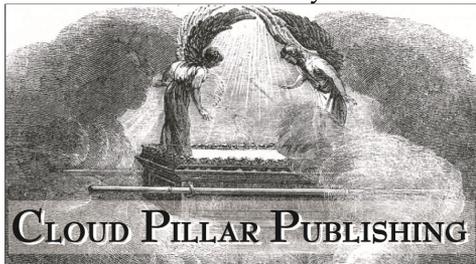


The
Garden
Key

a novel

ANGELA DOLBEAR

Published by



CLOUD PILLAR PUBLISHING

www.CloudPillarPublishing.com

Austin, Texas U.S.A.

THE GARDEN KEY

By Angela Dolbear

www.TheGardenKey.com

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Published by Cloud Pillar Publishing, Austin, TX, U.S.A.

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Lyrics for “Stupid” and “Autumn Leaves” by Angela Hembree Dolbear
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ISBN-13: 978-0-615-31477-8

ISBN-10: 0-615-31477-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2009908527

Printed in the United States of America

Cover design and book layout by A. Hembree Dolbear

Cover photography by Sonia Ferrón, www.flickr.com/photos/nekronaut

Victorian key necklace by Amoelbarroco, www.amoelbarroco.com

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Very special thanks to...

Geoff & Catherine Dolbear
For all your amazing support

Richard & Marie Hembree
For your continuous encouragement to write

Carrie Robinson
For all your help in time of need

and

Tim Douglas Dolbear
For all your love in its many forms
I love you, my beloved, my best friend

“...not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit,'

says the **L**ORD of hosts.”



A garden locked
is my sister,
my bride,
a rock garden locked,
a spring sealed up."

*Song of Solomon,
Twelfth verse of the fourth chapter*



Chapter One

I'm not looking over there again. I'm not. I wish I had not seen him walk in. Now I'm all distracted. I'm supposed to be in a state of worship, but instead I'm fighting with lust. I feel like standing up and saying, "Hi, my name is Madeleine, and I'm a lust-o-holic."

Oh Lord, please help me to stop lusting over this guy. In the name of Jesus I pray, Amen.

"Maddy!" Maggie, my roommate and partner in crime, hisses through clenched teeth. "Madeleine!" She jams the offering basket into my elbow, snagging the sleeve of my new crocheted cardigan. I quickly untangled the black thread and pass the basket to the woman sitting next to me.

LUST, you say? Yes, lust. In church no less. How can this be? A fine upstanding Christian young lady about to start her last year of college at a fine upstanding Christian university struggles with one of the most base and primal aspects of the human condition.

I just can't seem to get him out of my head. I do okay for a little while, then something will happen, some situation will come up, and then let the daydreams begin. This whole elaborate scene starts playing in my head like some cheesy chick flick...what I'm wearing, more importantly, what he's wearing, which is usually a black t-shirt that fits snugly across his broad shoulders, paired with faded worn-in Levi's 501's jeans that look as if they were tailor made for him. And I even write elaborate dialogue in these daydreams. He usually says

something witty that makes me laugh, which is strange, since, well, I've never even spoken to him.

"So, ya'll get much out of the message today?" Maggie asks, as we cross the crowded church parking lot toward my car.

"Yeah, it was pretty good," I mumble, as I struggle with my seatbelt.

"Uh huh. I saw you eye-ballin' him. I can't believe you still have a thing for that guy." Maggie says into the mirror while she expertly outlines and paints her matte blood red lips.

She double checks her artistry in the mirror that is clipped on to the passenger's side visor, which she installed in my car during our freshman year. "Hon, I don't know why you just don't go up to him and just say 'hi.'"

"Oh, I don't know. Maybe because I lack the sexual fortitude that others around me exude." *Yikes*. I didn't mean that to sound as biting as it came out, but we've had this discussion too many times in the past for it to not irritate me.

"And just what is that supposed to mean?" She says as she feigns a hurt look.

"Oh come on Mag, you know I can't," I say. "I'd probably trip or fall, or both, and a long dribble of unintelligible gibberish would ooze from my mouth."

I make a quick left turn out of the church parking lot, and into traffic. Maggie shrugs and goes back to her make-up application, digging in her purse for various tubes and compacts.

"He's just a guy," she says into the mirror, while blotting her chin with a powder puff.

With her Dallas drawl, she makes it sound so simple. Like he's just some *gah*, and not my mysterious Adonis. Adonis. A pagan god for my pagan thoughts.

"Just walk up to him and introduce yourself, and let him do the rest," she says, and zips up her make-up bag. "Let him do all the talking. Just smile, look him in the eyes and touch your hair a lot. Guys love that."

I stifle an outburst of laughter at the mental image of myself doing something like that with my extreme lack of feminine smoothness. Of course Maggie would think talking to guys is simple. Guys always look up when Maggie saunters into a room. I don't know whether it's her big platinum blonde hair styled very closely to the classic Marilyn Monroe style, or her delicate cheekbones, dark brown exotic eyes and porcelain skin, all of which she inherited from her half-Japanese mother. Or maybe it's just the plain fact that she seems to put "it" out there, and guys take notice.

Maggie describes herself as hip-heavy, "a gal built for comfort and not speed," she once told me. She has three inches and a good fifteen pounds on me and my five-foot, two-inch petite frame. But she wears it so well that it seems like there's always some guy checking her out, wherever we go.

"Hon, it's not that hard," Maggie continues. "Guys only want one thing. And if they think there's even the teeniest chance they might get it, well, then you've got 'em hooked."

"Oh, nice advice. From a pastor's daughter no less."

Maggie shoots me a look that would harm, followed with a quick icy pageant smile/tilted-head combo.

"Besides, I'm not sure those kinds of tactics would work on a guy like him." I say.

"Not coming from the Queen of Darkness, they won't," she quips.

I return her icy pageant smile which quickly morphs into a squinty-eyed sneer.

"Maddy, if you are serious about gettin' this guy, you are gonna have to stop dressin' like you raid the closets of Addams Family on a daily basis. And honestly, did you buy stock in black eyeliner or somethin'?" Maggie asks.

"Have you been conspiring with my mother?"

"Look, I'm just sayin'. Hon, you need to put your curves to work for you. Shoot, if I had your thirty-four-D's and itty-bitty waist, I'd make sure they were prominently displayed instead

of hidin' 'em under some big ol' sweater like you always do. Guys are more attracted to girls with those 'personality traits,' if you know what I mean." Maggie gives me a wicked smile.

"Well, that may be true, but I'm not going to change just to attract some guy. Been there. Done that."

"Even for Mr. Mysterious, with the cute butt?"

"How do you know what his posterior looks like?" I glance at her.

"Oh Hon, Maggie the Cat knows all when it comes to the opposite sex," she says as a knowing grin slides across her face. "Besides, don't play innocent with me. I know your eyes have strayed on more than one occasion. I bet you could even tell me what those little measurement numbers are on the leather tag on the back of his jeans."

I try not to blush. She's right. I do know. After three years of rooming with her at Biola University in La Mirada, California, she knows me all too well.

I haven't always been this way. I was never really into the whole boy crazy thing. They just weren't my fixation. Not that my world didn't flip upside down for a short period of time whenever a member of the opposite sex would show any inkling of interest in me, especially if he was remotely appealing, and moderately attractive. But my world just didn't revolve around guys like Maggie's world does. That is, until about a year ago.

Oh Lord, please help me to stop this lust nonsense. He's just a guy. A guy I've never even met. In Jesus' name I ask, Amen.

As I finish my silent prayer, I back my car into the driveway of my mother and stepfather's mini-estate in the swanky part of Chino Hills.

"Anybody home?" my voice echoes off the marble floors and twenty-foot high glass windows in the foyer. No answer. *Thank You, Jesus!* My mother isn't home yet. Maggie and I run upstairs to my room to retrieve the stuff we packed to take to

school. Maggie drove in from Texas and stayed the weekend with me, so she could get back to her school-time job at the Victoria's Secret in the Brea Mall before school starts next week, and to keep me company, which I'm grateful for.

I don't mind being home alone most of the time. I enjoy the peace and quiet, and the time to think and dream (yeah, mostly about *him*, I'll confess) without my mother interrupting me with her constant barrage of criticism and general acrimony.

My mother and my stepfather, Dr. Bill, cosmetic surgeon extraordinaire, spend most of the summer traveling through Europe. Usually, they return to the States for a brief stay at the Simpson House in Santa Barbara, California, where my mother recovers in peace and luxury from her latest procedures. Dr. Bill would have undoubtedly not only performed these procedures, but would also stay there with her to oversee her recovery as well.

This summer, they plan to come home directly from Europe. My mother said she had a little more "shopping" to do there and then they would be home, which I'm guessing is code for the fact that she had minor procedures done this time, and doesn't need the extended recovery time in Santa Barbara. It's always fun to see my mother after one of her "vacations" to guess what has been lifted, augmented and/or completely reconstructed. Someday, I think I will pass her on the street and totally not recognize her.

We load up the backseat and trunk of my Toyota Corolla with Maggie's dorm room stuff she stored at my house for the summer, as well as the boxes filled with my own dorm-life essentials. I carefully place my cherished two-cup coffee maker on the floor behind my seat. We manage to pack up my car and get back on the road before Dr. Frankenstein and his bride return home.

As we drive out of my parents' cul-de-sac, my mind slips into autopilot and instantly starts replaying everything I saw

about him in church today. All his movements. The way he walks, the way he runs his hand through the front of his wavy black hair when his head is down and he is reading his Bible. How the back of his long hair fans out across his broad muscular shoulders...ugh! *Stop thinking this junk already! Oh Lord help me...*

Okay, lust isn't the only thing that is wrong with me, but it seems to be the sin of the day, or year, at least. So what else can I tell you that is wrong with me? Let's see, first off, I'm not your average everyday church girl. I don't have a tapestry cover for my Bible. I'm not what you would characterize as sweet or nice (but I'm working on it). I even tried the "Christian Girl" character on for size for a little while, but it didn't fit. I felt like I was living a lie all the time.

I don't wear white lacy stuff or pastel colors, or stylish matching outfits like Maggie. I think she and I are polar opposites when it comes to fashion. I don't want to get into judging or stereotyping other people, because I don't like it when people do that to me, but God made me different.

I wear black. All black, all the time. I love my new Doc Marten nine-lace-hole black patent leather boots, which Maggie and my mother both detest. I like things that are gothic, dark and edgy, and a little quirky. I like my long coarse mousy brown hair dyed black, much to the dismay of my bleached-blond mother. And I like tall, black-haired, beefy-built musicians with eyes the color of light green jade. Well, one in particular.

He shops at the music and video store where I work and goes to the same church as me (which I think is peculiarly awesome). He always comes into the store alone. Come to think of it, whenever I see him in the store or at church, he's alone.

I deduced he is a musician since he always buys two packs of GHS Boomers electric guitar strings. Eleven gauge, not the nines the wannabes usually buy. He typically wears a black t-shirt, either plain or with a logo from the latest Grunge band.

Oh, and the Levi's. If he ever gets a new pair, that will be a sad day. I know, I know. I shouldn't be talking, or thinking like this. I definitely need help.

So does a person ever stop being an objectified figment of the imagination, and just become a person? It stinks that I have built this guy up in my mind so much, I think that if I ever actually speak to him, I will suddenly be stricken mute or I will completely pass out, and it will probably be on a day that I'm wearing a skirt that will slide up to display a regrettably placed hole in my opaque black tights.

As we turn onto the main outlet street, Maggie and I pull up next to a mini truck with two high school-aged looking guys inside in the second left turn lane on Chino Hills Parkway. They instantly start pointing at us and hooting like a couple of deranged owls. When the traffic light turns green, I burn rubber turning left onto Highway 142, and ignore the infantile cat calls coming from the truck.

"Did you at least get his name this summer?" Maggie asks, craning her neck to smile back at the boys.

"I told you, I haven't spoken to him yet."

"I know *that*. There are others ways to find stuff out, you know."

"Like what?" I dare to ask.

"Like does he ever pay with a credit card or a check? Checks are the best because most of the time you can get the guy's address and phone number." She has picked up a remarkable number of guys working at Victoria's Secret. Go figure.

"No, I don't know," I say. "I've never helped him check out at the cash register."

"Maddy! Why not? That's the perfect opportunity to start a conversation. I bet you purposely let someone else help him, don't you? So you don't have to talk to him."

I feel my lips tighten. I can't speak because what she said is true.

"Yeah, I thought so. You are so hopeless," she hisses, rolling her eyes.

Sometimes I think if I looked more like Maggie or my mother, I would possess the courage to go up and talk to him. It brings to mind a topic of conversion I've had with my mother, once or twice, maybe three or four times now. It usually begins with her addressing me by my full name, which is never good.

"Madeleine Marie Winger, why do you constantly dress like you are in mourning? There are other colors besides black, more *attractive* colors." Sometimes she adds under her breath, which she thinks I can't hear, "you certainly didn't get your fashion sense from me."

Thank God! Most of my mother's skin-tight clothing could be found in the closet of any trend-conscious fifteen-year-old girl. I think she hoped that when I gave my life to Jesus when I was nineteen, I would start dressing "better," maybe more like her. *Gag.*

"You know, you are not in high school anymore, Madeleine. If you want to attract a nice college boy, you need to start acting and dressing like the college student you are," my mother adamantly informs me.

My mind quickly flashed to visions of pleated plaid skirts and corduroy jackets with contrasting elbow patches. Weird, and definitely not me.

"Mom, I'm not going to college just to find a husband, okay? My goal in life is not to get hitched to some guy just because he looks good on paper."

Instantly, I wince at my own remarks, wishing I had not said them. I know. I should be more respectful of my mother, and not give into my sarcastic fleshly tendencies. I'm working on it. One more topic for prayer.

But man, my mother. Doting wife for fifteen years of esteemed plastic surgeon, Dr. Bill Cutter. When she first started dating Dr. Bill, I *so* wanted to call him “Mr. Bill,” after the little clay-mation character on my favorite old episodes of *Saturday Night Live*. I was six years old and wished I could have a Mr. Sluggo of my own to deliver me from my mother’s new man. I could just hear Dr. Bill exclaiming “Ohhhh nooooo,” as my Mr. Sluggo pummeled him into a shapeless heap of clay. Yes!

But my mother insisted I address him properly, since doctors deserve respect. That’s when I knew. Her persistent defense of him meant that Dr. Bill was here to stay. He was a doctor and she was going to marry him. He would be her new “Wallet,” in that he would be able to support her comfortably *and* perform her upkeep at the same time. How convenient.

But Dr. Bill turned out to be a good guy. He treats us both really well, and he’s good for my mother. Much better than my real father, I would venture to guess. How she ever ended up with my father, a part-time musician and full-time off-shore oil rig worker, is beyond me. She skirts the issue whenever I bring it up. She seems miles away from her old life now.

I slow my car as we near the notoriously dangerous S-curves of Highway 142, also known on our local news as Carbon Canyon Road, since sections of the canyon tend to burn up every year during the fire season in early Fall.

Maggie stares out the window at the passing hills covered with the dry brown brush of August and the groves of old Eucalyptus trees. With a heavy sigh, she studies her long French-manicured fingernails. She’s quiet, and seems consumed by her thoughts. Her rare moments of silence usually mean she’s frustrated with me.

“Look, I hate that I’m totally infatuated with a guy I’ve never met,” I say, to try to clear the air. “I don’t know anything about him or his character. I really don’t want to have these intense feelings for him. Besides, I’m not even sure I want a

boyfriend right now. I've got enough stuff to think about. Like, what am I going to do after graduation? *Agh!* Why can't I stop daydreaming about him? This sucks."

"I know sweetie," Maggie consoles me. "But I think I know what's really going on in that dyed-black head of yours. You're scared."

"Ding, ding, ding! Tell the lady what's she's won, Bob!"

"What's there to be so afraid of? Of meeting some guy you've had a crush on since Noah went into the ark? You might really hit it off with him. Or not. Maddy, you'll never know unless you *at least* talk to him. Come on, what've you got to lose?"

"A lot." I glance stone-faced at her. Maggie likes to fish for some juicy (gory, more like) details of stuff I did in my life before I asked Christ into my heart. Most of the time I don't like to talk about my B.C. days, unless it's for a good reason.

I pull into the alleyway next to the parking lot of Alpha Chi, the all female dormitory at Biola where we live. Our room is on First Odd, the ground floor hall of rooms on one side of the building. We start unloading our stuff into our room through the emergency exit door, which is left open only during moving days for easy access to the subterranean floor of the dormitory.

The old building smell is strong after being closed up all summer, but the scent is familiar, and not totally unpleasant. We're about to begin our senior year, class of 1998. My last year of college. Holy mackerel.

Chapter Two

“Oh my gosh! Hiyyyy! M & M are back everyone!” Bethany proclaims loudly, her sarcastic greeting reverberating off the hallway walls. Her forced plastic smile reminds me of the overly friendly realtor woman who sold the mini-mansion to my mother and Dr. Bill when I was a little kid.

Bethany Hendricks is the self-proclaimed mega-Christian of our floor. Maggie and I have had the unfortunate pleasure of living in the assigned dorm room right next to her since we all first came to Biola in our freshman year. She is a local girl from South Orange County. Her father pastors an affluent midsize church in the area. I have only met her parents a couple times because I keep my distance when I know they are making one of their short visits to the campus. After I met them for the first time, I overheard Bethany’s mother voice her astonishment that such a fine school would admit people like me, and isn’t the school concerned that people like me will hurt its reputation. I guess she didn’t realize how unsound proof the walls of our dorm rooms are.

In the past three years that we have shared the wall dividing our dorm rooms, I have mentally concocted over a hundred ways to thicken and sound proof this cinder block wall, primarily so I wouldn’t be able to hear every word Bethany gushes about Chad, the Super-Boyfriend.

Bethany gives Maggie and me the once over, only slightly shading her disapproval. I try to keep things civil with Bethany

by ignoring her comments, but Maggie gives it right back to her. And then some.

"Magdalena Morris, are you still working in that den of sin?" Bethany asks. I see Maggie bristle. She hates being called by her whole first name, because it's how her stepmother always refers to her. Who does Bethany think she is anyway?

"I sure am. Why? Are ya'll lookin' for somethin' special? I can set you up with a bra from our new line of extreme push-up bras that'll surely speed up Chad's marriage proposal alright! You're about a thirty-six-B, right? I just bought one, so you could try on mine to see if you like it."

"Uh, no thanks," Bethany says with very apparent disapproval.

"Well, okay. Ya'll let me know if you change your mind," Maggie says as a fiendish smile spreads across her face. "Hey Bethany, check out what I bought when I was back home this summer."

Maggie carefully unrolls a long tube of thick glossy paper she is holding to reveal a black and white picture of a shirtless, totally ripped and gorgeous, dark haired cowboy. He kind of reminded me of a certain someone...

"'Save a horse...ride a cowboy.' Hmm. Cute." Bethany grimaces.

"You can borrow it for a while if you'd like, Maddy and I won't mind." Maggie gives her a wide-eyed grin. I try not to bust-out laughing.

"I don't think so. It's not appropriate décor for young Christian women to display in their dorm room."

"Really? Well okay, suit yourself. I think this guy could brighten up any old dorm room, don't you? Besides, he looks just like this guy Maddy has a huge crush on." Maggie winks at me.

"Oh really?" Bethany turns her wrath, I mean attention, toward me.

"No, not really. Maggie is just kidding around." I shoot Maggie a I'm-gonna-kill-you-later look. The last thing I want is for Bethany to start cross-examining me on this subject. Especially this subject.

"Oh." Bethany looks me up and down. "Madeleine, I totally love your outfit. It's so, so black. Is it new?" She smoothed out her new-looking J.Crew khaki skorts, like they are the exemplary attire for all Christian co-eds. As if! I wouldn't be caught dead in anything like that.

Oh Lord, please guard my tongue and keep me from saying something completely acidic. In Your name I pray, Amen.

"How was your summer, Bethany?" I grin innocently at her, purposely changing the subject.

Last semester, I finally discovered a sure-fire way to side-step Bethany's self-righteous remarks. First, I totally ignore what she said, and then second, I make her the topic of the conversation. It works every time.

"Totally fab! Chad and I spent a whole month traveling with his parents through Europe. It was absolutely fabulous!"

"Oh, did ya'll go there on a mission trip or something? Maybe to teach the women of Serbia the appropriate way to dress while livin' under political oppression?" Maggie says with another crazy wide-eyed grin.

Bethany's expression looks as if she is considering the question, like maybe she should take up this cause, but then frowns, and gives Maggie and me a sickeningly sweet smile accompanied with a condescending head tilt, which Maggie promptly returns.

Maggie loves to antagonize Bethany. She says she just gives back to Bethany what she dishes out. But I suspect the main reason Maggie gets so much pleasure out of provoking her is because Bethany reminds Maggie of her stepmother. I think it's sad and kind of mean, and Maggie shouldn't do it, but she never misses a beat when it comes to putting Bethany in her place.

“Hey guys! Welcome back! How was your summer?” Suzette, Bethany’s roommate, walks up, her thick and curly waist-length sandy brown hair swaying behind.

I thought Suzette was cool from the first time I met her. I never feel her judging me. Nor do her parents. They are loving and genuine people, just like their daughter, but unfortunately they don’t make it out to California very often. They live in Woodinville, Washington, a suburb northeast of Seattle.

Suzette’s ex-hippie parents were saved near the end of the Jesus Movement in the 70’s. They did some missions work in India for a few years before settling in Woodinville to raise their growing family, and to open a plant nursery near their home. Suzette was home-schooled for most of her life, along with her other four younger siblings. She and Bethany make an odd pairing. But then, so does Maggie and me.

“How goes the man search?” Maggie is always probing her. Suzette shakes her head sadly, and then looks down at her new Birkenstock sandals.

As laid back as Suzette seems, her main goal in life is to get her “M-R-S degree,” code for those girls who are totally matrimonially-minded. Last semester during a finals study break, she confided to me that she often cries herself to sleep at night begging God to bring her a husband. She told me it bothers her deeply that she has only one more year of college left, and has not yet found the future pastor to which she would become a pastor’s wife, and potentially give birth to and raise four to six children with said pastor. Not nearly enough time, she said, to cultivate the lifelong marriage they would surely share.

I bit my tongue about the “lifelong” part, and tried to console her with the fact that she is able to totally focus on school, and doesn’t have to worry about making time for some boyfriend. But I think my words fell on deaf ears.

I suspect Bethany rubs Suzette’s face in the fact that she has what Suzette wants, a long-term relationship with the strong

likelihood of marriage. But I'm sure Bethany does it in a subtle, spirit-filled way. Yeah, right.

"Suzette doesn't need the distractions of a boyfriend, do you, Suz?" Bethany answers Maggie's question for Suzette.

"I wouldn't mind—" Suzette tries to answer.

"She is going into the mission field, isn't that right, Suz?" The dejected look on Suzette's face breaks my heart.

Okay, sometimes I just really want to smack Bethany. Well, somebody should do it! She can be such an insensitive wench sometimes.

"Really, Suzi? That's great! Where would you like to go?" I ask, trying to dissipate my anger and make Suzette feel better.

"I, I don't know. I'm still praying about it, I guess," Suzette mumbles as she turns and quickly walks down the hall toward the restroom, her long hair swinging wildly behind her.

Maggie and I stare daggers at Bethany. If looks could harm...

Chapter Three

By the time I make the long hike from the campus bookstore to my dorm room, it feels like my back pack straps have worn trenches into my shoulders, matching the troughs long since dug from my bra straps. I had to buy eleven books for one of my upper division Communication major classes. Eleven. For one class. They're all paperback books, but still. I drop my backpack with a thud on the floor next to my desk. Vile country music fills my ears.

Uh oh. Maggie is lying on her bed with her arm strewn across her face. I know this posture. It usually means some massive drama has transpired in my absence. Something in the universe has gone terribly awry, all while I was at the campus bookstore.

"You okay?" I dare to ask.

"Kill me now! I'm gonna be writin' papers this semester 'til my fingers are worn to the bone!" Maggie flings her arm down to her side.

Phew, just a case of "Syllabus Shock." It usually strikes every semester after the first week of classes. You'd think we would get used to hearing about all the projects and papers we will be required to complete over the semester, but it's still an overwhelming amount of information to receive in one week.

"Anyone call?" I ask while stacking my new books on the shelf above my desk.

"Hmmm...yes. Adonis called for you. He wants you to meet him in the Garden of Eden at midnight. Oh, and he said don't

wear anything black. Unless of course, it's a black lace push-up bra with matching black panties!" Maggie gives me another one of her infamous evil smiles.

"Ha, ha. You're sooo funny. I'm astounded by your rapier wit." I hate it when she teases me about him.

"Hey, do you have to work tonight?" Maggie asks, ignoring my sarcasm. "I've been jonesin' for some Del Taco."

Del Taco is classic Southern California Mexican fast food style cuisine, ideal for college students on a budget. The menu is very similar to Taco Bell, but a little more like real Mexican food. We reserve trips to In-N-Out Burger, the ultimate in SoCal eats, for special occasions. Not that In-N-Out is expensive, it's just special. They make the best burgers ever, especially if you order your Double Double "Animal Style," which means extra everything. *Mmmm.*

"I'm off tonight, but I should go pick-up my paycheck," I tell her.

"Great! It's a date. My treat. Let's blow this joint." Maggie jumps off her bed and begins fixing her face in her vanity table mirror, while I grab my keys and purse.

After a quick bite to eat, we get back in my car and travel the streets to the Whittier Music Plus. The store is not crowded, but then it usually isn't, not like the Music Plus in Chino where I transferred from when I started going to Biola. That store seemed like it was constantly bustling with customers.

The glass front and sides of the store gleam in the street lights and bright signs from the surrounding buildings. As we walk in the store, Maggie and I are warmly greeted by my co-workers on duty.

"Hey Maddy, I thought you were off tonight?" our resident metal-head Jaime says. He always seems to know my schedule.

"I am. Just picking up my check."

"Cool. You ladies got plans tonight? I'm off at ten."

"Oh, gee Jaime...we've really got to get back to school. Early class in the morning." I grab Maggie by the arm with a squeeze.

She has already slipped into her “Marilyn” posture for Jaime, complete with her index fingernail hanging on her lower lip, and batting her long, mascara encrusted eyelashes at him. I try to pull her toward the backroom door. But as I turn, I stop dead in my tracks. *No, no, no! Not with Maggie here! Oh, Lord, please help!*

There he is. *My crush*. Across the store, standing in the “M” section of the rock CD bins. His head is down and his hair is covering his face as he searches through the discs, but I know it’s him. I’d know that lovely mane of black wavy hair anywhere. I turn away quickly. Maybe Maggie won’t notice. Play it cool. Yeah right!

Good. Maggie is still flirting with Jaime, with her chest thrust forward. I focus on the front door. *Keep your eyes straight ahead...don’t look over there*. I pull her toward the front door, and quickly wave to my co-workers as we escape out the front door.

“That was quick. I didn’t even see you go into the backroom...Hey! Wait a minute!” Maggie steps back from my car, and closes the passenger door.

Maggie stands with her hands on her hips and a disgusted look on her face. In plain view through the plate glass windows, you can see him inside the store standing in the aisle between the rows of CD bins.

“Maggie, please! Let’s go!” I beg her.

“Not a chance, Sugar-pants! It’s fate, or kismet, or whatever. A divine appointment.”

“Please Maggie, no! Get in the car! Let’s go! I look completely awful right now!” I say, hoping to appeal to her deep-seeded sense of vanity so she will let us go.

“Madeleine, darlin’, this is your golden opportunity.”

“Come on, Maggie! I’ll let you dress me and do my make-up for a day...a whole week! Can we please just go?”

I look Maggie straight in the eye. I feel like I’m going to be sick from the waves of panic crashing down on me. Maggie considers my outfit and appearance consisting of an oversized

faded black t-shirt, old black jeans, ailing black Converse Chuck Taylor high-tops, my long hair scraped back in a ponytail, and no hint of make-up. She looks back at the window, and then back at me. With a heavy sigh, she opens the car door and climbs inside.

"Alright, but this is the last time. If we see him at church on Sunday, you *will* go up and talk to him. Or else I will!"

"Hey Maddy, you forgot your check," Jaime calls as he walks toward my car. He is grinning like the Cheshire Cat in Alice of Wonderland. He kind of looks like it, too.

"Oh, thanks Jaime. I guess I have a lot on my mind." He hands the envelope to Maggie through the open window, and leans down on the car door. His long bleached blond hair falls forward and brushes the top of the open window. I have visions of him and Maggie wearing rubber gloves and sharing a bottle of peroxide.

"You ladies got any plans Saturday night? My band's playing at the Whiskey in Hollywood." He reaches into the inside pocket of his standard issue black Music Plus vest and pulls out two tickets. He hands the tickets to Maggie.

"Well bless your heart, aren't you sweet! Madeleine and I would love to come see your little band play." Maggie is such a bad liar, and I don't think Jaime picks up on her Southern sarcasm either.

I look up at the window, just in time to see a guy with sandy brown shoulder-length curly hair walk up to my Adonis, and say something to him that makes him laugh. Oh, be still my beating heart. What a sweet smile!

"Hey Jaime, do you know that guy in the store there?" Maggie asks, as she notices me staring at him.

"Which one?" Jaime seems a little dejected.

"The tall one, with the black hair."

"No, not really. But I know his band practices at the same rehearsal room building in La Habra, as my band does. I've seen him there a couple of times. I think he's a guitar player.

I've only heard his band play a little. They suck." Jaime says that about all other hard rock bands except his.

"Okay, thanks Jaime. We've really got to run. I'll see you later." I turn the key in the ignition and release the parking brake.

"Okay. Hey, I'll see you tomorrow. You close, right?" He backs away from my car, and walks back toward the store, waving and smiling.

I give a quick wave, and pull out into traffic. So, I wonder who that was with him tonight. Like I said, I've never seen him with anyone before.

"See how much information you can get if you only ask?" Maggie looks pleased with herself. "Now you know where his band practices."

"Yeah," I mumble. I'm still reeling from the close encounter. Okay. So I will admit it. I'm a little scared to meet this guy. Maybe more than a little scared. Scared, for a lot of reasons.

"So, now we need to come up with a plan." Maggie looks intently ahead.

"Like what? I just happen to show up at some rehearsal studio, when I'm not even in a band?"

Maggie gets a devious look in her eye. "I know! You could—"

"No way! I'm not going to use Jaime."

"Hon, why not? You know he has a major crush on you?"

"Maggie, that is so wrong."

"Oh come on. It's not like he wouldn't do it to you."

"That doesn't matter. I don't do things like that." I shoot Maggie a serious look. "Besides, if it's meant to happen that I'm supposed to meet this guy, then it will happen."

"What if you miss that opportunity? Like what if it was supposed to 'happen' tonight?"

"It's not time yet, Maggie."

"How do *you* know?"

"I just know."

"Hon, don't you think it's already some kinda providence that this guy goes to the same church as you way out in Chino Hills, and shops in the music store where you work, way out here in Whittier?"

"Yeah, maybe, but I'm not ready for it, okay? So please just drop it, okay?"

"Ready for what? You talk like you're gonna marry this guy!"

Maggie is really starting to irritate me. *Breathe in, breathe out.* "Look, if I do meet him, I'm not ready for any of the potential outcomes, okay?" I try to keep my voice calm. "If I meet him, and he rejects me, I will be devastated."

"Oh, hon, he won't," Maggie tries to reassure me.

"And if I meet him, and we hit it off, and we start dating, I'm afraid of what could happen, you know, being alone with him."

"He's a big strappin' guy, but he doesn't seem the rapist type to me." I'm not sure if Maggie is serious or she's trying to make a joke.

"Maggie. It's not *him* that I'm worried about."

Chapter Four

At first I thought I was just dreaming. More like a nightmare, actually. But the ringing persists as I wake up. I crawl out of my soft warm bed and answer the phone.

"Hello...?"

"Is Maggie there?" A distinctive Texan accent asks.

"She's asleep. Who's calling?" I am not a happy camper.

"Were ya'll sleeping? Oh, I'm sorry, darlin'. I forget about the time difference. I was just gettin' ready for work, and I thought I'd give Maggie a quick call. Is she there?"

"Hold on." I sigh deeply.

"Who is it?" Maggie asks me as she sits up in bed. I shrug and hold the receiver out to her.

She climbs out of bed to get the phone, which resides on the floor in the middle of the two sides of our room. I hand her the receiver with my best "it's 3 A.M." look of sleepy disdain, and stagger back to my bed.

"Hello?...Hi baby, how ya'll doin'?" Maggie uses her best bedroom voice. "Yeah, I miss you, too...I been thinkin' about you, too."

Oh puke! I pull my pillow over my head to try to drown out Maggie's cooing. She gets the message and picks up the phone and carries it out into the hallway, and closes our door.

I wonder which guy this is in Maggie's menagerie of men. Chris? Jeff? Chad? Yes, Bethany's Chad, you remember, the Super-Boyfriend?

He and Maggie went out a few times during our freshman year. He still calls her once in a while, which I think is strange. Whenever I answer the phone when he calls, he always gives some lame excuse why he's calling. Usually he says something about a class they have together, since they are both Sociology majors. Like I care. I don't think Bethany knows about Chad's calls. If she does, she never mentions it. Come to think of it, Maggie never mentions it either. It seems like it would be something Maggie would love to throw in Bethany's face, but she hasn't yet.

"Maddy!" Maggie whispers as she taps softly on the door. "Open the door. It's locked." I peel back the covers and stagger to the door to open it.

"So, who was that?" I ask, since I am awake now, and I know Maggie will keep me awake to recount the whole conversation.

"Bodacious Bart!" She smiles widely, and closes her eyes.

"The cowboy guy from Dallas you told me about? Is he the one you said carries around a picture of his truck in his wallet? Is he the guy who also takes his Wrangler jeans to the cleaners to get starched creases put in them?"

"Mmmm...that's the one. He is such a gentleman. He called to ask if I wanted him to ship my clothes to me that I left in the hamper at his house. He already washed'em for me. Isn't that sweet?"

"*Maaagggiiie!* I thought you said you were a good girl over summer break."

"Well, I was, mostly. Just this one little indiscretion the night before I left. He looked so good, and he was so sweet. And he told me he loved me, and I couldn't resist."

I shake my head, and climb back into my bed, and pull my covers up. Maggie climbs into her own bed. I don't say anything. I don't need to. I know Maggie knows it's wrong. My silence on the matter speaks volumes to her. She silently rolls over to face the wall.

Who am I to judge? It's not like I've never been down that road myself. I've lived the life that Maggie is living. I've done the things she is doing. I clearly remember feeling what she must feel every time one of these guys is finished having his way with her, and then thinks he can come around for more whenever he wants, with one phone call full of sweet talk. I don't think I'll ever forget that gut-grinding feeling that messes with your head until you feel like you might go insane.

The summer before I started attending Biola, I got an information packet in the mail about university life, and a short biography card written by my future roommate. I thought it was some cruel joke that someone was playing on me to pair me up with a pastor's daughter—a pastor's daughter from Texas no less. Maggie and I couldn't have come from more different regional backgrounds. But now I know it was the hand of God working. We have a lot more in common than I ever would have imagined.

I'm a couple years older than most of the other girls, and I have experienced a lot more than most of them, especially with the opposite sex—a lot more experience—as has Maggie. Maggie and I also have our step-parent woes in common, only her step-mother has been in her life since she was two years old.

According to Maggie, Betina Johnson Morris, "Tini" to all her who know and love her (if that's at all possible, Maggie would add), is a petite, crafty, sly, sneaky, bossy, imposing (plus a few more of Maggie's colorful descriptions I've forgotten) and a sanctimonious demon-woman from the seventh layer of Hell.

She had been attending Maggie's father's small parish in Plano for many years when Maggie's mother died. Tini was convinced it was her duty to slither her way in and ensnare the recently widowed and ruggedly good-looking Pastor Eddie

Morris, only ten months after Maggie's mother's death from breast cancer.

Tini successfully spun her web and snared the handsome young preacher, persuading him that he needed to remarry immediately, because a man in his position needed an appropriate wife to care for him. The fact that he had some baggage in the form of a two-year-old "mixed-breed" little girl would be her cross she would have to bear, and she reminds everyone around her on a regular basis, including Maggie.

I think Maggie is still very bitter about the situation. I wonder sometimes if she feels betrayed by her father for marrying such a horrible woman. I wonder if she is seeking the love and acceptance she feels she didn't get at home every time she sleeps with one of her guys. Or maybe she's just plain being rebellious. Either way, I know from experience how much she is hurting herself. Maybe I should change my major to Psychology? *Yeah right.* I have enough trouble keeping my own head on straight half the time, much less help others with theirs.

I was first alerted to Maggie's "extra-curricular activities" a couple weeks after the beginning of our freshman year. Late at night, I would hear soft tapping on Maggie's window followed with the sound of her window slowly sliding up, and Maggie carefully sliding out. Nobody ever noticed that Maggie didn't keep a screen on her window. She wouldn't come back until the wee hours of the morning.

I knew what she was up to, and I didn't know what to do. Sneaking out in the middle of the night was definitely against the school code of ethics. But I couldn't report her. That would be like telling on myself, since I felt like I was just as guilty of the same things that Maggie was doing, only I performed most of my acts of debauchery in my pre-Biola days. All I felt I could do was pray for her. So I pray a lot. Daily. Sometimes, hourly.

The Bible story of the Samaritan man in chapter ten of the gospel of Luke really speaks to me when I read it (you should look it up and read it; it's a really cool passage). Not that Maggie is some severely wounded soul lying on the side of the road in a near death state. Well, maybe she is, spiritually speaking. I don't know. All I know is if the shoe were on the other foot, I would want someone to have compassion on me.

And Maggie doesn't need a sermon on purity. She has heard it all before, having grown up in the church. She knows all the Scriptures about keeping oneself pure.

But when her crying jags start, and they always do after a series of her male escapades, I just wrap my arms around her, smooth her hair and hand her clean tissues, as she huddles on the floor next to her bed, hugging her knees to her chest until the pain subsides enough for her to get up and get back to normal everyday life. That is, until the next guy calls.

Chapter Five

“EWWWW! That is the most disgusting thing I have seen!”

“It’s so hairy!”

“And veiny! Like some deformed hot dog!”

“That is SO disgusting!

“Do they all look like that?”

“I would never touch IT!”

With a quick curious glance at each other, Maggie pushes aside her word processor and I flip upside down the third of the eleven books I’m reading for one class, and we dart next door to Suzette and Bethany’s room, the origin of all these peculiar outbursts we hear.

We stop just inside the doorway of their room where a group of girls are all huddled around a Psychology book, open to a page with a black and white photograph of a penis. Maggie turns her head toward me and rolls her eyes.

“How pathetic!” she hisses to me under her breath. I give Maggie a half smile.

Honestly, I’m jealous of these girls. Jealous of their innocence. I wish I didn’t possess the memories I do, of all the things I’ve done in the past. Sometimes I feel like I have no business living among and breathing in the same air as these pure and innocent young women.

During our freshman year, at Bethany’s persistent prodding, Maggie and I, and Suzette, attended a purity conference for

women at a local church, called "A Garden Enclosed." I *so* didn't want to go. I don't fit in with stuff like that, and I didn't need any help feeling more condemned for my past experiences than I already did. But Maggie wanted to go, so I couldn't say no.

On the way there, Maggie claimed she wanted to go because it would be good people watching, and we could see who breaks down in tears the most. And then she confessed that her father said her attendance to the conference was mandatory. Maggie's father, as kind and compassionate as he is, is not a man to be disobeyed.

I learned some valuable stuff at the conference, especially Scripture references I could certainly use today. It didn't seem like Maggie got anything out of it. She trashed all the information sheets we received, as well as the little gold key that each of us received.

We were supposed to keep the keys as a symbol of our stand for purity, to remember that each of us is a "garden enclosed." A woman is to remain locked up until her wedding night, upon which she gives the little gold key to her husband.

I keep my key in my underwear drawer, so I see it daily. It helps me remember to clean up my mind when my daydreams about my Adonis start getting too frequent. Maggie tossed her key in the small trash can on the side of our desks. But I fished it out when she left the room, and hid it under some books in the bottom drawer of my desk. She will want it back someday. Someday soon, I hope.

"Maddy, have you ever seen anything so hideous?" asks Janelle, who lives two rooms down the hall from us. *Yes, more times than I care to remember, unfortunately*, I think to myself.

"Janelle, aren't you a nursing major?" I ask. Okay, I'm getting too good at this avoiding the truth thing.

"Yeah, but I don't have to look at penises all day...or is it 'peni'?"

"Ya'll better get used to it!" Maggie says as she walks further into the room. "'Cause you know, all ya'll are gonna have to do more than just touch IT on your weddin' night." Maggie says, and all the girls stare at her, some with looks of wide-eyed shock, and some with looks of incredulous horror.

"I think if it was my husband's, I wouldn't be disgusted by it at all. It would be part of him, so I would be okay with it," Suzette says. She is so sweetly pure. Oh, to be that innocent again.

"I can't believe this school would allow a textbook with nudity in it. It's like, pornographic!" Bethany says with a hiss, always the spoil sport. "Suzette, why are you even taking Psychology, don't you think it's immoral and hedonistic?"

"Bethany, it's not pornography. And no, Psychology is not immoral. It's the study of human behavior. You should know that," Suzette says.

Hmm...this is new. I've never seen Suzette stand up to her overbearing roommate before.

"Well, Chad said we shouldn't be required to take Psychology, and he and his parents are going to appeal the requirement. Besides, it's not like you're going to need it in the mission field."

"Bethany, give it a rest, will you?" Suzette turns and storms out of the room.

I slip out of the room after Suzette, and catch up with her in the bathroom. "Hey, what's up?" I ask her.

"I'm just so sick of hearing about her stupid boyfriend!" Suzette says with her arms wrapped around herself and her forehead wrinkled.

"You and me both. I begged Maggie to swap sides of the room with me this year, but she flat out refused."

"Everything is 'Chad says this' or 'Chad thinks that's immoral.' Chad, Chad, Chad! I'm so tired of it!" Her eyes begin to well up with tears. "I've always been happy for her, since she first started dating him, but Maddy, sometimes I think she talks

about him so much just to rub it in my face that she has a serious boyfriend and I don't. Especially this year," she says, wiping her eyes.

I get that same feeling too, but I think it better not to tell her. "Maybe we need to get you some good earplugs, or a pair of those big fancy headphones that block out sound." I say, trying to cheer her up.

Suzette laughs, but tears are spilling from the corners of her eyes. "Mostly, I'm tired of being single. Maddy, I pray every day for God to bring me to my future husband."

"I know. Waiting is really hard sometimes." I hand her a tissue from the box on the bathroom counter.

"It's all I want. Does it seem weird to just want to be a wife and mother?" Suzette asks.

"Not if it's the desire of your heart. Besides, who's to say what's weird and what's not? Oh, wait, that would be *Chad's* job, wouldn't it?" I say. Suzette laughs again.

"And I'm not sure about going into the mission field, either. It just seems too scary to me."

"Hey, maybe we should start a club for people who don't know what they want to do after graduation." I give Suzette a big hug. "You and I can be charter members!"

"Thanks Maddy." Suzette sniffs into my shoulder, and hugs me back. After a few moments, Suzette pulls away and wipes her eyes. "Wanna go to Juice Stop? I can't go back in there right now."

"Sure, let me get my keys and ask Maggie if she wants anything."

I run back to our room and grab my stuff. Maggie is still in Bethany and Suzette's room, so I decide to skip asking her. Suzette and I quickly sneak out to the parking lot.

"*You oughta know!*" Suzette sings loudly along with the stereo, with the wind from the rolled down window whipping her long hair all around. "Oh, I love this song! Bethany won't let me play

this CD in our room." Suzette cranks up the volume on my car stereo.

"I know. Alanis Morissette is pretty much the only non-country musician Maggie likes, and one time she was blasting this CD in our room, and lip synching and dancing around to it, and Bethany walked in and started lecturing us on the inappropriateness of the lyrical content."

"Oh, no way! Did she really? I bet Maggie was not pleased!"

"She was a little miffed. And I think my evil sarcasm is rubbing off on her. She told Bethany, 'oh, ya'll are so right! We shouldn't listen to a young woman singing her heart out about how the guy she loved with her whole being, used her and then dumped her like a truck full of cow manure!'"

Suzette laughs at my Maggie impersonation. "What did Bethany say?"

"Not much. Just something about it still not being appropriate. Then Maggie said 'wait 'til it happens to you with your precious little Chad, then we'll see what you say.' Then Bethany said that would never happen to her, and she turned and left our room."

"Yikes! What did you do?" Suzette looks at me with amazement.

"I didn't get involved. I just turned my stereo down, and went back to studying."

"Do you think those two will ever actually get in a fight?"

"I don't think so. Maggie told me she doesn't like the stuff Bethany says, but she understands why she is the way she is."

"Wow, that's surprising."

"Maggie is used to hyper-righteousness. Her step-mother is an expert in pointing out the unrighteousness of others. Maggie said her step-mother acts like the Great Commission Jesus gave her is to go into all the world and point out the wrong things people are doing, not just pointing them toward Christ."

"Ewww."

"Yeah, and her step-mother thinks that I'm a less than ideal roommate for her step-daughter."

"Let me guess, she doesn't like the way you dress?"

"No, it's not that. She doesn't like that my biological parents are divorced."

"Like you have control over that."

"Yeah, and then there's the fact that my mother brazenly flirted with Maggie's father in front of her step-mother, at the parent orientation at the beginning of our freshman year."

"Oh my goodness..." Suzette says.

"Yeah, so I make myself scarce whenever she and Maggie's father come for a visit."

"But again, that's not your fault. That totally stinks."

"It does, especially because I really like Maggie's dad. He's always so cool to talk to." I purposely change the subject. "So Bethany is really starting to get on your last nerve, huh?"

"Maddy, can you keep an extreme secret? I mean, you can't even tell Maggie."

"Am I sure I want to hear this? Is it a matter of national security?"

"Seriously..."

"Wait, let me guess, Bethany and her Super-Boyfriend are doing it."

"Well, I don't know for sure..."

"*No way!* I was just kidding!" I can't believe I guessed it.

"Last night she came home like an hour and half late from her date with you-know-who, which is so not like her. And I saw brownish-red marks, like hickies, on the side of her breast when she was getting dressed this morning."

"Ewww! Hickies! That's so junior high. I bet they were listening to Journey or something."

"Maddy, what do I do? Should I confront her?"

"Suz, I seriously doubt Bethany and Chad are having sex. I bet there were just making out."

"How can you tell?"

"Well, Chad is still calling her isn't he?"

"Yeah, like a hundred times a day."

"Well, there you go. They're not having sex."

"What do you mean? I don't get it." Suzette looks puzzled.

"Look, when the hunter conquers his prey, then the hunt is over. Isn't it? Time to move on to a different unconquered prey, maybe taller, blonder, easier to obtain."

Suzette still looks confused. "But I can't see Chad breaking up with her, even if they are having sex. They're practically engaged," she says.

"I hope not, but he's a guy isn't he? They are all basically wired the same, aren't they? Bethany and Chad shouldn't be messing around with making out, either. That's like playing with matches in a dynamite factory."

"Maddy, how do you know all this about guys?"

"Experience is a cruel teacher, sometimes." *Sometimes?* Actually, every time.

"You've seriously went through stuff like this?"

"Yes. Many times."

Suzette looks like she's trying to hide her look of shock. She doesn't know much about my past.

"I speak from experience when I tell you it's really important to do what God says, specifically in the relationship-with-guys department." I have to pause for a moment to let the high-speed mental montage of regrettable guys I've been with, finish playing in my mind. "Because the alternative to obedience is really unpleasant, and always, one hundred percent of the time, ends up hurting like hell."

The line in Juice Stop is short, thankfully. I guess it would be at eight P.M. on a week night. I try not to laugh out loud at the hilarious banter I hear from the group of guys in line right behind me.

"Dude, do ya think you could suck less at practice tonight? You could seriously use some lessons, or something," one guy says.

"Aww dude, weak! So do you! Your vocals sound like a monkey screaming 'cause his hand's caught in that grinder thing," the other guy retorts.

"Dude, time is not just a magazine. Drummers are supposed to be able to keep a steady beat, or is this news to you?"

"Funny. Isn't the lead vocalist supposed to stay in pitch? Dude, your pitch is all over the place, just like a, like a knuckle ball! Maybe someday you'll become an actual singer, instead of just a vocalist."

"Dudes, relax! You guys sound like an old married couple," another guy with a smooth deep voice says. "After you get your drinks, you guys need to say you're sorry and chill-out. We're like a family, remember?"

"Aww shucks, Pete's right. I love you man!" One of the guys says to the other guy he has been teasing.

"No, I love *you*, man!"

"You guys are so strange." The deep voiced guy says, laughing.

"We can't all be rip and shred guitar gods, full of the wisdom of the ages and the nobleness of the ancients like you, Saint Peter."

I hear the last guy with the smooth voice laugh, as the other guy pushes him into me.

"I'm sorry!" The deep-voiced guy says.

I turn around and start to say it's okay, but I can't get the words out. I am looking up into the greenest eyes I have ever seen. I can't breathe. I literally think my heart has stopped beating. It's him. It's him. *OH MY LORD!* It's him!

"Hey, don't you work at the Music Plus in Whittier?" He asks. His voice is so low and lyrically sounding to me. He is smiling at me, his eyes shining like brilliantly polishes jade stones.

OH GOD...OH GOD...OH GOD! My stomach is turning continuous summersaults.

"Hey, can you get me a discount?" One of the other guys interrupts.

"Quiet, Ted." he says, keeping his eyes locked with mine.

"Excuuuse me!" Ted feigns insult.

"I, uh, work..." is all I can manage to sputter out. I can feel the blood draining from my face and my palms are getting sweaty. My knees feel like they are going to give out at any moment. I need to look away, anywhere else, but his eyes.

"Maddy, here's your smoothie. Your favorite, chocolate and banana. My treat, girlfriend!" Suzette hands me a large Styrofoam cup. I take it and murmur my thanks. She is staring at me. I'm sure I look as stunned as I feel.

"I, uh, we've got to go. Bye..." I pull Suzette by the arm toward the door.

"Okay, maybe I'll see you at the Plus." He says, with a big smile.

"Uh...yeah...sure..." I continue my beeline for the door with Suzette in tow. *Argh!* I'm such an idiot!

"Woohoo! Peter! Dude! She's hot, man!" Ted says, even though we are clearly still within earshot.

"And she likes you, dude!" The other guy says, playfully punching Peter in the arm.

"Just order your drinks," Peter says, as we pass through the doorway of the building.

I burn rubber out of the parking lot. *Breathe. Breathe.*

"Maddy, are you okay? Who was that guy back there? He's gorgeous!" Suzette says as she happily slurps her smoothie.

I try to restore my racing heart to a more normal rate and breathing pattern, as opposed to that of a rabbit that has just escaped from a chasing fox. My hands are shaking on the steering wheel.

Peter. *His name is Peter!*

Maggie will be royally disappointed that she missed this, but honestly, I'm thankful she wasn't here.