

Prologue

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There comes a time in every girl's life when the boy she thought had cooties suddenly causes her cheeks to redden. She feels her heart skip a beat and thinks, "wow he's cute." It suddenly seems as if cooties had never existed. For most girls that moment happens between the ages of ten and thirteen. It happened to my twin sister Cathy in seventh grade. It happened to me in pre-school.

I can't explain why I found it necessary to have a boyfriend in pre-school. I thought he was cute; he held my hand. My parents thought it was adorable, Cathy thought it was gross, and I thought it was perfect. Things did not change much in elementary school. I had a new crush every year. Butterflies fluttered in my stomach every time the boy I liked smiled at me. I thoroughly enjoyed the feeling.

By third grade I had discovered the wear-a-dress-every-day tactic; I got plenty of attention. One boy even stole his sister's ring and proposed to me at recess. My mother made me return it the next day. She was a volunteer at my school and happened to be helping out in the cafeteria that day. My ex-fiancé pleaded with her to let me keep the ring. Sadly the answer remained no, but in due time we got over our tears.

At age nine I manipulated my way onto the boys team at recess. We had played boys against girls all year. The boys agreed to let me be on their team so I could take the girls by surprise. Needless to say the boys team won, the girls hated me for a week, and the boys thought I was brilliant.

If you haven't already assumed, Cathy and I are very different. While I was drawing pictures for my crush-of-the-week, she was outside crushing the neighborhood boys on the soccer field. She could outrun, out-pitch, and out-smart the boys at every game she played. She did not do it to get their attention or to make them admire her; she did it to prove that she was better than them. Whenever a boy tried to hold Cathy's hand she punched him. I couldn't understand her! While I was parading around the house in our mother's high heels, Cathy was in the backyard playing catch with our father. Our whole family knew it would take a very special boy to capture Cathy's admiration, and a very special boy to keep mine!

Chapter 1

Jon Anderson's heart pounded heavily against his chest as he opened Chris Dunkin's front door. He had walked through that door thousands of times before, but never during one of Taylor Dunkin's "ragers". As Jon stepped into Chris's living room, the odor of beer besieged his nostrils. Chris's home—the normally calm spot, perfect for watching Patriot's games—resembled a whirlwind.

"Anderson!" Jason Davids hollered from the hallway adjacent to the living room. Jason began making his way through the sea of college kids—Taylor's friends. "Dude, this is ill," Jason stated, cupping his right hand with Jon's and patting him on the back. "Chris just did a thirty-second keg stand, and Sartelli shotgunned a beer with Taylor."

Jon widened his eyes. He hated word that had just flowed out of his friend's mouth. *Chris drinking, again?! Even though he has a game tomorrow?* Jon sighed.

"Don't be scarrrrred," Jason sang, laughing and pushing Jon further into the party. "I'm staying sober tonight too, buddy."

"I have to use the bathroom," Jon said, breaking free from Jason. He pushed through the crowd, thinking that, as a seventh grader, he must look like an infant to the majority of the partiers. After elbowing his way to it, Jon knocked loudly on the closed bathroom door. He knocked three times before he received a response.

"Hold the #@!\$ on!" Jordan Dunkin's distinct voice rang back. A moment later the bathroom door swung open with great force. Jon's eyes collided with the glassy blue eyes of Montgomery Lake High's varsity football Captain.

"Oh! Jonny A! What's up, buddy?" Jordan laughed, patting Jon on the shoulder. Jordan was Chris's older cousin—a senior at Montgomery Lake High. "Sorry about that

buddy. My friend here's not feeling so hot," he added, referring to the disheveled, but beautiful, brunette leaning against his right side.

"No problem," Jon said, observing the nauseated look on Jordan's friend's face as he stepped past her. *What am I doing here? This was a huge mistake*, he thought.

Stepping back into the chaos of the party a moment later, Jon's attention was immediately stolen away. "Get away from her!" Marc Dunkin's angry voice echoed through the party. "Jordan!" Marc screamed, flying up the nearby staircase after his older brother without hesitation. The sound of Marc's feet hitting each step domineered the chant of the party. Jon rushed to the bottom of the stairs. His three best friends, Jason, Chris, and Bryan joined him within seconds.

"Oh crap," Chris huffed, watching his older cousins with a look of horror on his face. "Not good."

"Jordan! Get out of the room!" Marc demanded, angrily banging on Chris's bedroom door at the top of the stairs.

Chris's eyes widened. "He's going to break my door down!"

"Who's in there with Jordan?" Jason asked.

Jon watched as Marc, in one fluid motion, threw his five-foot-eleven, one hundred eighty-five pound, muscular body against the door. From beside Jon, Chris began pushing through the large crowd gathered at the bottom of the stairs. "Marc, hold up!" he called, running up the stairs toward his irate cousin. "Who is he in there with?"

"Do you have a key?" Marc asked Chris, frantically, as he leaned his weight fully against the door. "Jordan, get the hell away from her!"

From the bottom of the stairs, Jon was unable to decipher Chris's response.

“He’s going to rape her!” Marc screamed, as he kicked the door.

Jon watched in horror. *Oh no. The girl from the bathroom*, he thought. He panicked, racking his brain for a way to help.

“Get out of my room!” Chris shouted as he lunged at the door.

Jon watched—frozen—as Marc and Chris continued kicking the door until it became loose on its hinges. Before the door completely broke open, Jordan whipped it open.

Sweat trickled from Jon’s forehead as he watched Jordan slam Marc into the hallway wall. Marc wrestled Jordan to the ground and pinned him down by the top step. Jon saw Chris take one look at his cousins and then disappear into his bedroom. Both Marc and Jordan were MLH football players, who had been working out since they hit puberty. Although Jordan was two years older than Marc, it was a toss up over which brother was stronger.

“I’m going to kill you!” Jordan yelled, trying to push his way free.

“Don’t touch her again!” Marc screamed. “What did you put in her drink?!”

“Woah! Woah! Woah!” Taylor Dunkin exclaimed, pushing past Jon and the crowd gathered at the bottom of the stairs. “Break this up!” he shouted, hustling up the stairs to reach his dueling younger brothers. Taylor, a junior on the football team at Northeastern University, tore Marc off Jordan with little effort. “Are you trying to ruin my party? Do you want to get arrested? What the heck is wrong with you?!” he yelled in Marc’s face.

“He drugged Michelle!” Marc exclaimed, pushing past Taylor toward Chris’s bedroom. “Chris, let me in!” he cried, banging on the door. A moment later, Marc

disappeared into the bedroom. Jordan slammed his fist into the wall. Jon watched as Taylor yanked Jordan into the upstairs bathroom and slammed the door shut.

“That’s messed up,” Jason said, turning toward Jon. He looked ghostly pale.
“That’s Kristen’s sister.”

“Where’s Kristen?” Jon asked.

“Grounded.”

“Because of what happened between you two?”

“No. There’s no way her parents found out about that,” Jason stated confidently.
“Should we leave?”

“I don’t feel right staying,” Jon replied.

“Sartelli, do you want to bounce?” Jason called to Bryan, who was leaning against the nearby living room couch.

“Sup?” Bryan yelled over the chant of the party that had returned to its normal volume. It seemed to Jon as if most of the partiers were unshaken by the confrontation that had just taken place. *God help me to never become that desensitized*, he thought.

“Do you want to head out?” Jason asked, stepping toward Bryan. “We can go to my house.”

Bryan nodded. “I’m really glad I didn’t invite Courtney here. What a freakin’ disaster.”

“I can’t believe Chris has to deal with this crap every time his parents go away,” Jon stated. “Thank God for Marc.”

“I don’t know how he’s related to Taylor or Jordan,” Jason said. “If they weren’t all amazing at football, I would think Marc was adopted.”

“I have to get out of here,” Jon said.

“We’re right behind you, man,” Jason said, patting Jon on the shoulders.