

Jesse Barlow flew back to Provincetown to shoot a few final scenes and he told Dexter he thought the show was going to be well received by the public. He smiled and rocked on the balls of his feet. He kept thanking Dexter for trusting him and doing everything he'd suggested.

When Jesse patted his back and told him he was a real professional, Dexter smiled. He knew in his heart he hadn't done the show for publicity or to boost his career. He'd done it for money and he'd gotten lucky that Elliot had put him in the middle of the Memorial Day controversy. Dexter didn't mention this to Jesse, but also knew this was probably the last time he'd ever do a television series again.

Dexter threw a small party the night before they left. Marion prepared a wonderful dinner and Brighton was allowed to stay up later than usual. Elliot was invited and Captain Lang stood in the background watching everyone with a small grin on his face. Lang was happy to see them leave. He wanted to get to work on his book with Dexter. Jesse had contacted Dexter's agent in Hollywood with the name of his friend in publishing. When the publisher heard that Dexter wanted to write a series of novels about

Captain Lang's adventures at sea, he couldn't wait to offer Dexter a contract. But they had to work fast. The publisher wanted the first book out at the same time the reality show aired on national television.

The day after everyone left, Dexter and Captain Lang started the book. They spent their days in the study off Dexter's bedroom working. And at night, Dexter's legs were usually up in the air and dangling over Captain Lang's shoulders. Dexter couldn't get enough of his penis. When his lips weren't wrapped around the shaft and he wasn't smoking it, his legs were wide open and it was inside his body.

In record time, Dexter submitted the first book in the series, ahead of schedule. This was plenty of time to get the book on the shelves when the reality show aired in the summer. Dexter had a prescient feeling that writing these books was one of the most important things he'd ever do. The publisher had paid him a nice advance and he knew that the faster the books reached the public the sooner he'd start to receive an income. Best of all, there was even talk of selling the film rights to a huge Hollywood film company. If that happened, Dexter was hoping he could get Michael involved so he could gain some financial security, too.

For the first time since he'd lost his money a year earlier, Dexter finally felt as if he could take a deep breath and relax.

Then one night in early April, Elliot called and asked Dexter out to dinner. Dexter hung up the phone and sighed. They saw each other all the time. He'd just seen Elliot two days earlier when they'd taken Brighton to the pediatrician for her annual physical. Dexter couldn't figure out why Elliot sounded so aloof and his voice had been so low. Elliot had said he wanted to talk to him about something and he wanted to go to a

small, private restaurant to do it. Dexter agreed to meet him at seven. This was a Thursday night and he knew the restaurant wouldn't be crowded. He hadn't been out to dinner in months. He was looking forward to a quiet evening with a good friend.

But when he showed up at the restaurant, Elliot was standing beside a small table holding a bouquet of roses. There were only two other couples in the dining area and they weren't paying attention. Elliot was wearing a starched white shirt and light beige dress slacks. His hair was styled with product and he wore shiny black shoes. This was formal for Elliot; it looked as if he'd taken hours to get ready. He usually wore faded jeans and a black ski jacket. His hair was normally messy on top, and his old black boots were always scuffed.

Dexter had worn a leather jacket, a black turtleneck, and jeans. Provincetown was a very casual place and hardly anyone ever dressed for dinner. When Dexter crossed toward the table and saw the flowers, he smiled and said, "Why are you so dressed up? Who are *they* for?"

Elliot handed the flowers to Dexter and shrugged his shoulders. "I got them for you. I'd like to talk about *us* tonight."

"*Us*?"

"Yes," Elliot said. Then he moved to Dexter's side of the table and pulled out his chair. "You look very nice tonight. But you always look nice."

Dexter gulped and sat down at the table. When it occurred to him that Elliot had become romantically interested in him, his stomach turned. Elliot was a good friend and he wasn't bad looking. If Dexter had met him a year earlier he would have considered dating him. Stocky guys like Elliot actually turned him on. But Dexter was in love with

Captain Lang now. He opened his napkin and placed it on his lap, praying silently that he'd be able to handle this situation with Elliot and still be able to keep Elliot as a good friend.

Elliot sat down at the other side of the table. He fumbled with his hands and his right knee kept jerking up and down. It looked as if he'd been holding back his feelings for a long time and now he couldn't wait to let them out.

After they ordered, he reached across the table and held Dexter's hand. He looked into Dexter's eyes and said, "I'd like to start seeing you as a boyfriend. I've become very fond of you, and I think we could be good together." He looked down at the table and hesitated for a moment. When he looked up again, he said, "I think we'd be good in bed, too."

Dexter pulled his hand back, then rubbed his jaw and frowned. "Ah well," he said. "Elliot, I just don't feel that way about you." He wanted to be honest and he didn't want to play games. "I think you're attractive and you're a wonderful guy. But I'm happy with my life the way it is right now. I have no intention of getting serious with anyone."

Elliot shrugged. "I don't get it, though. You never date. You never have sex. You live like a monk. How can you be happy with the way things are?" He sat back and shook his head. "I was kind of hoping you had feelings for me and you didn't know how to express them."

Dexter smiled. He couldn't explain Captain Lang to him. "Elliot, your friendship means the world to me. I don't want to lose it. But I'm being honest with you. I'm not interested in anything more than friendship. I like my life the way it is. Please understand. And please don't get mad. I need your friendship."

Elliot lowered his head and stared down at his lap. “I see.”

Dexter reached for his hand this time. “No, you don’t see. I want it to be clear that this isn’t personal. You’re a hot guy. If I were interested in something more, I’d be in your pants before you could tell me to stop. But I’m just not interested in having a relationship with anyone right now. I might not be interested in having a relationship with anyone ever again. I’m sorry. You deserve better than that. You’re a sweet guy, but I like my life just the way it is.”

Elliot tilted his head and smiled. “There’s no need to be sorry. You’re being honest. That’s one of the things I love about you.”

“Are we okay?” Dexter asked. “We’re still friends and nothing has changed?” He wanted to end the conversation. Dragging it out would only make things more difficult.

Elliot’s head rocked back and forth. He sighed and said, “I’d be lying if I said I wasn’t disappointed. But we’re okay. And we’re still good friends.” Then he reached out and patted the top of Dexter’s hand. “If you do change your mind, I’m still here.”

When Dexter went home that night and told Captain Lang about this, Lang frowned and said, “I kind of like Elliot. Are you sure you did the right thing?” He was standing near the window, looking out to the sea. His voice was soft and his hands were in his pockets.

Dexter blinked and went to the window. “I don’t understand. Why would you want me to get involved with Elliot, or anyone for that matter?”

Captain Lang frowned. His back was to Dexter and he wouldn’t turn to look him in the eyes. “You’re a young, vital man, Dexter. I’m a ghost. I can’t take you out to

dinner. I can't travel with you. I'm locked here in Keel Cottage and I can't give you the things you need."

Dexter put his arms through Captain Lang's and wrapped them around his chest. Then he rested his cheek on Lang's back and said, "I don't want anything else. I'm in love with you and that's all I need. I've never been happier." Then he sighed and asked, "Don't you feel the same way about me?"

Captain Lang shook his head and frowned. "I love you more than anything or anyone I've ever known. And I love you too much to ruin your life, Dexter. I don't want to be the one responsible for you missing out on all the things there are to experience in life. And lately, it feels like that's what I've been doing."

Dexter stepped back and gave him a look. "So you think I'd be happier with Elliot, or some other man I didn't love?"

Lang turned around and faced him. He reached out, held his shoulders, and said, "I'm not saying Elliot is the one. But sooner or later someone else will come along and I don't want to see you miss out on a chance for real happiness with a real man."

Dexter kissed his back. "You are a real man," he said. "And you know how to make me feel like a real man." He smiled and removed his shoes and socks. He unfastened his pants and pulled them off. Then he kicked his pants away from his feet and pulled off his shirt. When he was standing naked, he leaned into Lang's body and said, "I have found happiness. And I'm going to hold on to it as hard as I can for as long as I can."

Chapter Sixteen

After the first book was submitted, Dexter and Captain Lang began work on the second book of the series so it could be submitted to the publisher as quickly as possible. The reality show was set to air that summer, and the first book was launching the same week the show aired. The reality show would have aired in the spring, but Jesse Barlow decided to postpone it until the book launch. He wanted as much publicity as he could get and he figured that if the book and the show were released together he'd double his chances of getting ratings.

Dexter had to do some traveling and some promotion. But the fact that both projects were coming out at the same time gave him a lot of attention and saved him from what could have been grueling publicity tours. If anything, he was more worried about overexposure. He hadn't been in the public eye for many years and he didn't want people getting sick of him too soon.

The second book would launch a year later, and then a third and final book in the series would launch a year after that. The publisher had high expectations; there hadn't been a series of books like this in years. Dexter went to bed at night with a smile on his face. The man of his dreams was holding him in his arms, and his life had never been so well planned.

Dexter and Captain Lang worked hard that summer on the second book, eight hours a day, six days a week. Dexter didn't go to the beach at all; he wrote anywhere from three thousand to four thousand words a day. He spent even more time editing.

When he wasn't working he was spending time with Brighton, hanging out with Elliot, or making love to Captain Lang.

When the reality show aired on television in the summer, it was a hit. Jesse had focused on saving the fundraiser for the most part, but he'd also carefully edited small fragments of the peculiar things that had happened while they had been shooting the show. From what Dexter read and heard, Jesse made it look like Keel Cottage could be haunted, but it couldn't be proven.

But Dexter wasn't completely sure how Jesse did this, because he didn't watch the show on TV. Marion and Brighton watched faithfully. Elliot recorded it for Dexter in case he wanted to watch in the future. Dexter thanked him, but he knew that wouldn't happen. It was a personal thing; he'd never watched himself on the sitcom either. There was something creepy about watching himself on TV and listening to his own voice come out of a speaker. All he had to do was think about it and it made the side of his face twitch.

The book came out the same week the TV show aired. The reviews were excellent and he'd proven he was capable of doing more than just smiling and taking his clothes off for the camera. But he didn't actually read the book either. He asked Captain Lang if he wanted to read the book and Lang replied, "Why would I read it? It's my life. I already know how it ends."

Dexter smiled and put the book on a shelf in the study. He couldn't argue with Lang. He felt the same way about watching the reality show.

After the second book was submitted in September, Dexter wanted to take a few months off and just relax. He'd been working nonstop since the reality show had started

shooting—almost a full year. He'd been writing with Captain Lang since January. His eyes were tired of looking at a computer screen, his back ached from sitting in his office chair all day, and the fingers in his left hand started to tingle from working on a keyboard for so many hours.

But Captain Lang didn't want to stop. He insisted they finish the third book in the series so it could be submitted in January. Lang claimed it was the best way to keep all the books flowing; he didn't want to lose his momentum.

When the third book was finished in January, Dexter finally took a break from work. His editor called and said he was going to be in Provincetown for a week. He said he'd never been to Provincetown and he wanted to check some real estate during the off season. But he also wanted to meet Dexter, work on a few edits, and talk about publicity for the entire series of books.

Dexter couldn't wait to meet him. His name was James Campbell. They had been e-mailing and talking on the phone for months. Dexter liked the way he edited. When James suggested a change, it was always something that improved the book. Dexter felt as if he already knew him. And when Dexter found out that James was planning to stay at a local inn, he insisted that James be his houseguest in Keel Cottage that week.

When James arrived at Keel Cottage, Dexter raised his eyebrows and took a deep breath. He'd been expecting a small, tweedy type of man, with thick eyeglasses, thinning hair, and a middle-aged paunch. But he was nothing like that. James was tall, with thick, dark hair, a long, lean body, and hands the size of Frisbees. His brown eyes were gentle and his lips were full. He was wearing faded jeans, a brown leather sport jacket, and a

white cableknit sweater. He didn't look like he was from New York. He looked more like he'd just stepped out of a New England sportsman's magazine.

James stood in the doorway holding a suitcase in one hand and a white shopping bag in the other. He handed Dexter the white shopping bag filled with gourmet items from a shop in New York. He smiled and said, "It's nice to meet you, Dexter. I've been a fan of your old shows since I was a child." His voice was slow and deep, and his movements were gentle and relaxed.

Dexter smiled and reached for his hand. If James had been a fan of Dexter's old shows, Dexter assumed he was in his thirties. "It's nice to meet you, too. I feel like I already know you." Dexter didn't mention how shocked he was to see that James was so rugged and handsome. He tried hard not to look between James's legs to see if there was a bulge.

Captain Lang was standing at the bottom of the stairs watching them. He rubbed his jaw and said, "He's very attractive, Dexter. He seems very decent, too."

Dexter turned slowly and gave Lang a look. He wasn't sure if Lang was jealous about the fact that James was so attractive.

Later that afternoon, while James was in the guestroom and Dexter was removing his clothes so he could take a nap, Captain Lang walked through the fireplace. He stood at the foot of the bed and said, "I'm going to make myself scarce this week. You have business with this fellow and I'm not going to get in the way."

Dexter tilted his head and crossed to where he was standing. Dexter's shirt and shoes were off and his jeans were unzipped. He put his arms around Captain Lang and

smiled. He couldn't wait to take off his pants and get into bed. "You don't have to be jealous. I'm not interested in him. I'm in love with you."

Captain Lang kissed the top of his head. "I'm not jealous, Dexter. I just think it's best if you deal with business this week and I remain in the background."

"Let's go to bed," Dexter said. He pulled down his pants and stepped out of them. "I've been dying to put my legs over your shoulders all day. I want you to bend me in half today."

Lang reached for Dexter's ass and sighed. He grabbed a handful of Dexter's flesh and clenched it hard. "I'm still going to make myself scarce. You should focus on work this week."

After that, the week passed quickly. Lang only saw Dexter in his bedroom when he took his afternoon nap and went to bed at night. Dexter and James spent their mornings working on edits and their afternoons touring Provincetown. Brighton stared at James with glazed eyes—her first schoolgirl crush. And Cleo couldn't wait to jump up on James's lap when he sat down. Dexter took James to the shops, to the Pilgrim Monument, and to all the other tourist attractions first. They went with Elliot and a real estate agent to see properties for sale. Dexter wasn't sure if James was gay, so he avoided the gay bars and the more flamboyant spots in town.

But one evening in the middle of that week, while they were walking up Commercial Street, James stopped short in front of a candy shop. He looked down a side street and leaned forward. In January, Commercial Street in Provincetown was practically empty and not much was happening in town. But there were still a few places open for locals.

“Why are we stopping?” Dexter asked. They’d just had a wonderful dinner at one of the few restaurants that remained open all year.

“Is that a bar?” James asked. “I’d love to get a drink.”

Dexter smiled and shrugged his shoulders. “I should warn you first. It’s a gay bar. And it’s one of the racier bars in town. I don’t want to shock you.”

James gave him a look and blinked. “Are you serious? You don’t know I’m gay?”

Dexter’s eyes bugged. He shook his head and said, “I wasn’t sure. And I didn’t want to insult you by asking. It’s really none of my business, and it doesn’t matter anyway.”

James put his arm around Dexter’s waist and laughed again. “C’mon,” he said. “I’ll buy you a drink.”

For the rest of the week, James blatantly flirted with Dexter. He didn’t do anything physical, but he wasn’t shy about letting Dexter know he was interested in him romantically. He told Dexter he’d loved the magazine photos he’d done. When Marion and Brighton weren’t listening, James leaned forward and told Dexter he’d love to see him on a real beach in the swimsuit he’d worn for the photos. Dexter smiled too much and pretended he didn’t notice the obvious flirtations. Dexter didn’t want Captain Lang to get jealous; he didn’t want to play games. He liked James. But he wasn’t in love with James.

The night James left Provincetown Dexter walked him out to his rental car. Marion had prepared a wonderful beef stew and she’d packed a few snacks for James. James preferred driving back to New York at night to avoid the traffic. Dexter carried his bag to the car and Brighton waved goodbye from the front porch. When they were out of

Brighton's sight, Dexter leaned over to put the bag in the back seat. James reached down with both hands and placed them on Dexter's waist. Dexter stood up slowly; he didn't know how to react. He held his breath for a moment, then sighed out loud.

"Can I kiss you goodbye?" James asked. He was still holding Dexter's waist. "I've been dying to kiss you all week."

Dexter turned around and looked him in the eye. He placed his palms on James's chest and pushed him back with a gentle shove. "I'm not sure that's a good idea," he said. Then he put his hands in his pockets and looked down at his shoes. "I like you a lot. But I think it's better if we just stick to business."

James's eyes opened wide. "Can't we even be friends?"

Dexter smiled. "I thought we were friends."

"I know you're not involved with anyone," James said. "I'd like to get to know you better. I think I might be falling in love with you." He took a deep breath. "I know I shouldn't say that so soon. I don't want to freak you out. But I like to be honest. And I haven't felt this way about anyone in a long time, Dexter."

Dexter sighed. If it hadn't been for Captain Lang, he might have been attracted to James. "I'm sorry, James," he said. "I'm not ready to get involved with anyone right now. I was in a long-term relationship with someone and I'm still getting over the breakup. I'm happy with my life right now the way it is and I'm not ready to complicate it with a relationship." His words sounded familiar. This was the same thing he'd told Elliot, too. Eventually, he knew he'd have to come up with a better excuse if guys kept coming on to him.

James moved in closer. He put his arms around Dexter's waist and said, "It's not as if we're complete strangers. I know we only met in person this week. But we have actually known each other for months now." Then he leaned forward and kissed Dexter on the mouth. It wasn't a long kiss; he didn't insert his tongue.

Dexter smiled. The kiss was pleasant, but his heart didn't race and his breathing remained normal. It did nothing for him. "I'm flattered. You're a great-looking guy. But I'm just not ready to get involved with anyone. I hope you understand."

James removed his hands from Dexter's waist. He stepped back and said, "You're very attractive, too. You can't blame me for trying. I do understand." Then he opened the front door and sat down behind the wheel. "Thanks for a wonderful week," he said. "And, just so you know, I'm not giving up yet. I like you too much. I'll be in touch."

When James started the car, Dexter slammed the back door shut and stepped away from the car. He watched him back out of the driveway and waited for him to pull away from the curb. As Dexter turned back to the house, he looked up at the widow's walk. Captain Lang was leaning against the rail. His hands were in his pockets and he was staring down at Dexter. Dexter looked up at him and smiled. Then he loped back to the house with his hands in his pockets.

Marion was getting Brighton ready for bed. Dexter said goodnight to her and went into his bedroom. Captain Lang was waiting for him. He was standing in front of the fireplace, with his elbow on the mantel and his feet crossed at the ankle.

"I assume you saw what happened outside," Dexter said. He knew he couldn't hide anything from Captain Lang. "Please don't get jealous. I told him I wasn't interested."

Captain Lang lowered his arm and folded his hands on his waist. "I saw everything. I'm not jealous," he said. "I actually like James. He's a very decent man. He's good for you." He put his hands into his pockets and turned his back to Dexter. "I sense he was strong feelings for you, and I think you should get to know him better."

Dexter lowered his brows. He crossed the room and placed his hand on Lang's shoulder and said, "I don't want to get to know him better. I'm in love with *you*."

Captain Lang turned around and faced him. He put his hands on Dexter's shoulders and said, "I'm going away, Dexter. I'm doing this for your own good. You are a young, vital man. You have a life to live and I've already taken too much from you. And now that James is part of your life, I know I'm not needed here any longer."

"I don't understand," Dexter said. His voice trembled, and his knees felt as if they were ready to collapse. "I know you love me. Don't do this to us. What we have doesn't happen often. For some people, it never happens."

"You don't know what you're saying, Dexter. You have no future with me. There is no future for us. I have to do the right thing. I didn't live a perfect life, as you well know from the books we've written. And now I'm wise enough to know when it's time to do the right thing." He leaned forward and kissed Dexter's forehead, then his body stiffened and he stepped back toward the wall. "What I'm doing is for your own good. One day you'll understand and you'll thank me for allowing you to move on with your life. There is a right way, and there is a wrong way."

Dexter reached out with both arms. His eyes filled and tears began to roll down his face. He lifted his arms and spread them apart. "I can't do this without you," he said.

“I don’t want to be alone again. Don’t you see how much I need you? *You* are the right thing. Why can’t you see that?”

Captain Lang’s body began to fade. When he was almost completely transparent, he smiled and said, “You’re very strong, Dexter. You just don’t know that yet. Give life a chance...give James a chance. He’s a decent man. And always remember how much I do love you.”

“If you love me you’ll stay here, in Keel Cottage, where we both belong,” Dexter said. His voice cracked; he leaned into the side of a wing chair for support. “Please don’t leave. I can’t be alone again. When Michael left me, I thought I’d die. Please stay. I’m begging you now. I don’t care about pride.”

Captain Lang didn’t answer this time. He vanished completely and Dexter knew he was gone for good. An absolute silence enveloped the entire house. A hollow sensation passed through Dexter’s body and he fell into the wing chair, sobbing, with his hands pressed to his face so Marion and Brighton wouldn’t hear him.

Chapter Eighteen

When Dexter finally went to bed, he curled into a fetal position and slept in his clothes. He didn't pull down the covers or use the pillows. The tears stopped and he remained in one position, staring into the darkness for hours. When he couldn't keep his eyes open any longer, he drifted into a deep sleep from sheer mental exhaustion.

The next morning the sun was shining through the windows in the turret. He rubbed his eyes and sat up on the edge of the bed. Normally, Captain Lang would have been there when he opened his eyes. Dexter would have been naked and Lang's strong arms would have been wrapped around his shoulders. The room felt so empty. He rubbed his eyes again, but couldn't focus on anything clearly. When he stood up, he went to the bathroom so he could stand under a hot shower. His eyes were burning, his face felt puffy, and his back was sore from sleeping in an awkward position.

At breakfast, he kissed Brighton good morning and smiled at Marion. He reached down and patted Cleo on the head. He joked around the same way he always did. Dexter knew how to act. He'd had years of training and he knew how to become someone else. So he pretended to be the same happy man he'd been a day earlier. He couldn't tell anyone what had happened with Captain Lang. They would have thought he was insane.

For the next two weeks, he spent his days in the study. He told everyone he was working, which was a plausible excuse. But he was really just sitting at his desk staring out the window. Sometimes he spoke to the empty room. He'd lean forward in his chair

and said things to Captain Lang, hoping Lang might appear to him. But no one ever replied.

After two weeks had passed, he went down for breakfast one morning as usual. Brighton was playing with Cleo and Marion was making coffee. He smiled and said good morning, then sat down and opened the newest edition of Provincetown's local newspaper, *The Banner*.

While he was reading, Marion looked up from the coffee machine and said, "You know, Mr. Moore, something is different around here."

He lowered the paper and turned to face her. "Different?"

She lifted a mug from the counter and filled it with steaming coffee. "I know you think I'm daft, but the house seems different to me. When I wake up and walk into the kitchen, all the cabinet doors are shut, just the way I left them the night before. And nothing strange or out of the ordinary has happened in over two weeks. To be honest, I kind of miss it. I know that sounds silly, Mr. Moore. But I got used to all these strange little things happening around the house. It felt normal."

Dexter's stomach jumped and his heart raced. He wanted to talk about Captain Lang with someone. There were so many words and emotions ready to burst from his mouth. But he maintained an even expression and said, "Maybe you're just getting used to the house, Marion. I haven't noticed anything different." Then he leaned forward and grabbed the end of an old sock hanging from Cleo's mouth. He pulled the sock and said to Brighton, "You don't notice anything different, Brighton, do you?"

Brighton laughed and shrugged her shoulders. "I don't wake up all tucked in every morning anymore." While Dexter pulled the sock in Cleo's mouth, Cleo pulled

back as hard as he could. But Cleo couldn't manage to secure his footing on the wooden floor. His feet slipped and his body went forward.

Dexter let go of the sock and Cleo fell backward on his hind quarters. "What are you talking about, Brighton?" He knew he hadn't been tucking her into bed at night.

She reached for the sock in Cleo's mouth and said, "While we've been here in this house, I used to always wake up tucked in. Now I don't anymore. I miss it, too. I always felt safe and warm."

Dexter gave Marion a look. "Have you been tucking her into bed at night, Marion?"

Marion's eyes were wide. She put down the coffee mug and pressed her palm to her cheek. "I have no idea what she's talking about, Mr. Moore. I kiss her goodnight and close the door. But I never actually tuck her into bed."

Dexter didn't want to continue talking about this. He reached for the sock in Cleo's mouth and pulled it out with one quick tug. "Sit down and eat your breakfast, Brighton. You'll be late for school."

Brighton stood up and went to her chair. Marion came to the table with a mug of coffee and looked down at Dexter with her lips pursed. She placed the mug in front of him and said, "For the first time since I arrived in Keel Cottage, I feel like the house is empty."

Dexter laughed and waved his arm. "Marion, you have an overactive imagination, is all."

She turned and crossed back to the island. "Maybe so, Mr. Moore, but I know something's different around here. I just don't know what."

Dexter lifted the mug and took a sip of coffee, then lifted the newspaper and pretended he hadn't heard what she'd said.

In the months that followed, Dexter returned to his normal routine. He'd resigned himself to the fact that Captain Lang was not going to return and that life continued. He stopped talking to empty rooms. He started to go out again. He met Elliot for drinks, he went to dinner parties with friends, and he kept busy with his work in the Retail Association.

In the late spring, he began traveling to promote the second book, which was launching that summer. With the first book, he hadn't done as much promotion because of the reality show. But this time he had to do talk shows, magazine interviews, and radio shows. He met James Campbell in New York to discuss the book launch. James bought him small gifts, took him to quiet, romantic restaurants, and continued to flirt. He wasn't shy. One night while they were standing outside Dexter's hotel, James put his arms around Dexter and said, "I'm in love with you. Tell me there's some hope, Dexter." Then he boldly slipped his arm under Dexter's jacket and grabbed his crotch.

Dexter stepped back and straightened his jacket. "I need time, James," he said. "I'm still in love with Michael." Then he kissed James on the cheek and went into the hotel alone. He clenched his fists all the way up to his room. He wanted to feel the same way about James. But he didn't feel anything more than friendship.

By June, the second book was released and Dexter started jogging in the early mornings. He discovered that strenuous cardio workouts helped ease stress. And it helped him forget about his sexual frustrations. He masturbated often. But he hadn't had sex with anyone since Captain Lang. He'd jog down the driveway at six in the morning and

run all the way to the east end of town and back. He smiled and nodded at the same people every morning. There were a handful of other people in town with the same routine. He'd been in Provincetown for two years, yet it felt as if he'd been there all his life.

Then one morning in the middle of June, he jogged down the driveway and noticed an unfamiliar car parked in the street at the end of the driveway. He'd never seen this car; it had New York tags. The summertime tourists were returning and he knew unfamiliar cars were common. But this one caught his eye. It was a twenty-five-year old Lincoln Town Car, with faded gold paint and a chocolate brown vinyl roof that had frayed edges. You didn't see cars like that in Provincetown often. Most of the tourists drove new SUVs or expensive foreign cars.

The front windows in the Lincoln were down. Dexter jogged past the driver's door and looked inside. There were two young men in the front seat. The passenger had long, light brown hair and a scruffy goatee. He was wearing a dark green T-shirt, faded jeans, and dark sunglasses that covered the top half of his face. The driver had black hair. He wore a black T-shirt and dark jeans. His seat was all the way back and he wasn't wearing shoes or socks. His left leg was up and his large bare foot was resting on the dashboard. There was a tattoo of a snake on his ankle.

Dexter nodded at them and smiled. They reminded him of the rough guys he used to see all the time in California, riding their skateboards down Santa Monica Boulevard with their shirts wide open and their pants falling below their waists. These guys all had three things in common: dark, sexy eyes; huge, thick dicks; and an innate sense of

entitlement that suggested the world owed them something for just being young and handsome.

The driver looked up at Dexter and nodded, then reached between his legs and scratched his crotch a few times. He did it with sudden jerks so that his dick would move around. The only thing he could have done that would have been more obvious was pulling his dick out and shaking it in Dexter's direction.

Dexter pressed his palm to his throat. He blinked and continued jogging. When he reached the next block, he turned around and looked back at the old Lincoln. The driver was standing outside the car now. He was leaning against the front door, with his elbow on the roof, watching Dexter. Dexter couldn't see the expression on his face. But he did see the guy reach down and grab his crotch again.

When Dexter returned an hour later, the car was gone. But it was back again the next morning. When Dexter jogged by this time, the guy with the dark hair was sitting on the hood of the car. His shirt was off and his jeans were so far down Dexter could see his pubic hairs. The other guy was in the passenger seat. He looked Dexter up and down with a sly grin on his face. Dexter nodded and smiled.

The guy lifted his chin and said, "Hey, baby. I like those shorts. Nice ass." His voice was deep and hoarse, with a naughty, playful tone. Guys flirted with each other all the time in Provincetown, so this wasn't completely out of the ordinary.

Dexter's eyes opened wide. He wondered if the guy could sense how sexually frustrated he was. He almost tripped on a crack in the pavement. He was wearing a pair of tight, black Spandex athletic shorts and a white cotton tank top. He had a red baseball cap pulled down over his eyes. Guys did this to him all the time; he was used to it. But at

that hour of the morning, he didn't feel sexy, and he wasn't interested in flirting with anyone. He didn't know how to respond to the guy, so he smiled and said, "Thanks, man," and kept jogging.

The car was gone by the time he returned. And for the next four days, the pattern repeated. Sometimes both guys were standing outside the car. They always made a comment about Dexter's ass and they always made an obscene gesture with their crotches. He should have called the police. If Dexter had been a woman he most likely would have called the police the first day this all began. But Dexter was a gay man, and contrary to popular stereotypical beliefs, gay men did not think like women. Dexter thought like a man, and had the ego of a man. And men didn't call the police, or ask for any kind of help, unless it was absolutely necessary.

One morning the dark-haired guy actually unzipped his pants and adjusted his underwear. The morning after that, the guy with the lighter hair licked his lips and whistled at Dexter. Dexter still didn't think it was serious enough to call the police. They seemed harmless enough; they were always smiling. He just figured it was a couple of smart-asses passing through Provincetown, hoping to make sexual conquests. If he ignored them, they'd lose interest and disappear.

After a few days of awkward encounters, Dexter decided to change his routine. Instead of jogging in the morning, he waited until nine o'clock one night. The guys weren't there when he left the house. He took a deep breath and sighed. But when he returned from his run an hour later, the old Lincoln was back again. They must have been watching his every move from a distance. The guys were outside the car, tossing a Frisbee to each other in the street. It was dark outside, but they were near a streetlight.

Dexter could see they were both shirtless. Their baggy jeans were pulled down to their hips and it looked like they weren't wearing any underwear.

Dexter was drenched in sweat. His tank top was clinging to his chest and his white running shorts hugged his body. When he slowed down to a walk, the guy with the dark hair looked at him and said, "Hey, baby. Can we use your phone? We're having a little car trouble and we need to call someone." He even sounded like the guys on Santa Monica Boulevard, with a streetwise accent that had quasi-ethnic undertones. But these guys weren't ethnic.

There was no way Dexter was going to invite them into his house. He took a deep breath and said, "I'll get my cell phone, guys. It's in the house." He was planning to call the police.

The guy with the dark hair dropped the Frisbee in the street. The guy with the lighter hair grinned. Dexter smiled at them and turned toward the house. But while Dexter was walking up the driveway, the guy with the dark hair grabbed Dexter's arm and the guy with the lighter hair placed his hand over Dexter's mouth. Dexter tried to break free. But they were too strong to resist. The one with the dark hair reached down and grabbed Dexter's ass, then whispered, "Let's go inside, baby. You're gonna like this. I'll bet you have a lot of nice things in that house, too. We've been watching you and your little family."

After that, everything happened fast. First, they tied Dexter to a chair on the front porch and gagged him. Then they went inside and tied and gagged Marion to her bed. When Cleo barked, the guy with the lighter hair scooped him up, brought him to the garage, and threw him into the trunk of Dexter's car. Brighton was sound asleep in her

room. She didn't know what was happening, and Dexter, still tied to a chair, prayed she'd never find out.

When they returned to the front porch, they untied Dexter's legs and dragged him up to his bedroom. Dexter fought hard. He squirmed and jerked; he tried hard to pull away from them with all the strength he had. But these young men were strong, and about ten years younger than Dexter. The one with the dark hair leaned in, licked Dexter's neck and said, "If you care about that sweet little girl sleeping in her bed right now, you won't make a sound."

Dexter's body went still. Brighton's face flashed before his eyes and he nodded yes.

The dark-haired guy put his hand down Dexter's shorts and squeezed his ass. He smelled like he hadn't showered in weeks, like raw onions, sauerkraut, and an assorted cheese platter. "You just spread those pretty legs for us, and everything will be just fine."

Dexter tried to speak; he mumbled as fast as he could. He wanted to tell them he'd do anything they wanted if they left Brighton alone. His eyes opened wide and he nodded again.

When they were in Dexter's bedroom, they tied his arms to the bedpost. The one with light hair pulled off his shorts and his running shoes; the one with dark hair ripped his tank top off. Dexter closed his eyes; he was stark naked. He clenched his fists and took deep breaths through his nose. And when the dark-haired guy pulled his dick out of his pants, Dexter's body began to tremble. He knew what they were going to do to him. But his one concern at that moment was that the bedroom door was wide open. He didn't

want Brighton to wake up and see what was happening. He wasn't sure what they would do to her if she did wake up.

Dexter tired to motion with his head. He jerked it toward the bedroom door and softly mumbled something incoherent. He was trying to say, "Close the door." But they weren't paying attention. They both had their penises out now, and both were fully erect. The one with dark hair rubbed his against Dexter's naked thigh and said, "You're gonna like this, baby. We've been watching that hot ass jog down the street. We know you want it bad, baby."

When the one with the lighter hair rubbed his dick against Dexter's naked hip, a soft cry came from the other end of the house. "Dad, I had a bad dream," Brighton shouted. Her distant voice sounded fragile and apprehensive.

The dark-haired guy looked at the other guy and said, "You go take care of her while I get him ready for you." He sucked in his bottom lip and said to Dexter, "I'm gonna split that pretty ass wide open, baby. I'm going to get you ready for my buddy." Then he bent down and licked the small of Dexter's back. "You like that, don't you?"

The light-haired guy stared down at Dexter's naked body and grinned, then turned toward the open door and said, "I'll shut her up. I'll be right back."

But just as he reached the doorway, a strong gust of wind passed through the room. It blew his light brown hair forward and slammed the door shut. He stood there for a moment and stared. He turned back to the dark-haired guy and said, "What the fuck was that?"

The one with dark hair didn't get a chance to answer, because one of the wing chairs rose from the floor, sailed across the room, and knocked into his body. He fell

back on the bed and shook his head. Then the other wing chair went up and crashed into him.

The guy standing near the door shouted, “Did you see that? Those fucking chairs just lifted up by themselves. I’m getting the fuck out of here.” He reached for the door knob and tried to open the door. He pulled and tugged, the handles went clockwise and counter clockwise but the door would not open. “It’s not locked. I can’t open it. It’s stuck or something.”

Dexter heard sirens racing down Commercial Street. He heard Marion run upstairs and he heard Cleo barking. Marion shouted, “I called the police, Mr. Moore. They are on their way right now. I’m going to lock myself in the bedroom with Brighton.”

The two men looked at each other and panicked. The dark-haired one said, “The window.”

When they ran to the front window, a large antique high boy jumped out from the wall and fell on top of them. They didn’t know what hit them; there hadn’t been time to avoid it. The high boy knocked them both out cold and pinned them to the floor.

Dexter was still tied to the bedpost. He heard the police cars pull up on the front lawn and he saw flashing lights in the window. He looked down at the men unconscious and pinned beneath the high boy.

When he looked up again, Captain Lang was standing in front of him. Lang untied his hands and removed the gag from his mouth. He pulled Dexter into his body and held him as tight as he could. “You’re okay,” he said. “Everything is fine. I told you you’d always be safe in this house.”

“I thought you were gone,” Dexter said. There were tears in his eyes and one rolled down the side of his face. He rested his head on Lang’s chest and tried to catch his breath.

“I’ve been here all the time,” Lang said. “I’ve just been very quiet, Dexter.”

Dexter heard someone force the front door open. A man’s voice shouted, “This is the police. We are armed.”

Then Marion shouted, “We’re upstairs. Please help us.”

Captain Lang stepped back. “Put your pants on. You don’t want them to find you naked. You’re a celebrity.”

Dexter looked into his eyes and said, “Are you going to disappear again?”

Captain Lang tilted his head and smiled. “No,” he said. “I’m back for as long as you want me. I love you too much to ever leave you again.” He shrugged his shoulders. “Maybe it’s a mistake. But my love for you is too strong to ignore, Dexter.”

Dexter smiled and reached down to the floor for his shorts. He hadn’t heard Lang speak his name in a long time. “And I love you.”

* * * *

Later that night when the police were gone and the two guys were in custody, Marion and Dexter both put Brighton back to bed. When she was settled and they were on their way back to their rooms, Marion stopped in the hall and said, “Mr. Moore, you’re going to think I’ve totally lost my mind. But I have to tell you this. When I was tied up, I actually felt the ropes slip from my hands and ankles by themselves. I have no idea how it happened. But that’s how I was able to call the police. And I have no idea

how Cleo got out of the trunk of the car. I know they locked him in there. I heard them do it. There's something strange about this house. But in a good way, not a bad way."

Dexter smiled and ran his hand across the back of his head. "I know exactly what you mean, Marion. I feel the same way."

Then he left her in the hallway and went back to his own bedroom. When he opened the door, the wing chairs were in front of the fireplace and the highboy was back against the wall. The room looked perfect. But more than that, Captain Lang was lying in the middle of his bed. He was wearing his sea captain uniform. The cap was tilted down and his feet were crossed at the ankle. He smiled at Dexter and reached out with both arms. "I'd like to hold you in my arms for the rest of your life, Dexter, if that's okay with you. But I don't want to rob you of the normal life you deserve. I couldn't do that to you."

Dexter smiled and took a deep breath. "You're not robbing me. Don't you see that? I don't care about going to restaurants with you, or taking vacations with you, or the fact that my life won't be traditional. I only care about being with you for the rest of my life, and living here in Keel Cottage. You're not robbing me of anything. You'll be giving me what I've always wanted." He crawled into Captain Lang's open arms. He rested his head on Lang's chest and whispered, "All you have to do is promise to love me as much as I love you. Nothing else really matters in the end."

"That's the one thing you'll never have to worry about, Dexter," Lang said. "I've been in love with you since the day you walked into this house, and that's never going to change."

Chapter Nineteen

On Dexter's ninetieth birthday, Brighton drove to the Cape from Northampton. It was a sunny afternoon in late May. A light breeze was blowing in from the bay and the air smelled salty and fresh, with hints of impending summertime.

It was still cool and Dexter was wearing a heavy tweed jacket. He was sitting on the porch so he'd know when they arrived. This was one of those times he missed Cleo most of all. If Cleo had still been alive, he would have barked when someone pulled into the driveway, and Dexter would have been able to wait inside the house where it was warmer. He'd thought about getting another dog after Cleo died. But he knew it wouldn't be the same. Cleo had lived to be twenty-one years old and he'd died in his sleep. Dexter had buried him behind Keel Cottage in the middle of a small rose garden.

Brighton was coming with her husband, Jasper. She had three grown children of her own, and four grandchildren. She was an English professor at Smith College, the same college where she'd received all of her own degrees.

When she pulled into the driveway at Keel Cottage, Dexter stood up from his favorite wicker chair on the front porch and smiled. He was proud of his daughter and of all her accomplishments. She could have gone into show business. With his contacts and Michael's contacts, it wouldn't have been difficult to establish a career in Hollywood. But she'd decided early on that she wanted to teach. Whenever he thought about the fact that she'd gone to Smith, he couldn't stop smiling.

Dexter liked her husband, Jasper, too. They had been married for more than thirty years. Jasper owned a large hardware store near Smith, a family business that was more than one hundred years old. They'd met while Brighton had been studying for her undergraduate degree.

Dexter reached for his cane and started walking down the steps to meet them on the lawn. But Captain Lang said, "Wait for them here, Dexter. You're not good with steps. Let them come to you. You don't want to fall and break a hip." He still looked the same as he did the day he'd first appeared to Dexter.

"I know how to walk down a small flight of steps, thank you," Dexter said. His hair was white, his body was thin and frail, and he tended to stoop forward when he used a cane. His face had wrinkles and his eyeglasses were thick. But he was just as determined as he'd always been. He gave Captain Lang a look, tapped the cane against the rail, and said, "I think I'm capable of crossing the front lawn to meet my own daughter." As he'd grown older, he'd become stubborn.

Captain Lang rubbed his jaw and smiled. "Don't talk to me," he said. "They will think you've gone senile if they see you talking to no one."

Dexter laughed and said, "At my age, I couldn't care less what anyone thinks. And if I want to talk to the man I love, I will." Then he smiled at Captain Lang and winked.

By the time he turned around again, Brighton and Jasper were at the bottom of the stairs. She looked up at him and smiled. "Happy Birthday, Dad." Then she climbed the steps and kissed him on the cheek.

Dexter shook Jasper's hand and said, "Let's go inside and wait for the others to arrive. I had the housekeeper prepare coffee in the living room."

This birthday celebration had been Brighton's idea. She'd invited Dexter's old friends: Michael, Elliot, and James Campbell. There weren't many friends left. But the most important ones were still around. They were all going out to dinner at Dexter's favorite restaurant in Provincetown. Michael had already arrived from the West Coast and was walking around in town. Elliot only lived a few blocks away. And James Campbell had moved to Provincetown when he'd retired from publishing twenty years earlier. He lived up on the east end.

When they went into the house, a pleasant young woman with long brown hair greeted them in the hallway and told them she'd bring the coffee into the living room. Dexter smiled and thanked her, without using her name. He called her "Dear." Captain Lang was standing near the staircase. He shook his head and smiled. "You forgot her name again, Dexter, didn't you?"

Dexter smiled at Brighton and ignored Lang. "Let's go into the living room. The housekeeper will take care of everything."

Captain Lang said, "Her name is *Judy*, Dexter."

Dexter smiled. "I know her name is Judy."

Brighton and Jasper looked at each other and raised their eyebrows. Then Brighton smiled at Dexter and said, "Are you talking to us, Dad?"

"Yes," Dexter said. "Of course I'm talking to you. There's no one else in the room. Who else would I be talking to? Her name is Judy, the housekeeper." Then he leaned forward and whispered, "It's the strangest thing, Brighton. After Marion passed on,

I just can't seem to remember the names of these housekeepers. They are all very nice people, but no one's ever been able to replace Marion." Marion had lived until she was in her nineties. And after she'd died, Dexter never had another live-in housekeeper again. He hired daytime help. They came in at eight and left at six, with Thursdays and Sundays off. Most only lasted a few years at a time.

Brighton reached for his hand and smiled. "I know, Dad. I think about her every day of my life. She was family. I feel kind of guilty. She would have been mortified to see us going out to a restaurant on your ninetieth birthday. She would have insisted we celebrate right here in Keel Cottage, with a large platter of lobsters and a homemade birthday cake."

Dexter turned away from Brighton and smiled at Captain Lang. He shrugged his shoulders. He would have preferred to celebrate his birthday at home, with Lang by his side. "Yes she would have been upset," he said. "She knew how I liked celebrating things like this in my own home."

"I wish I were more of a cook," Brighton said.

"Don't give it a second thought," Dexter said. "I've been looking forward to this night for a long time. I'm just happy to be with you whenever I can. I'm glad you came home, Brighton."

While they were having coffee and light refreshments, Michael returned from his walk. Brighton hadn't seen her other father in a long time. She jumped up and hugged him, then scolded him nicely for not calling her as often as he should have.

When Elliot and James arrived at Keel Cottage, they all walked to the restaurant together. It was only a five-minute walk and it was pointless to take cars. Provincetown

wasn't crowded with tourists yet, so they almost had the entire restaurant to themselves. The host escorted them to a private section at the back of the building, overlooking the ocean. Dexter hooked his cane to the back of a chair and sat down at the head of the table.

After they ordered, Elliot lifted his glass and made a toast, "To the best friend I've ever had," he said. His hand shook and he almost spilled his drink, but that didn't stop him from clicking his glass against Dexter's.

They laughed about the past, and James Campbell joked about Dexter writing another book. Dexter had written more than forty books by the time he'd turned seventy. This even shocked him. He'd never imagined that a child TV star would become a famous author. All his books were novels about the sea, filled with action and adventure. And he'd written them all with Captain Lang.

When the waitress brought out a large birthday cake, with ninety burning candles, Dexter smiled and pressed his palm to his chest. His eyes opened wide and he felt light-headed. Everyone thought he was staring at the cake. But he didn't even notice the cake. His right hand started to wobble. He couldn't control the shaking. The right side of his body felt numb and his right cheek twitched. When everyone stood up to applaud him, Dexter's head went down, he slipped off the chair, and fell to the floor.

The next thing he remembered was waking up in a strange place. Brighton was at his side. When she saw his eyes open, she leaned forward and whispered, "It's okay, Dad. You're going to be fine. We're in the hospital in Hyannis."

Dexter tried to sit up, but he couldn't move the right side of his body. When he opened his mouth to speak, the right side wouldn't move. His voice sounded hollow and slurred and he couldn't pronounce hard consonants. He mumbled, "What happened?"

Brighton reached for his hand. “You had a stroke, Dad. But you’re going to be fine.”

Dexter lowered his eyebrows. He slowly lifted his left hand and said, “Home. I want to go home.” He didn’t care what Brighton or the doctors had to say. He knew he was dying. He felt it with every fiber of his being.

Brighton tried to placate him, and to reassure him he was in the best possible place. But he refused to listen. By the end of that day, he turned his head and refused to look at her. She sat back in a chair and started to cry. Jasper was with her. Michael was sitting in a chair on the other side of the room. This was the first time in a long time they had disagreed about anything.

Michael stood up and crossed to where she was sitting. He put his arm on her shoulder. “Maybe he is better off in his own home.”

She looked up at Michael and tilted her head. He’d turned out to be a decent father. Even though he’d always lived on the West Coast, Brighton had grown up knowing him and he’d always been there for the important parts of her life. “I don’t know, Dad,” she said. “I’m terrified. I’ve never been so scared in my life. I don’t want to lose him.” She clenched her fists and pressed them to her forehead.

Dexter opened his eyes and stared at her. He lifted his head from the pillow as far as he could and pointed. Then he smiled and said, “I just want to go home to Keel Cottage. I don’t want to die here. I want to die in my own home.” He’d been lucky in life; this was the first time he’d ever been hospitalized.

She stood up, leaned against the hospital bed, and rested her head on his chest. While tears rolled down her face, she hugged Dexter and said, "I'll take you home, Dad. I'll arrange for a discharge tomorrow."

Michael took a deep breath and patted Dexter's foot. "You're doing the right thing, sweetheart." Then he winked at Dexter.

Two days later, Dexter was back at Keel Cottage in his own bedroom. Brighton had hired a nurse and they'd filled his room with hospital equipment. While the nurse checked the machines and Brighton sat at the foot of the bed, Captain Lang stood at Dexter's side. Brighton couldn't understand why Dexter kept looking up toward the window all the time. She couldn't see Lang. She still had no idea he was there and that he was offering support and guidance to the only man he'd ever loved, in life or death. Her eyes opened wide when Dexter mumbled to the window. Dexter's eyes were clear and the left side of his face went up as if he were trying to smile.

Then one evening while Dexter was staring at Captain Lang, Brighton reached for Dexter's hand and said, "You're looking at him right now, aren't you?"

Dexter's head slowly turned in her direction. He raised his one eyebrow and nodded yes. "You know about him?"

She nodded and squeezed his hand tighter. "I've always known someone else was here in Keel Cottage. When I was a child and I fell from the widow's walk, I know someone saved my life. I was too young to realize it then, but when I got older I started to understand. I remembered being caught in mid-air. Someone, or something, carried me down to the shrubs and placed me gently on top of them. After that, someone used to tuck me into bed at night. I think it was a man. I think I even saw him once. He thought I was

sleeping. But I was waiting to see if he'd come into the room. I remember a tall man in a dark suit, just like the one in the painting downstairs."

Dexter smiled and looked up at Captain Lang. "I've had a good, long life," he said.

After that, Dexter lingered for another week. On a breezy night the Friday of Memorial Day weekend, he woke from a deep sleep and saw Brighton sitting at the foot of the bed. Jasper was there, all his grandchildren and great-grandchildren were there, and Elliot and James were sitting in the wing chairs by the fireplace reminiscing about Jesse Barlow. They were talking about how much they missed watching Jesse's shows on TV and how his death in that awful car accident was way before his time. Michael was sitting on the window seat. He was staring at Dexter with tears in his eyes, shaking his head.

When Dexter lifted his head, they all stopped talking and stared at him. Brighton leaned forward and Jasper placed his hand on her back. Dexter smiled and looked over their shoulders. He saw Marion standing next to Jesse Barlow near the fireplace. They were illuminated by a soft white light that slowed his heart. Jesse and Marion were not crying and they were not shaking their heads. They were smiling at Dexter. Their arms were stretched out and they were motioning him to join them. Dexter smiled back at them and looked down at the foot of the bed. His little dog Cleo was sitting next to his feet, wagging his tail. When Cleo barked and shook his head back and forth, the metal identification tags that had always been attached to his collar clinked softly.

Brighton stood up and went to his side. "What's wrong, Dad? Do you want something?"

Dexter rested his head on the pillow and looked up toward the window. Captain Lang was standing there. His strong hand was on Dexter's shoulder and he was smiling.

“Are you ready, Dexter?” he asked. “I’m going to take you with me now, so we can be together forever.”

Dexter felt a surge of energy pass through his entire body. He smiled and said, “I see Marion, and Cleo, and even Jesse Barlow.” He hadn’t thought about Jesse Barlow or the reality show in years.

“They came for support,” Captain Lang said. “They know you’re ready to join me now. You don’t have to be afraid anymore. You can let go. It’s time.”

Brighton thought he was talking to her. She pressed her palm to her chest and said, “You just had a dream, Dad. You’re fine. You’re going to be just fine. I love you. Hang on.”

Dexter turned to her and smiled. “I love you, too.” His voice still wobbled, but he spoke almost as clearly as he’d spoken the day before the stroke. He turned to the rest of them and smiled. He saw his friends and his family. “I love you all,” he said.

Then his eyes opened wide and he took one last shallow breath. His chest heaved, his body went forward, and his eyes opened wide.

When his body went back and settled into the sheets with a quiet thud, everyone in the room leaned forward. Brighton let out a soft cry and held his hand. Jasper grabbed Brighton’s shoulders and said, “He’d gone, sweetheart. He’s at peace now. There’s no more pain.”

While the rest of them consoled each other with tears in their eyes, Dexter’s young body appeared in the outline of his ninety-year-old body. The image of the handsome young Dexter sat up on the bed. It slipped out of the old body with little effort. Dexter looked down at his arms and legs and shook his head.

Captain Lang smiled and leaned forward, then he lifted the young Dexter from the bed and looked into his eyes. “There’s no more pain, Dexter. You’re the same magnificent young man you were when I first met you.”

Dexter lifted his arms and rested them on Captain Lang’s shoulders. He placed his head on Lang’s chest and said, “I can’t believe how wonderful I feel. I haven’t felt this good in over fifty years.” His arthritic joints were limber again; his body was hard and strong. He could see clearly without eyeglasses.

“Would you like to go up to the widow’s walk now and look at the stars?” Captain Lang asked. “We can do anything we want now, Dexter. We’re finally free.”

“Yes,” Dexter said. “Take me up there and show me how much you love me. I want it to be just like the first time we made love.”

Captain Lang turned toward the fireplace. He carried Dexter across the room. They passed through Dexter’s friends and family without being noticed. When they reached the mantel, Captain Lang said, “Are you ready, my love?”

Dexter nodded yes and said, “I’ve been ready for a long time.”

THE END

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