Lovereading.co.uk

Tommy Sullivan is a Freak

Meg Cabot

Macmillan

Extract

All text is copyright of the author

This opening extract is exclusive to Love**reading**.
Please print off and read at your leisure.

Tommy Sullivan is a FREAK

Meg Cabot is the author of the phenomenally successful The Princess Diaries series. With vast numbers of copies sold around the world, the books have topped the US and UK bestseller lists for weeks and won several awards. Two movies based on the series have been massively popular throughout the world.

Meg is also the author of the bestselling *All American Girl*, *All American Girl: Ready or Not*, *How to Be Popular*, *Jinx*, *Teen Idol*, *Avalon High*, *Nicola and the Viscount*, *Victoria and the Rogue* and The Mediator series as well as many other books for teenagers and adults. She lives in Florida with her husband and her one-eyed cat, Henrietta, and says she is still waiting for her real parents, the king and queen, to restore her to her rightful throne.

Visit Meg Cabot's website at www.megcabot.co.uk

One

'Oh my God, what's *she* doing here?' my best friend, Sidney van der Hoff, was asking as I came up to the corner booth to hand out menus.

Sidney wasn't talking about me. She was glaring at someone at another table.

But I couldn't be bothered to look and see who Sidney was talking about, since my boyfriend, Seth, was sitting next to her, smiling up at me . . . that smile that's been making girls' insides melt since about the fifth grade, when we all started noticing Seth's even white teeth and highly kissable lips.

It still freaks me out that of all the girls in school, I'm the one he picked to kiss with those lips.

'Hey, babe,' Seth said to me, blinking his long, sexy eyelashes – the ones I overheard my mom telling Sidney's mom over the phone are totally wasted on a guy. He snaked an arm around my waist and gave me a squeeze.

'Hi,' I said a little breathlessly. Not because of the squeeze, but because I had a table of twelve (Mrs Hogarth's

ninety-seventh birthday party) that was running me ragged, refilling their iced-tea glasses and such, so I was panting a little anyway. 'How was the movie?'

'Lame,' Sidney answered for everyone. 'You didn't miss anything. Lindsay should stick with red, blonde does nothing for her. Seriously, though. What's Morgan Castle doing here?' Sidney used the menu I'd just given her to point at a table over in Shaniqua's section. 'I mean, she's got some nerve.'

I started to say Sidney was wrong – no way would Morgan Castle be caught dead at the Gull 'n' Gulp. Especially at the height of the summer season, when the place was so packed. Locals – like Morgan – know better than to try to set foot near this place during high season. At least, not without a reservation. If you don't have a reservation at the Gull 'n' Gulp – even on a Tuesday night, like tonight – during high season, you can expect to wait *at least* an hour for a table . . . *two* hours on weekends.

Not that the tourists seem to mind. That's because Jill, the hostess, gives them each one of those giant beepers you can't fit into your pocket and mistakenly walk away with, and tells them she'll beep them when a table's free.

You'd be surprised how well people take this information. I guess they're used to it, from their T.G.I.Fridays and Cheesecake Factories back home, or whatever. They just take their beeper and spend their hour wait strolling up and down the pier. They look over the side rails at the striped bass swimming around in the clear water ('Look, Mommy!' some kid will always yell. 'Sharks!') and maybe

wander over to historic Old Towne Eastport, with its cobblestone streets and quaint shops, then wander back and peer into the yachts at the Summer People watching satellite TV and sipping their gin and tonics.

Then their beeper goes off and they come hurrying over for their table.

Sometimes, while Jill's leading them to a table in my section, I'll overhear a tourist go, 'Why couldn't we just have sat THERE?' and see them point to the big booth in the corner.

And Jill will be all, 'Oh, sorry. That's reserved.'

Except that this is a total lie. The booth isn't reserved. Well, not technically. We just hold it open every night, in case of VIPs.

Not that Eastport, Connecticut, sees that many VIPs. Or, OK, any. Sometimes, between lunch and dinner, when there's a lull, Jill and Shaniqua and I will sit around and fantasize about what we'd do if a REAL celebrity walked into the place, like Ryan Phillippe (although we've gone off him a bit since his divorce) or Justin Timberlake, or even Prince William (you never know. He could have got lost on his yacht or whatever).

The crazy thing is, even if by some incredible fluke an actual VIP like that did show up at the Gull 'n' Gulp, he wouldn't get a seat at the VIP booth. Because in Eastport, Connecticut, the only true VIPs are the Quahogs.

And that's who the corner booth is always saved for any Quahog who, for whatever reason, might not have made a

reservation at the Gull 'n' Gulp during high season, and needs a table.

Shocking but true: every once in a while a tourist will wander into the restaurant who has never heard of a quahog. Peggy, the manager, had to take me aside my first day working at the Gulp last June, when a tourist was like, 'What's a quahog?'

Only they said it the way it's spelled, kwah-hog, instead of the way it's supposed to be pronounced, which is koh-hog.

And I was all, 'You don't know what a QUAHOG is???' and almost died laughing.

Peggy explained to me, very stiffly, that quahogs actually aren't that well known outside the north-east, and that people from the Midwest, for instance, have probably never even heard of them before.

She was speaking of the bivalve, of course. Because that's what a quahog is – a type of clam that, when mixed in a pot with a lot of potatoes, onion, leeks, heavy cream and flour, make for the Gull 'n' Gulp's bestselling chowder. Those types of quahogs are what Eastport has been known for since like the 1600s, practically.

Now, though, our town is known for a different type of quahog entirely. Because the Quahogs is also the name of Eastport High School's football team, which has won the state championship every year since before I was born, sixteen years ago.

Well, except for one year. The year I was in eighth grade.

But no one ever talks about that year.

It's hard to say which quahogs the town's residents are proudest of, the clams or the team. If I had to guess, I'd say it's the football team. It's easy to take a clam – especially one that's been around for that long – for granted. The team's only been on its winning streak for a decade and a half.

And the memory of what it felt like NOT to have the best team in the state is still fresh in everybody's mind, since it was only four years ago, after all, that they were forced to forfeit that single season.

That's why nobody in town questions the corner booth. Even if some local did, for whatever reason, show up at the Gull 'n' Gulp during the summer season without a reservation, he wouldn't expect to be seated in the empty corner booth. That booth is for Quahogs, and Quahogs only.

And everybody knows it.

Especially my boyfriend, Seth Turner. That's because Seth, following in the footsteps of his big brother, two-time first-team All-State defensive-end Jake Turner, is this year's varsity Quahog kicker. Seth, like his brother before him, loves the corner booth. He likes to stop by the Gull 'n' Gulp when I'm working, and sit there till I'm done, drinking free Cokes and inhaling quahog fritters (deep-fried dough with bits of clam inside, that you dip in a sweet 'n' sour sauce. This is the only kind of quahog I can stand to eat, because the dough masks the quahog's rubbery texture, and the sauce masks its total tastelessness. I am not a fan of

the quahog – the bivalve variety, I mean. Not that I've dared mention this to anyone. I don't want to get run out of town).

Anyway, then, when my shift is up, Seth puts my bike in the back of his four by four, and then we make out in the cab until my curfew, which is midnight in the summertime.

So the corner booth is a total win-win situation, if you ask me.

Of course, lots of times Seth isn't the only Quahog in the corner booth. Sometimes his brother Jake – who now works for their dad's construction company – comes along.

Not tonight though. Tonight Seth's brought along Quahog defensive lineman Jamal Jarvis and his girlfriend, Martha Wu, as well as quarterback Dave Hollingsworth.

And of course, wherever Dave goes, my best friend, Sidney van der Hoff, has to trail along, since she and Dave have been attached at the hip all summer, ever since Sidney's former boyfriend – last year's Quahog quarterback, All-State most-valuable-player Rick Stamford – graduated in the spring and sent Sidney a *Dear Sidney* text message, telling her he needed his space and wanted to see other girls when he went to UCLA in the fall.

Which, if you ask me, was pretty decent of him. He could have strung Sidney along all summer and then just dumped her when he got to California – or even just gone ahead and seen other girls behind her back and not told her, and come back for Thanksgiving and Christmas vacations expecting to pick things up where they'd left off. It's

not like, being all the way across the country, Sidney would ever have known Rick had his tongue in some Kappa Kappa Gamma's mouth.

Although actually it is possible – even easy – to see other people behind your significant other's back while living in the same town, without that person – or anyone else, for that matter – ever finding out. Easier, for instance, than hiding the fact that you can't stand quahogs (the supposedly edible kind).

I'm just saying.

So it was nice of Rick not to string Sidney along. I told her that at the time, even though it didn't seem to console her much. Sidney didn't really calm down until she found out Dave had broken up with Beth Ridley due to her cheating on him with this hottie from Australia she met while crewing on her uncle's parasailing charter.

So Sidney invited Dave over to her house to commiserate about their no-good exes in her jacuzzi over Boylan's Creme Soda (Sidney's was sugar free, of course). And Dave didn't even try to take her bikini top off, which really impressed Sidney.

So of course she hooked up with him.

For such a small town, a lot of stuff happens in Eastport. Sometimes it's hard to keep up.

Like right now, for instance. Because when I looked over at Morgan Castle's table and saw who she was with, I knew EXACTLY what she was doing at the Gull 'n' Gulp on a Tuesday night in high season.

And I also knew I didn't have time for the drama that

was about to erupt. I mean, I had Mrs Hogarth's birthday to deal with.

Sidney didn't know that though, and even if she had, she wouldn't have cared. I've been best friends with Sidney van der Hoff, the most popular girl in my class, since second grade, when I let her cheat off me during a spelling quiz. Sidney had been a wreck that day, on account of her kitten having gone in to get spayed. Sidney had convinced herself Muffy wasn't going to survive.

So I took pity on her and let her copy my answers.

Muffy got through her surgery just fine, and grew into a fat cat who I got to know quite well from the frequent slumber parties I attended at Sidney's house afterwards, Sidney not being the sort of person to forget a kindness.

That's what I love about Sidney.

It's all the drama I could live without.

'Oh my God, is that *Eric Fluteley*?' Sidney was totally staring at Morgan's table. 'That's even WEIRDER. What's HE doing here? This is hardly his kind of place. I mean, considering that no Hollywood casting scouts are likely to walk in.'

'Hey, Katie,' Dave said, ignoring his girlfriend's outburst. This was typical Dave behaviour. He is a notorious smoother-over . . . one of those people who is always calm, no matter what the situation – even Morgan Castle and Eric Fluteley dining together at the Gull 'n' Gulp. That's why he and Sidney make such a good couple. She's a disrupter and he's a smoother-over. Together, they're almost

like one normal person. 'How you doing? Busy tonight, huh?'

'Way busy,' I said. He had no idea. This family from like Ohio or something had come in earlier, and the parents had let their kids run around all over the place, bothering Jill up at the hostess stand, throwing French fries out into the water (even though the signs on the pier supports say, very clearly, *Do Not Feed the Birds or Fish*), getting in the way of the busboys when they were carrying enormous trays of used plates, shrieking for no reason, that sort of thing.

If my brother and I had acted that way in a restaurant, my mom would have made us go sit out in the car.

But these parents just smiled like they thought their kids were so cute, even when one of them blew milk at me from a straw.

And then, after all that, they only left a three-dollar tip.

Hello. Do you know what you can buy in Eastport for three dollars? Nothing.

'I'll make this quick then,' Dave was saying. 'I'll have a Coke.'

'Make it two,' Jamal said.

'Make it three,' Seth said, with another one of his knee-melting smiles. I could tell by the way he couldn't take his eyes off me that things were going to get steamy in the cab of his truck later on. I knew the cami I was wearing had been a good idea, even though Peggy has a thing about bra straps showing and had almost made me go home to change until Jill had pointed out that *her* bra straps show

every single night, and if it's OK for the hostess, why not the waiting staff?

'Diet for me, please, Katie,' Martha said.

'Me too,' Sidney said.

'Two diets, three regulars, and two quahog fritter platters coming up,' I said, regathering the menus. We always throw in free quahogs for the Quahogs. Because it's good for business to have the most popular guys in town hanging out at your establishment. 'Be back in a minute, guys.'

I winked at Seth, who winked back. Then I hurried to turn in their order and get the drinks.

I couldn't help glancing in Eric's direction on my way to the soda station – and saw him staring at me over the top of Morgan's head. He had that look on his face – the same look he got when I was taking his headshots for his college apps and the stills of him for the *Gazette* during that really intense scene from *The Breakfast Club*, which our school put on, where Bender talks about how his dad burnt him for spilling paint on the garage floor. Eric played Bender, and you could TOTALLY see how Claire, the school's prom princess, would go for him.

Eric really is talented. I wouldn't be surprised to see him in the movies some day. Or some TV series about sensitive but fearless doctors or whatever. He's already got an agent and goes on auditions and everything. He almost got a part in a Daisy Brand Sour Cream commercial, but was dropped at the last minute when the director decided to go in a different direction and use a five-year-old instead.

Which I could understand. I mean, it's sour cream.

How intense do you want the guy to look about it? Even now, Eric was looking at me so intensely that Morgan, who was trying to talk to him, totally paused and looked around to see what he was staring at.

Quick as a flash, I turned my back on them and leaned down to ask Mrs Hogarth if there was anything she needed.

'Oh no, Katie dear,' she said, beaming at me. 'Everything is just lovely. Larry, honey, you remember Katie Ellison, don't you? Her mother and father own Ellison Properties, the real estate firm in town.'

Mrs Hogarth's son, who was in Eastport with his wife (and some of his kids and some of their kids and a few of *their* kids) to take his mom and her best friends from her assisted living community out for her birthday, smiled. 'Is that so?'

'And Katie takes pictures for her school paper,' Mrs Hogarth went on. 'And for our community newsletter. She took that nice picture of the quilting club. Remember, Anne Marie?'

'I thought I looked fat in it,' said Mrs O'Callahan, who, by the way, *is* fat. Although I'd tried to Photoshop out some of the excess, knowing she'd complain later.

'Well,' I said super-chipperly. 'Is everyone ready for dessert?'

'Oh, I think so,' Mrs Hogarth's son said with a wink. He'd stopped by earlier with a cake from Strong's Bakery, which we'd stashed in the back and which I was supposed to bring out while singing 'Happy Birthday'. The

Hogarths had forgotten to get candles though, so I'd run over to the card shop and picked up two shaped like the numbers nine and seven. They were kids' candles, with clowns on them, but I knew Mrs Hogarth wouldn't mind.

'Oh, nothing for me, thanks,' Mrs Hogarth said. 'I'm stuffed. That grouper was delicious!'

'I'll be right back to see if anyone wants coffee then,' I said, and hurried around the corner to the soda station, still careful not to look back in Eric's direction.

Ducking into the kitchen, I grabbed Mrs Hogarth's cake, threw on the two candles and started out again –

– and almost crashed right into Eric Fluteley, who – looking at me intensely the whole time – took the cake from my hands, set it next to the coffee-maker, grabbed me by both shoulders and kissed me on the lips.

Two

'The Gull 'n' Gulp just so isn't Morgan Castle's kind of place,' Sidney was going on, into my cellphone.

I grunted in response. I was trying to work some leave-in conditioner through my wet hair with a comb. I'd had to wash it three times after my shift in order to get the smell of fried quahog out of it.

Seriously, I don't know how Seth can stand to make out with me when I stink so much of clams.

But the stink is pretty much the only downside of waitressing at one of the most popular restaurants in town. Especially when you pocket forty-eight bucks in tips, like I did tonight.

Not to mention the added bonus of getting kissed by Eric Fluteley at the soda station.

'I mean, shouldn't she have been over at the Oaken Bucket?' Sidney asked.

'Totally.' I don't know what's going on with my hair. I have been trying to grow it out ever since an unfortunate bobbing incident midway through sophomore year. It's

almost shoulder length now, with a lot of layers (because the stick-straight thing that works so well for Sidney doesn't work at *all* for me) and gold highlights to make it less aggressively *brown*. According to Marty over at Supercuts, I'm supposed to let it dry naturally, then scrunch it with curl enhancer to make it fuller and give it bounce.

But that only seems to work when it's humid outside or I'm in the vicinity of the Gull 'n' Gulp's kitchens.

Sidney was right, of course. The Oaken Bucket, the vegan cafe across town, is much more Morgan's scene than the Gull 'n' Gulp. I mean, the Bucket serves stuff like falafel in a pitta with hummus and avocado, and tofu stir-fry over brown rice. You won't find a single item on the menu made with quahogs over at the Bucket, that's for sure.

'There's only one reason she'd go there,' Sidney went on, in her most malevolent tone. 'And we all know what it is.'

I nearly dropped my phone. Right into the toilet, which is where the comb ended up. Fortunately, I'd remembered to flush earlier. I caught the phone at the last minute and pressed it to my ear.

'W-wait,' I stammered. 'What? We *do*?'

How could she know? She couldn't know! No one had seen me with Eric – had they?

I *knew* I should have slapped him. Oh *why* had I kissed him back? I totally wouldn't have, if I'd thought there was any chance that Seth – or Sidney – might have seen us.

But the soda station is totally hidden from view of the corner booth. And from where Morgan Castle was sitting.

So instead of slapping Eric Fluteley when he started kissing me I'd melted, exactly as if I'd been one of Mrs Hogarth's birthday candles left to burn too long.

Well, what else was I going to do? I mean, Eric's just . . . hot.

When Eric finally let me up for air though, I said, very indignantly (admittedly through delightfully tingly lips), 'What are you, crazy? Did you see who's sitting in the corner booth? The entire Quahog football team!'

Eric had replied, 'Not *all* of them. Don't exaggerate, Katie.'

'Well, the ones who'd totally pound your face in, if they saw you doing what you just did.' I really couldn't believe it. I mean, what had he been *thinking*? You do not just go up to a girl and start kissing her behind the soda station. Especially when her boyfriend is sitting just a couple of metres away.

Even if, you know, she really likes it. And wants to do it some more.

'What's he doing here anyway?' Eric had wanted to know. 'I thought you said the fire was gone and you were finally breaking up with him.'

Had I told Eric that the fire was gone between me and Seth? Probably. It had gone out pretty soon after we'd become a couple and the excitement that Seth Turner, the most popular boy in school, had picked me – ME! – as his steady girlfriend had died down.

But how can you break up with a guy who's just so . . . nice? I mean, what kind of awful person would do something like that? Break up with her boyfriend of nearly four years because he's just . . . boring?

Had I told Eric that Seth and I were breaking up? Probably. Oh God, what was happening to me? I couldn't even keep all my lies straight any more.

'Yeah,' I'd said. 'Well, I haven't got around to it yet. Obviously.'

'Katie.' That was when Eric reached over to take my hand and gazed meaningfully into my brown eyes with his gorgeous blue ones – the same blue as the Long Island Sound on a cloudless day. 'You've got to break it off with him. You know you two don't have anything in common. Whereas you and I – we're artists. We have me something special. It's not fair of you to do this to him.'

The thing is, Eric was totally right. Well, not about him and me having something special – except, you know, that I think Eric's totally hot, and a dynamo kisser.

I meant about the part where he said that Seth and I really don't have anything in common. We don't.

Well, except that I think Seth's totally hot, and a dynamo kisser too. I've thought that for as long as I can remember – well, the totally hot part anyway. I didn't know about the kissing part until the end of eighth grade, which was the first time Seth ever laid one on me, during a game of Spin the Bottle in Sidney's basement rec room after a midsummer pool party. It was like a dream come true for

me – the boy every girl in school wanted actually wanted ME. We've been dating ever since.

But even so, Eric was one to talk.

'What about Morgan?' I demanded. 'How are you being fair to *her*?'

Eric didn't even have the dignity to look embarrassed.

'Morgan and I aren't a couple,' he'd said. 'So I can't exactly be accused of doing anything wrong.'

'Neither can I!' I'd insisted, even though I'd known at the time that this was sort of untrue. 'I so didn't do anything. I'm just trying to take Mrs Hogarth her birthday cake!'

'Yeah,' Eric said sarcastically. 'Just like you *so didn't do anything* today before your shift started.'

Oops! Well, yeah, so OK. I had sort of made out with Eric at the employee bike rack behind the emergency generator before work.

But whatever! That didn't mean he could kiss me while he was out with another girl!

'You get back to Morgan right now,' I'd said. 'This is a terrible thing to do to her. She's so sweet too. I don't even know why you brought her here. She's a vegan. There's nothing she can eat here except salad.'

'I was trying to make you jealous,' Eric had said, his hands going around my waist. 'Is it working?'

It was just then that Peggy rounded the corner holding an empty iced-tea pitcher. She'd stopped dead at the sight of us. Because of course patrons aren't allowed in employee-only sections, such as behind the soda station.

Or even back behind the emergency generator by the employee bike rack either.

'Is there a problem back here, Ellison?' Peggy had asked in an astonished voice.

'No,' I'd said quickly, as Eric sprang away from me. 'He was just looking for—'

'Salt,' Eric had said, grabbing a nearby salt shaker from the tray by the soda dispenser. 'Bye.'

He'd hurried back to his table while Peggy, meanwhile, narrowed her eyes at me.

'Ellison,' she'd said in a suspicious voice, 'what's going on?'

'Nothing.' I'd grabbed Mrs Hogarth's cake and held it out. 'Do you have a lighter?'

'I thought you were going out with Jake Turner's little brother,' Peggy had said in the same suspicious voice, after reaching into the pocket of her khakis and pulling out a lighter, then lighting the number nine and seven candles.

'I *am*,' I'd insisted. 'Eric's just a friend.'

A friend I like to make out with when I get the chance, I'd thought, but didn't add aloud.

Peggy had rolled her eyes. She's been managing the Gull 'n' Gulp for ten years. I guess she's seen it all. Heard it all too.

'I knew I was wrong not to make you go home and get a sweater,' was all she'd said.

Like if my bra straps hadn't been showing, I'd have somehow managed NOT to get caught kissing Eric Fluteley behind the soda station?

But Peggy wouldn't have told *Sidney* about what she'd seen me doing. Peggy doesn't gossip (and she busts her employees' chops when she catches them doing it).

So how had Sidney found out? No way had she seen Eric kiss me behind the soda station.

Could she have seen me outside by the bike rack earlier today?

No way. Sidney doesn't even own a bike. She never goes anywhere at all unless it's in Dave's Camaro or the white convertible Volkswagen Cabriolet her dad got her for her sixteenth birthday.

'I'll tell you why Morgan was there,' Sidney said knowingly into the phone. 'She's spying. On the competition.'

Oh God! The competition for Eric's affections? That's totally me!

Except that if Sidney knew, why hadn't she said anything to me? I mean, Sidney's not exactly reticent with her opinions, and if she found out I've been macking behind an emergency generator with Eric Fluteley, you can bet she'd have a few things to say about it. Sidney thinks Seth and I are the perfect couple and is looking forward to her and Dave and Seth and me being the It Couples of our senior year. My getting caught macking with Eric Fluteley would totally ruin Sidney's plans for the prom, et cetera.

'I mean, her sponsor's the Oaken Bucket,' Sidney went on. 'How much do you really think they're contributing to her campaign? Whereas you actually *work* for your sponsor, so they've got like a vested interest in actually promoting you . . .'

Oh. Oh my God.

I sagged down on to the side of the bathtub in relief. OK. So *that* was what Sidney was talking about. Not Eric. Nothing to do with Eric.

'And, seriously, does she really think anyone's going to vote for a Quahog Princess who doesn't even eat quahogs?' Sidney wanted to know.

I can't believe I almost forgot. That there's another type of quahog, I mean, besides the clam and the football team.

There's the town's annual contest for Quahog Princess.

Which I'm running for.

And so is Sidney. And so is Morgan.

Which is why Sidney can't stand Morgan, even though Morgan is really sweet, once you get to know her. Which I did, because Morgan, who has been taking ballet since she was like four and is a shoo-in for the Joffrey Ballet Company in the city someday, danced Laurey's dream sequence in the drama club's production of *Oklahoma!* last spring (Eric played Jud. And let me tell you, he was the hottest, most brooding Jud ever. A lot of girls – like me, for instance – thought Laurey should have gone with Jud instead of that stupid Curly, who was played by Paul McFadden, who is kind of a sissy anyway), and I had to photograph her in it for the yearbook and the school paper.

Morgan was super nice about doing her grand jetés over and over, since I couldn't quite get the shot right with my digital Sony, and her legs kept blurring. (I finally got an excellent shot of her in mid-air, with her legs perfectly

horizontal to the stage. It looks like she's flying, but she's got this calm expression on her face, almost bored, like, 'Ho hum, I defy gravity like this every day.')

Morgan's doing that same dance for the talent portion of the Quahog Princess pageant.

And can I just say that one of the things Sidney dislikes most about Morgan is the fact that Morgan's talent is way better than Sidney's, which is singing a Kelly Clarkson song – not to mention mine, which is the worst beauty-pageant talent of all . . . playing piano?

Although the fact that Morgan's got this long, skinny neck and no body fat and never talks to anyone doesn't exactly endear her to the Sidney-types of the world either. It isn't that Morgan thinks she's better than everyone, as Sidney insists. She's just really shy.

It's scandalous that Eric was using her to try to make me jealous. I am fully going to have a talk with him next time we make out behind the emergency generator.

'Oh,' I said to Sidney, laughing with relief when I finally realized she was talking about Quahog Princess and not Eric. 'I don't think she was there to spy on us. I think it's just where Eric took her. It wasn't like she could say anything. He had to have made that reservation a week ago.'

'Yeah, and what is up with that anyway?' Sidney wanted to know. 'Who makes a reservation at the *Gull 'n' Gulp*?'

Sidney, I knew, wasn't dissing the Gulp. It's just that no local would ever deign to make a reservation there, unless it was a special occasion, like Mrs Hogarth's birthday party.

Or a guy who wanted to make the girl he was currently macking with behind her boyfriend's back jealous.

'Maybe he wanted to impress her,' I said, carefully fishing my comb out of the toilet, just as there was a thump on the bathroom door.

'I'm *in* here,' I called to the thumper, who I knew was my brother, Liam, just getting home from the video arcade at Duckpin Lanes, where he'd spent most, if not all, of his nights this summer. No one else in my house was awake, since it was after midnight.

'Yeah, but since when are Eric Fluteley and Morgan Castle a couple?' Sidney demanded. 'It all seems a little too convenient, if you ask me. She's running for Quahog Princess and needs an escort for the evening-gown event, and she just HAPPENS to start going out with the best-looking guy in school? I mean, besides Seth and Dave? And then just HAPPENS to show up at the Gull 'n' Gulp on a night when we're both there?'

'I'm at the Gulp almost every night, Sid,' I pointed out. 'So are you, for that matter. I really don't think Morgan was there to spy on us.'

'Oh God, Katie,' Sidney said. 'You are *such* an innocent.'

Sidney always calls me an innocent, because even though Seth and I have been going out forever, I'm still a virgin, and Sidney lost hers to Rick Stamford two summers ago in his room while his parents were out attending the Eastport Towne Fair.

But I just don't think it's a good idea for a girl who can't seem to stick to kissing one guy at a time to start sleeping

with them too. I mean, at least Sidney was sure she loved Rick (and thought he returned the feeling). I think the fact that I can't stop kissing Eric Fluteley is a pretty good sign that, as hot as I've always thought he is and all, I'm not in love with Seth . . .

. . . and the fact that I can't stop kissing Seth means I'm most likely not in love with Eric either.

Although I kind of wonder if Sidney would still think I'm so innocent if she knew why Morgan Castle had *really* been at the Gull 'n' Gulp tonight – because Eric Fluteley brought her there to make me jealous.

Not that I'm going to tell her – or anyone else – that.

Liam thumped again. I flung the comb into the sink, turned on the hot water in hopes of killing whatever germs were now growing on it, thanks to its toilet plunge, and yanked open the door.

'I'm *in* here,' I said to my brother, who, just this past summer, grew six inches in three months and now towers over me, even though at five seven I am three inches taller than Sidney, and, in fact, am one of the taller girls in my class. Especially when my hair is doing what it's supposed to and fluffing up.

'I *know* that,' Liam said sarcastically. 'I need to—'

'Then use the downstairs bathroom,' I said, and started to close the door.

'I wanted to tell you something,' Liam said, putting a hand to the door so I couldn't close it. 'If you'd quit yakking on the phone long enough to listen. Who is that, anyway? Sidney?'

'Hold on, Sid,' I said into the phone. Then I turned off the hot water – I'm not sure how long it takes to sterilize toilet germs off a plastic comb, but I don't want to waste water either – and said to Liam in an impatient voice, 'What?'

'Who is that?' Sidney wanted to know. 'Liam?'

'Yeah,' I said into the phone. To Liam I repeated, '*What?*'

'Oh, nothing,' Liam said with a shrug. 'It's just that I saw someone you know tonight down at Duckpin Lanes.'

'That's thrilling,' I said to him. 'Now go away.'

'OK, fine,' Liam said, turning to continue down the hall to his room. 'I just thought you'd want to know.'

'Who?' Sidney chirped in my ear. 'Who did he see? Oh my God, ask him if it was Rick. If it was Rick, and he was with Beth Ridley, I'll die. Martha said she heard Rick and Beth hooked up at Hannah Lebowitz's Fourth of July barbecue—'

'Liam,' I said. I didn't say it loud, because I didn't want to wake up Mom and Dad, who were downstairs in the master bedroom they added on off the laundry room two years ago, so they could be away from us kids. 'Who was it? Was it Rick Stamford?'

'You wish,' Liam said with a snort.

'What do you mean, *you wish*?' I demanded.

'I mean, you *wish* it was Rick Stamford and not who I'm about to tell you it was. Because when I tell you, you're going to freak.'

'Was it Rick?' Sidney wanted to know. 'What did he say? I can't hear him. Your phone gets the worst reception . . .'

'It wasn't Rick,' I said into the phone, while Sidney, on the other end of my phone, shrieked, 'It must have been a celebrity then! Was it Matt Fox? I've heard he's buying a summer place over in Westport. Was it Matt Fox? Ask him if it was Matt Fox!'

'It was Tommy Sullivan,' Liam said flatly.

At that, I did drop my cellphone. Fortunately, however, not into the toilet. Instead, it landed on the floor.

Where it broke into three pieces.

As it was falling, I could hear Sidney going, 'Wait, I didn't hear him, what did he—'

Then smash.

Then . . . silence.

Liam looked at the pieces of my cellphone and laughed.

'That's what I was trying to tell you,' he said. 'Tommy Sullivan's back in town.'

Three

OK, why?

That's all I want to know.

Why did Tommy Sullivan have to come back *now*, just when everything was going perfectly – to mess it all up?

The summer before your senior year is the last summer when you can actually have a good time. No stresses yet about college apps and transcripts. No freaking out about extra-curriculars or Chemistry.

And this has been the most outstanding summer of my life so far: people have finally started to realize that even though I'm the class brain, I can still be fun to party with. I've got a job I love, where I make good enough money to have (almost) fully paid off the camera I really want. I've got a fantastic boyfriend and an even hotter guy to mack with behind the emergency generator when that boyfriend isn't around . . .

So why does Tommy Sullivan have to come back NOW and ruin it all?

Liam wouldn't give me any details last night after he

dropped his little bombshell, because he was mad I wouldn't get off the phone to Sidney to listen to him. Liam's fourteen and starting his freshman year at Eastport High, and his new height totally attracted the attention of Coach Hayes, who spied Liam towering over everyone at freshman orientation and asked him if he was trying out for the Quahogs.

Since Liam – like every other guy in Eastport – practically lives for Quahog football, this totally went to his head. He's been impossible to live with ever since. And try-outs aren't even until Friday.

But I knew from experience that I'd wear him down eventually and get him to spill the details of his Tommy Sullivan stunner. Liam can't keep a secret to save his life.

Which is why, when I saw what time it was when I woke up the next morning, I said my best swear word, rolled out of bed and, without even showering first, threw on my clothes (and, OK, a tiny bit of make-up, because a girl running for Quahog Princess really shouldn't be seen in public without her mascara on), hopped on my bike, and pedalled over to the Y, where Liam's been going every day to lift weights in the hope of bulking up for Quahog try-outs on Friday.

Oh yeah. I'm like the only almost-seventeen-year-old in Eastport who doesn't have a car. I'm not one of those vegan environmentalist types who hangs out with Morgan Castle over at the Oaken Bucket or anything. I totally love meat. I just think if you live in a small town – and Eastport's only got twenty-five thousand full-time residents (though May through to August the population rises to

thirty-five thousand, on account of the Summer People) – you should ride a bike around and not drive. It's better for the environment and better for you physically as well.

Sidney thinks it's weird I'm saving my money for a camera and not a car, like everyone else we know (although, to be truthful, everyone else we know got a car for their sixteenth birthday. I asked for – and received – a Power Mac G5, along with a full colour printer so I could print my own photos – although I still take my film in to Eastport Old Towne Photo if I want something really professional-looking), but there's nowhere I need to go that isn't within biking distance (except the city, but I can take public transport there), so why waste fossil fuels when I can just use pedal power?

And, unlike Sidney, I don't have to spend hours in the gym every week, since I get all my exercise from biking around.

Oh, fine. OK, true confession time: I get carsick. I fact, I get everything sick – seasick, airsick, train-sick, carsick, even raft-sick (from floating on a raft in a pool) and swing-sick (from swinging on a swing).

The only time I don't feel sick? When I'm walking. Or riding a bike.

My mom blames it on all the inner-ear infections I had as a kid. My dad – who has never been sick a day in his life and won't let any of us forget it – thinks it's all psychosomatic and that as soon as I fall for a cute enough guy I won't get sick at all when he's driving me around, and I'll even want to get a licence. For instance, so I can drive with

the guy in a Ferrari through the Alps. Because, Dad says, no one can function as an adult without a driver's licence.

But, as I've informed Dad numerous times, there is no guy in the world cute enough for this to happen.

And, besides, it's totally possible to function as an adult without a driver's licence: it's called New York City, where all the great photographers in America live and work.

And guess what? They have bike paths there too.

Anyway, I locked up outside the Y and went inside to find my brother lying on a padded bench, pulling on some kind of cords that caused all these weights behind him to raise up a few inches. Not unusually, there was a cluster of fourteen-year-old girls gathered around him, giggling excitedly. Because, since word got out that Coach Hayes himself had approached Liam about trying out for the Quahogs, every fourteen-year-old girl in town has been calling the house at all hours of the day, asking if Liam's there.

Clearly, all the Tiffanys and Brittanys I've been taking messages for have figured out where Liam spends his free time – when he isn't at Duckpin Lanes.

'Excuse me, ladies,' I said to them. 'But I need to have a word with my brother.'

The Tiffanys and Brittanys tittered like I'd said something funny. I've seriously never seen so many tanned bellies in my life. Do these girls' mothers really let them out of the house dressed that way? I was betting they left wearing real clothes, then whipped them off as soon as Mom wasn't looking any more.

'Not now, Kate,' Liam said, his face turning very red.

Not because he was embarrassed, but because he was lifting way more weight that he probably should have been, to show off in front of the girls.

'Oh yes, now,' I said, and pulled on some of his leg hairs.

CRASH! went the weights behind him.

Liam said a number of very colourful swear words, and the girls scattered, giggling hysterically, but really only retreating as far as the water cooler over by the desk where they hand out the towels.

'You didn't really see Tommy Sullivan at Duckpin Lanes last night,' I said to my brother. 'Did you?'

'I don't know,' Liam snapped. 'Maybe not. Maybe it was some other guy who came up to me and asked if I was Katie Ellison's little brother, and introduced himself as Tom Sullivan. Why'd you have to do that? Pull my leg hair like that? I hate it when you do that. I could have seriously injured myself, you know.'

'*Tom* Sullivan?' For the first time since I'd heard the news that Tommy Sullivan was back in town, my heart lifted. Tommy never called himself Tom. He'd always been Tommy, since kindergarten, when I'd first met him.

Maybe whoever Liam had met last night wasn't Tommy Sullivan – *my* Tommy Sullivan – after all!

'Maybe it was someone else,' I said hopefully. 'Some other Thomas Sullivan.'

The look Liam gave me was very sarcastic.

'Yeah,' he said. 'Some other Thomas Sullivan who told

me he'd been in your class at school and wanted to know how you were doing . . . and has red hair?'

My heart totally stopped beating. I swear for a few seconds I couldn't even breathe. I could hear the rock music the Y plays over its sound system – it was on the local pop station.

But it sounded really distant.

Because there's only one Tommy Sullivan I know of who's ever been in my class at school.

And only one Tommy Sullivan I know of who has red hair.

That hair! How many times since eighth grade, when Tommy finally left town, had I seen a guy – a tourist, usually – with red hair and done a double take, my heart hammering, certain it was Tommy, and I was going to have to look into those weird hazel eyes of his, which in certain lights were as green as the Sound during high tide, and in others as amber as leaves on an autumn day, sometimes even gold, like honey – only to have the guy turn around and end up not being Tommy at all?

Phew! I always told myself when this happened.

But could what Liam was telling me possibly be true? Could my luck – where Tommy Sullivan is concerned anyway – finally have run out?

'What did you say?' I asked, sliding on to the bench beside Liam. Which was a mistake, since the cushion was slick with sweat. But I didn't care that much, since I hadn't showered yet anyway.

'When he asked how I was doing,' I demanded 'what did you say?'

'I told him you were good,' Liam said. 'I told him you were going out with Seth Turner.'

My blood went cold. I couldn't believe it. Liam had told Tommy Sullivan that I'm going out with a *Quahog*?

'You told him *that*? Why'd you tell him that?'

'What else was I supposed to say?' Liam, getting up from the bench to reach for his bottle of Gatorade, looked annoyed. 'He asked what you were up to. I told him you were running for Quahog Princess.'

I groaned. I could only imagine what Tommy must have thought about my running for Quahog Princess, an honorary title with absolutely no benefits other than that the Quahog Princess gets to ride in a convertible Chevrolet with the mayor during the annual Eastport Towne Fair parade (I fully intended to take a Dramamine beforehand if I won) and open the Quahog Festival, which takes place on the third Sunday of August.

Which happens to be at the end of this week.

And, OK, to qualify you have to have a Grade Point Average of at last three point five (which, believe me, rules out a LOT of girls at my school), and be willing to show up at a lot of cheesy events during the Eastport Towne Fair, such as the quahog-eating contest (disgusting) and the quahog races (boring. Bivalves aren't that fast).

But to compensate for all that, the winner also gets fifteen hundred dollars cash in scholarship money from the Eastport Quahog Festival committee.

Even better, the money comes in the form of a cheque made out to the recipient, which she can deposit into her personal account and then spend on whatever she wants. I mean, they don't *check* to make sure she spends it on her education.

Which, I'll be frank, is the reason I'm running for Quahog Princess.

And, OK, I know I have zero chance with Sidney running too (she couldn't care less about the money. She's in it for the tiara).

But at least I have a better chance than Morgan Castle. I mean, Morgan Castle can barely open her mouth in public, she's so shy.

Although she has a much better talent than I do. I mean, for competing in a beauty pageant.

And yeah, I realize beauty pageants are sexist and all that. But come on. Fifteen hundred bucks? Even second place is a thousand. Third is five hundred.

So even if both Sidney and Morgan beat me (which is likely), I'd still be five hundred more dollars up than I would have been if I hadn't entered (the only other entrant is Jenna Hicks, who has multiple nose and eyebrow piercings, only wears black no matter how hot it is outside, and whose mother is making her enter in order to make her socialize more with girls her own age who don't list KAFKA as their answer to Interests on their myspace page. Which, not to be mean or anything, doesn't exactly make Jenna Quahog Princess material).

Which is good, because my parents are making me cut

back my hours at the Gull 'n' Gulp to one night a week once school starts up again next month, so I will totally need the scratch.

'What did he say?' I asked. 'When you told him about Quahog Princess?'

Liam shrugged. 'He laughed.'

I felt the hairs on the back of my neck rise.

'He *laughed*?' I did not like the sound of that. At *all*. 'Laughed like how?'

'What do you mean, laughed like how?' Liam wanted to know.

'Like did he laugh like he thought it was funny,' I asked, 'or like an evil genius? Was it *ha ha ha*? Or *MWA ha ha*?'

'What is *wrong* with you?' Liam asked me, loudly enough to cause the Tiffanys and Brittanys to burst into a fresh batch of giggles, over by the towel desk.

Whatever. Let them laugh. What do fourteen-year-olds in belly-baring tanks and yoga pants know about pain? And not just the kind you get when the belly-button piercing you got illegally in the city gets infected and you have to tell your mom so she can take you to the doctor, and then she grounds you.

I mean real pain, like trying to figure out what Tommy Sullivan could be doing back in town. He and his parents had moved away – to Westchester, outside New York City, a whole other state – the summer before our freshman year . . . the same summer I'd first played Spin the Bottle and kissed Seth. They had never said they were moving because of what happened the year before. In fact, my

mom, who was their realtor and sold their house for them, said Mrs Sullivan had told her they were moving so Mr Sullivan could have a shorter commute to his job in Manhattan.

But everyone had always just sort of assumed that what had happened with Tommy – and the outside of the new Eastport Middle School gymnasium wall – was a large part of why they left.

So why had he come back? It's true his grandparents still live here – we see them sometimes when Mom and Dad make us eat at the yacht club, which they belong to not because we own a yacht (Dad's boat is strictly for fishing; it doesn't even have a bathroom on it. Which isn't the only reason I won't get on it, but it's one of them), but because belonging to the local yacht club is good for schmoozing if you're in the real-estate business, like they are.

And OK, I suppose Tommy must come and visit his grandparents sometimes . . . although truthfully it never occurred to me before. Why wouldn't they just go to see him in Westchester? I mean, Eastport could hardly have good memories for him. Why would he want to come *here*?

But even if he just happened to be here because he was visiting his grandparents, why would he go to Duckpin Lanes, which is where every guy in town hangs out? That would be the LAST place you'd think someone as universally despised as Tommy Sullivan would go.

'Katie?'

I looked up, and saw Seth grinning down at me, all

melting brown eyes and sleek biceps, clearly fresh from a workout.

'What are you doing here?' he wanted to know. 'You never come to the Y.'

Which isn't strictly true. The Y is where I took my first photography class, the one that got me into cameras in the first place, even though the instructor – crabby Mr Bird, proprietor of Eastport Old Towne Photo – had hardly been encouraging.

But I let that slide, because, hello, hot guy. Who happens to be my boyfriend. Well, one of them anyway.

'Oh, I just came by to see how Liam's doing,' I said, as Seth slipped an arm around my waist and gave me a kiss. Which made me glad I'd put my mascara on. It was bad enough I still had bed-head.

Naturally, I didn't mention *why* I'd come to see Liam. In my long and varied career as a liar – which began at approximately the same time that Tommy Sullivan left town – I've learned that sometimes it's kinder to lie to people than it is to tell them the truth. Especially when the truth could hurt them. Seth can't even stand to hear Tommy's name uttered. He gets all quiet and moody whenever the subject comes up . . . even though his brother seems perfectly happy working for their dad.

Although probably not as happy as he would have been playing college ball.

So I've found it better, over the years, simply to keep mum on the Tommy front where Seth is concerned.

'I've been trying to call you all morning,' Seth said. 'Don't you have your cell on?'

Oops! I'd managed to snap all the pieces of my cellphone back together and had charged it up. But I'd forgotten to turn it on. I pulled it out of the pocket of my shorts and pressed POWER. A second later, I saw my screensaver – a picture of Seth, looking dreamily at me over an order of quahog fritters.

'My brainiac,' Seth said fondly. Because, even though I consistently rank top of our class, I am always doing things like forgetting to turn my cellphone on.

A second later, it rang.

'What happened to you last night?' Sidney asked after I'd answered. 'We got disconnected. I tried to call you back a million times and just got your voicemail.'

'Right,' I said. 'Dropped my phone. I had to recharge it.'

'Oh. So. Who was it?'

'Who was what?'

'Who'd your brother see at Duckpin Lanes?' Sidney wanted to know.

'Oh,' I said, thinking fast, watching as Seth started showing Liam how to use another nearby machine, while the Tiffanys and Brittanys gathered round, looking more worshipful than ever. Because, hello, Jake Turner's little brother. I didn't blame them. I'd felt the same way about him, back when I'd been starting ninth grade. Still do. Well, sort of. 'That. It was nobody. Just this guy Liam knew from football camp.'

'Why would he think you'd care about *that*?'

'I don't know,' I said. 'Because he's let this Quahog thing go completely to his head, maybe?'

'Oh, right. Well, where are you?'

'The Y,' I said. 'With Seth.' I didn't mention the whole part about having come to the Y to see my brother, not Seth, let alone the thing about Tommy Sullivan being back in town. I mean, it's not like I can tell *anybody* that. Any of my friends, I mean. They've all managed to forget that I ever even used to consort with Tommy Sullivan. I don't want to do anything to remind them of that fact.

'Oh good,' Sidney said. 'Grab Seth and go home and get in your swimsuit. The wind's up, so Dave wants to kitesurf. We're going to The Point.'

The Point is the private beach that belongs to the Eastport Yacht Club. Nobody in Eastport goes to the public beaches, because of not wanting to hang around with a bunch of tourists. Also, in the paper they're always reporting finding traces of E. coli in the water down at the public beach (caused by tourists with RVs illegally emptying their toilets into the water).

Still, given the whole Tommy thing, I wasn't exactly in the mood for the beach.

'I don't know,' I hemmed. 'I was sort of thinking of going home and practising –'

'For the pageant?' Sidney sounded disgusted. 'Oh, what*ever*.'

'– and I've got the dinner shift at the Gulp tonight.'

'So? Bring your work clothes. You can change at the

club. You need to work on your tan more than you need to work on that gherkin thing—'

'Gershwin,' I corrected her. 'It's "I've Got Rhythm" by George Gershwin.' I love Sidney and all, but really – *gherkin*?

'Whatever,' Sidney said again. 'Get your stuff and get to the club.'

Which is why, later that afternoon, I was stretched out on a blue and white Eastport Yacht Club beach towel, listening to the water lapping the shore (I wouldn't like to mislead anyone by saying I was listening to the sound of waves, because of course there are no waves on the Long Island Sound), and watching my boyfriend and Dave Hollingsworth struggle to get a kite sail into the air.

'Hottie alert,' Sidney, stretched out beside me, said in a desultory voice, as a yacht-club waiter staggered by through the hot sand, holding a tray of drinks for some rowdy young moms sitting under a beach umbrella while they watched their kids build sandcastles.

I barely lifted my head. Sid was right. I really do need to work on my tan. Compared to her, I look positively cadaverous.

Sidney was also right about spending the day at the beach. It was gorgeous out – seventy-five degrees with a cool breeze coming in off the water, a cloudless sky, and achingly hot sun. The Sound sparkled in front of us like a blue-green sapphire. We wouldn't have many days like this left. School would start in a couple of weeks, and then it

would all be over. Our last summer break before we all left for college.

It helped that Seth, when he'd seen me in my bikini, had purred approvingly, 'Hey, hot stuff.'

Oh, yeah. I'm all about the beach today. Who cares what Tommy Sullivan was doing at Duckpin Lanes last night? Who cares why he was asking about me? He was probably just in town to visit his grandparents after all. He was probably asking Liam about me for old times' sake, nothing more. I mean, why *else* would he be asking about me?

'I'm *over* the waiters here,' I said, in response to Sidney's hottie alert. 'Did you hear about that guy Travis? He was giving *real* Coke to everyone who ordered Diet. Shaniqua told me he was bragging about it down at the Sea Grape. That's so wrong.'

'Not the waiter, doofus,' Sidney said. 'That hottie over there.'

I turned my head to look where she was pointing. It seemed as if there were guys everywhere – hot ones and some not-so-hot ones – in their baggy swim trunks, struggling to lift windsails or tossing around a football or playing killer frisbee. That's the thing about guys, I've noticed. They are completely incapable of sitting still. Unlike me. I could lie in one position and not move for hours.

If I didn't have to go to the bathroom all the time from all the Diet Coke I kept consuming.

'Not *that* one,' Sidney said, noticing the direction of my gaze. '*That* one, coming out of the water right now. The one with the freestyle board. The *redheaded* one.'

My head swivelled around so fast I heard the bones in the back of my neck crack.

It couldn't be. It *couldn't.*

Because the guy coming out of the water was over six foot tall – almost a foot taller than Tommy had been, last time I'd seen him – with a golden tan. The guy coming out of the water was also totally cut. Not in a muscle-bound meathead kind of way, like some of those guys I'd seen over in the weight room at the Y, but with a lean, athletic body, nicely defined biceps, and a set of abs that would have made an actual six-pack jealous.

Whereas Tommy Sullivan, when I had last seen him, had had a sunken chest, skin as white as milk (where it wasn't covered in freckles), hair the colour of a new copper penny and arms as skinny as toothpicks.

Well, OK, I might be exaggerating a *little*. Still, he hadn't exactly been anything much to look at.

Not like this vision before us, who was shaking water out of his slightly overlong reddish-brown hair as he leaned over to lay down his board (revealing, as he did so, the fact that beneath his baggy swim trunks – so weighted down with water that they had sunk somewhat dangerously low on his hips – lurked what appeared to be an exceptionally well-formed gluteus maximus).

Sidney, who seemed no more capable of tearing her gaze away from this example of a god in human form than I was, said, 'I think I've died and gone to Hottie Heaven.'

'Dude, you've got a boyfriend,' I reminded her automatically.

'Dude, so have you,' she reminded me back, failing to mention – because she didn't know – that actually I've got *two* boyfriends.

But it was really hard to remember either of them when Windsurf Boy straightened up from setting down his board, turned around, and began to stride towards the clubhouse . . . and us.

Sidney's hand shot out to seize my wrist in a grip that hurt – mostly because she was digging her French manicure into me.

'Dude, he's coming this way,' she breathed.

As if I couldn't see that for myself. Windsurf Boy was moving through the sand directly towards us . . . not quite the most direct path to the clubhouse. I was glad the lenses of my Ray-Bans were polarized, so I was able to take in the fine details that might otherwise have been impossible to see, considering the glare from the water . . . the golden hair coating his legs . . . the sliver of matching hair snaking up that lean, flat belly from the waistband of his swim trunks . . . the square jaw and wide, slightly smiling mouth . . . the laughing amber eyes, squinting in the strong sunlight, because his sunglasses were dangling from a cord around his neck . . .

Wait. *Amber eyes?*

'Hi, Katie,' Tommy Sullivan said to me in a deep voice.

Then he went right on past us, climbing the steps to the clubhouse deck and disappearing through the double doors into the cool, air-conditioned lobby.