

The Shorehouse



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"C'mon, Angie, pick up," Vince muttered, tucking the phone under his chin as he continued to open and close cabinet doors, hoping to find something other than canned goods about to expire.

It was his own fault, really, for not double-checking that the shore house had been stocked with food the last time he and his sister were here. Angie had loaned the place to him for Memorial Day weekend, but she hadn't said anything about the cupboard being bare.

Not that he minded having to go shopping. He'd managed to beat the shore traffic by taking an extra day off of work and arriving at the sleepy little beach town at the crack of stupid on Friday morning. It wouldn't be a hardship to walk down to the main drag of town with the sun high in the sky and the smell of the ocean in his nose. Vince just wanted to make sure everything was perfect this weekend.

He'd bragged about the shore house often enough to both Dani and Peter on separate

occasions. It had gotten to the point where Dani accused him of romanticizing childhood memories, making his family's vacation home sound like something more magical than real.

If what he was finding was any indication, Dani might just have a point.

"Hello?" Angie finally picked up the phone.

"Hey, Angie," Vince said.

He could hear her sigh on the other end. "The spare key is in the flowerpot on the porch."

"Ha. Ha. No, I haven't managed to lock myself out yet. Wait... who the hell puts a spare key in a flowerpot on the front porch? That's the first place a burglar would look!"

"No, first a burglar would case the place to find out when you weren't home and the neighbors were all out, then they'd go in through the back to not call attention to themselves."

"You have got to stop it with the prime time legal dramas." He rolled his eyes.

Vince dropped onto one of the stools at the kitchen island, flipping through the old notebook he'd found hidden deep in a drawer. "Anyway, I found Grandma's notebook."

Silence greeted him down the other end of the line. "Oh."

"Oh? That's all you have to say?" Vince teased. "At first I thought it was just a cookbook, but--"

"Look, Vince, you don't want to mess with anything in there."

"You're saying you believe in this stuff?" Vince flipped through to the page he had found before, stroking over the faded ink in his grandmother's handwriting. 'To make true love reveal itself' had been printed at the top with painstaking care. "That this is her spellbook?"

"Vince, it's obviously something that meant a lot to her."

Vince knew waffling when he heard it. "I just never knew Grandma was a witch."

"Don't go applying labels to people. You're so judgmental, Vincenzo."

"Fine, Angela Maria. Obviously you knew about this. Why didn't you say

anything? Did you try anything in it?"

"She left it at the house," Angie said softly. "I thought it should stay there."

He had to agree with her, for once. Just being in this house reminded him of summers with his family, no matter how much they'd changed it over the years. His baby picture, along with those of Angie and their six cousins, still hung on the wall next to the entrance. Sitting on the old, worn couch in the living room brought back vivid memories of how Grandma forbade anyone to sit on it before she'd thrown a sheet over its new fabric. This book was just another piece of her left behind.

"All right," he said. "That makes sense."

"You're not going to try anything in it, right?"

"Angie, it's just a cookie recipe."

"Exactly. I don't want you burning down our family home."

"Ha. Ha." He hung up on her. His sister would understand. Besides, he had ingredients to purchase.

"You weren't kidding about this place," Dani said, locking the door of her car with a quick flick of her wrist, the car beeping back in response.

Vince leaned over the railing of the porch, just admiring how her copper hair gleamed in the evening light. Dani grinned at him, flashing him her dimples, though he couldn't see the freckles he knew dotted her nose and cheeks. She walked across the driveway, long legs looking even longer in her workout shorts.

"Did you think I made it up?" he asked as she joined him on the porch, hefting her duffel bag over onto one of the lawn chairs. Unlike Vince's sister, she could fit everything for a weekend in a single bag. Always practical, Dani

didn't mess with anything unnecessary. She worked as a fitness trainer because she was genuinely interested in health and nutrition. All of that made her perfect for Peter.

If he could just get the two of them to see that.

"Didn't quite believe you had a place right on the ocean." She flung her arms out and took a deep breath, taking in the pure sea air.

Vince handed over a bottle of the beer he had been saving for his friends' arrival. "It's not my place. It belongs to the rest of the family, too. My grandparents bought before the market boom."

Dani took the beer and peered at the label for a moment. "You remembered," she laughed, twisting the top off the bottle of Blue Moon.

He saluted her with his own open bottle. "The only kind of moon you were interested in seeing at Angie's New Year's party."

"Oh God, don't even remind me." Dani shook her head. Her long hair was spilling out of its ponytail. Vince wanted to curl his fingers around the red strands and tuck them behind her ears.

"Where is Peter? He's coming, right?"

"If his piece of junk car doesn't conk out on the parkway, he should be here soon. He left right after you did." Vince peered down the street, mistaking every set of headlights for Peter's ancient Camry. Without Peter here, they felt incomplete. The trio had been best friends since high school.

"He should have called me. I would have driven him down." Dani mimicked his action, looking for Peter's car.

"You know Peter." Vince shrugged. Peter was his best friend and he loved him, but the guy had a stubborn streak a mile wide.

Before Dani could respond, they both heard the deep rumble distinctive of

old cars, Peter's car in particular. The rusty junker came around the corner, still intact somehow, and slid into the space on the street, blocking in the driveway. Not that it mattered. Vince didn't expect to do any driving this weekend -- unless, of course, his plan worked and he needed to make himself scarce.

He'd cross that bridge if and when it came to that.

Vince trotted down the steps, leaving his beer behind. He bit back a laugh as Peter slid out of the car, wiping his hand against his sweaty forehead. "Let me guess, you still haven't gotten the AC fixed?"

"I have AC," Peter protested, his blond hair sticking up every which way. "We call it fifty-five/four."

Four windows open, driving fifty-five miles per hour. Vince grinned at the old joke. "You can make fifty-five in that piece of junk?"

"Just for that, you're carrying my suitcase in." Peter tossed the battered blue bag Vince's way. Of course, Peter carried in his art supplies, his paints, and his portable easel. He didn't trust anyone else to carry those, not even his best friends.

"Don't make me take back giving you the only room with a balcony," Vince said.

Peter's face lit up. "Balcony? Lead the way, good sir."

"What can I carry?" Dani asked, beer bottle still dangling from one hand.

Peter gave her a shy smile. Lately he always seemed so tentative and polite when she was around. Yet another reason for Vince to get involved. Someone needed to push these two together. "Um, how about the bags of chips in the back seat?"

"Oh, you brought food." Dani reached in to pull out several shopping bags. "I knew there was a reason I liked you."

Peter didn't respond, but Vince caught the blush on his cheeks. Sometimes the guy was just too sweet for his own good. "Come on, we'll scope out Peter's room first," Vince said, "so we can enjoy the balcony before he falls asleep."

Vince led them inside, feeling a bit proud as he showed off the house, giving a quick tour of the first floor before leading his friends upstairs. The balcony in Peter's room looked out over the ocean and the rocks that separated the house from the pounding waves.

They leaned over the railing, looking out at the horizon. At night, the sea blended with the sky, stretching out to forever like they were perched on the edge of the world. Both Peter and Dani had the same expression of awe on their faces, lips parted, eyes wide, captured by the spell of the ocean.

Something stirred in his gut, and Vince found he had to force himself to look away from them, too enraptured in the sharp angles in Dani's face and the way the shadows made Peter look so much younger. He shook his head, smiling to himself. Okay, so he had some gorgeous friends.

"This'll do?" Vince asked. "Think you'll get a painting out of it?"

Peter laughed. "One or two. Maybe even something I can sell."

Vince hip-checked him fondly. "Maybe. Then you might be able to afford a real car."

Peter's only response to that was to punch Vince -- hard -- in the shoulder.

"Now where's my room, sport?" Dani turned. "Since you gave Peter the one with the best view."

"Hey, now." Vince jerked his head toward the sliding glass doors. "I do know how to treat a lady. Gave you the master suite."

He had an ulterior motive, Vince had to admit. If this plan worked and he managed to get his friends to hook up, they'd need the one room in the place

with a California king. And he might be a bit old-fashioned, but Vince thought the lady should have the option to do the inviting or the refusing. Thus, giving Dani the biggest bedroom worked out perfectly.

She dropped her duffel on the bed and moved to pull back the curtains, still marveling over the view. "You know, I could get used to this."

He laughed. "You have until Monday." And that was exactly how long Vince had to convince Dani to give Peter a chance. Peter changed the subject every time Vince brought it up.

And whenever he even got close to the topic with Dani, she just laughed and told him he was imagining things.

Maybe he could move things along with the help of some magic cookies. It couldn't hurt, really. They'd been dancing around each other for years. If Vince couldn't talk them into it, well, maybe a good, old-fashioned love spell would do the trick.

Vince had preheated the oven and set everything out on the kitchen counter. He had put his ingredients in a row, perfectly in order for what he would need first. Peter had often called him obsessive compulsive, and Vince agreed; he had a thing about organization.

But now he just stared down at the recipe book, the ceiling fan whirring above him. He was going to have to call Angie about this, and Vince really didn't want to do that, especially at this time of the morning. He'd risk calling her cell; she wouldn't have turned it on if she was still sleeping.

"Don't tell me. This time you actually locked yourself out of the house."

He rolled his eyes, but was glad she'd answered at least. "Not yet."

"Shouldn't you be on the beach having fun? Why the hell are you calling me at the crack of dawn?"

"It's not that early." Vince leaned against the counter as he spoke.

"Spill, little brother."

Now that it came right down to it, Vince found he had a little bit of trouble admitting he was attempting something Angie specifically told him not to do. "Well, I'm baking these cookies..."

"Damn it, Vince, what did I tell you about trying the recipes in the book?"

"What's the problem, Angie, it's not like the spells actually work, right?" He challenged her, but didn't feel any better when she remained silent. "Listen, it's the love cookie spell. You know Dani and Peter are perfect for each other."

She choked out a laugh. "So you're trying magical cookies to get them together?"

"I've tried everything else."

"All right, I accept your altruistic reason," Angie said. "What's the problem? Don't have a cookie cutter?"

"No, it's this last part of the recipe. I need to include a special ingredient for each person the spell is intended for. That doesn't mean toenail clippings or anything, does it?"

"Vincenzo, didn't we have a discussion about stereotypes? Are you expecting eye of newt?"

Vince set the book carefully to the side of his ingredients. "No, just an explanation."

"You have no imagination. You have to pick an ingredient -- a food item -- to represent each of your friends. Something that makes you think of them every time you smell or taste it."

Vince looked over the flour, sugar, and eggs he'd already measured out into

tiny dishes.

"Something like a spice, maybe?"

"That could work," Angie agreed. "Any other questions?"

"I'll give you a call when I attempt the 'take over the world' cake."

"Funny." She hung up on him.

Vince looked over the spice rack hanging on the wall, wondering what the heck he was going to pick for each of his friends. His hand hovered over the ginger for a moment, thinking of Dani's red hair, but he pulled away, sure that didn't quite represent her.

Almost as if called up by his thoughts, the front door opened and Dani appeared with wet hair and sand caked up her calves. Sweat glistened on her skin, pink from the flush of the sun.

She held her running shoes in one hand, her feet bare on the tile floor, revealing painted toenails.

Vince felt warmth rise in his cheeks at the sight of her and turned away. He didn't want to get caught staring at his friend's girl, even if she wasn't really Peter's girl yet. "Jogging on the beach?"

"Running on sand is a great workout." She came over to the kitchenette.

"I prefer swimming." He grinned. She knew perfectly well that's how he and Peter first met, both on the swim team freshman year.

Dani raised an eyebrow at the smorgasbord of ingredients. "Are you baking cookies? In summer time?"

"It's always cookie time," he told her. "And we have air conditioning. It won't get too hot in here."

She moaned as she stretched her arms above her head. He watched as the

motion caused her t-shirt to ride up, revealing pale skin. Vince's hand twitched with the desire to touch. "Why have AC when you can throw open your windows and get that lovely sea breeze?"

"You wouldn't say that if it was August during a heat wave." Vince turned away, his cheeks burning, and poured the flour into his mixing bowl. "Feel like waking Peter up? We can go out for breakfast, then sit on the beach 'til we bake."

Dani reached inside the fridge and pulled out a bottle of water. "You kidding? He's been up since dawn, I think, painting the sunrise or something."

Oh. Vince hoped Peter hadn't heard any of his conversation with Angie.

"I'll tell him you're up. I'm sure he's looking forward to challenging you on the high seas.

You did bring your Speedo, right?" Those last words were shot at him from halfway up the stairs.

Vince blew her a raspberry, and she laughed all the way up.

He turned back to his spice rack, fingers finding the bottle of cloves. Yes, he thought, that would do nicely for Dani. Vince couldn't picture anything else that made him think only of her.

Still, he had to come up with something for Peter. Frowning at the little setup he had on the counter, Vince decided the cookies could wait until that afternoon and packed everything away.

They'd go better after dinner anyway. Lying on the beach always made him hungry.

Vince hadn't brought his Speedo, but to his chagrin, Peter had. He blamed the swimwear for Peter trouncing him in the water, beating him to the buoy three

times in a row.

"One last time, to the shore!" Vince gasped over the waves.

"You're on!" Peter took off, executing a perfect breaststroke, as if it hadn't been years since they competed.

Vince struggled to keep up, determined to win this time. The salt water stung his eyes and clogged his ears, but still he soldiered on, pacing himself until the last stretch where he caught up with Peter.

They reached the sand at the same time, laughing together as Vince leaned over onto his knees, gasping for breath. He'd never felt more out of shape, especially when he looked up at Peter, who wasn't even breathing hard. The water streamed off of Peter's lean form, glistening on his pecs and abs. When did skinny little Peter get this toned body? He'd obviously kept up with the swimming where Vince hadn't, but still, where had his friend been hiding that muscular self?

Arousal coiled in his gut, surprising him with the sudden intensity. Vince was glad for his baggy swimsuit. He stayed hunched over, brushing the sand off of his calves. "You've been practicing."

Peter grinned at him. "I love swimming. I thought you did, too."

"I do, I just haven't had the time. Work, you know. Not everyone can make a living sitting around painting pictures all day long."

"You seem to be the one doing all the sitting," Peter said, with a teasing poke at Vince's belly, which he sucked in immediately.

"Hey, ticklish here!"

"I remember," Peter said, with an odd tone to his voice. Just when Vince was attempting to figure out what the hell he meant by that, Dani came bounding up to them, a towel in each hand.

"Had enough of your strongman competition for one day?" she asked.

Vince snatched a towel, grateful for the cover to hide his untimely erection. Dani, in a two-piece bathing suit showing off her curves, did nothing to help it subside. Damn it, this weekend was not about Vince getting his rocks off. "Yeah. I think I'm going to head back to the house, grab some snacks. You guys want anything?"

"Just some water. I finished the last one in the cooler," Dani said.

He nodded. "You got it."

Vince escaped, aware that his friends watched him make his way up the beach, through the crowds of tourists that flocked here for the long weekend, the unofficial opening of the season.

Honestly, sometimes he preferred this place in winter, how the sand felt under his shoes while the icy wind blew over the Atlantic. The lack of people on the beach was only part of the appeal.

He walked barefoot the two blocks back to the shore house, kicking sand from his feet before entering. The spice rack caught his eye as he moved to the kitchen to grab the water. Peter had surprised him; Vince hadn't expected that sudden spark of fire underneath Peter's normally shy exterior. Vince took the chili powder off the shelf, wondering how the hell these cookies were going to end up tasting. Magic didn't seem to take flavor into account.

Unless... he looked over the recipe one more time. Vince pulled the cocoa powder from the cabinet, kept there for hot chocolate during the winter months. He grinned and started up the cookie process again, bottles of water forgotten.

Vince rolled a bottle of beer between his hands, too nervous to even take a sip. He'd put out his magic cookies once they'd gotten back home from their after-dinner walk on the beach.

They'd eaten dinner at one of the local tiny Italian pizzerias, the closest to homemade you could get. He still couldn't tell the difference between his grandmother's gravy and the sauce at Trentino's. They'd left so full that the walk back had been necessary.

Dusk had just started to descend, giving everything a warm glow. The ocean deepened into a darker blue than seemed possible. If they kept the lights from the boardwalk to their backs, it looked as if the world went on forever into that horizon.

"You guys aren't going to believe this, but I'm hungry!" Dani said when they made it back to the house.

"It's the salt water," Peter told her.

Vince took the opportunity to set out his plate of cookies, giving Dani a look that said 'See?'

Baking cookies was a good idea!' although he still didn't know if they were any good. He didn't want to risk eating one himself.

Peter sat back in one of the lawn chairs as they lounged on the balcony, a sketchbook on his lap, but he didn't seem to be drawing anything specific. Vince wished he'd just eat a cookie already.

"Huh," Dani said after her first bite.

"Now that's a ringing endorsement," Peter said, finally looking up from his doodling.

She shook her head and finished the cookie before answering. "It's not bad at all. Just flavors I didn't expect in a dessert."

"Have one." Vince pushed the plate over toward Peter who blinked wide blue eyes at him.

"You first. I'm not falling for that trick again."

"Christ, Peter, we were fourteen!"

"Are you implying that you've grown up any?"

Damn it, Vince couldn't back down from a challenge. He frowned down at the cookies, then finally grabbed the smallest one and popped it into his mouth. The recipe, and incantation that went with it, had been made especially for Peter and Dani. These shouldn't have any effect on him at all. Now, if only Peter would eat one.

"Huh," Vince said as he chewed. "Not half bad." The cocoa and the chili did go spectacularly together, with the hint of cloves to surprise the palate.

"Fine." Peter picked up a cookie. "Don't want to hear you whining about it all night." He bit down carefully, his hair falling to cover his face as he bent his head, hiding his expression from Vince and Dani, who waited for his opinion.

When Peter reached for a second cookie, Vince knew he had him.

Dani propped her feet up on the railing of the balcony, throwing her head back to take a long drink from her bottle. Vince watched as she swallowed, the hollow of her throat working, the delicate skin stretching. He wanted to press his lips there, feel her pulse beneath him.

"This worked out much better than your cooking experiments in college," Dani said when she had finished, the empty bottle propped in her lap.

Vince cleared his throat, still too caught up for a moment to respond in kind. "I can cook. I can cook pretty darn well," he protested.

"And that's why you're doing corporate shill work." Dani reached out with her free hand to run her fingers up and down the back of Vince's arm.

He stilled. "It pays the bills."

"But it doesn't make you happy." Peter flipped the cover on his sketchbook and propped it on the tray table with the cookies.

"What is this, guys, an intervention?" Vince tried to joke. The last thing he wanted to talk about was his boring-ass job. Vince pulled at the collar of his shirt, feeling confined despite the slight breeze.

Peter leaned over and curled his fingers over Vince's bare knee, his skin cool against Vince's too warm flesh. "Seriously, Vince, what would you rather be doing? Sitting in a cubicle all day doesn't make you happy."

"It's work. It's not supposed to make you happy."

"That's a copout, Vince. If you could do anything, what would you do?" Dani asked.

"I don't know," Vince began. "I love it down here. Love the ocean. Can't exactly make a living as a beach bum."

"No, but you can..." Peter thought for a moment. "Open a bed and breakfast. I'd paint murals on all the walls for you. Dani can offer aerobics classes for your guests. And you can bake 'em cookies."

Vince laughed. "Sounds like a nice dream." He covered Peter's hand with his own, aware of Dani's fingers massaging his shoulder gently. He shouldn't be here. He should give them time to be alone so the cookies could do their magic. "Maybe I should get to bed, leave you guys alone."

Dani looked over at Peter and just grinned. It occurred to Vince that the two of them sharing secret looks was a good thing. It meant they were working together, but he didn't like the predatory gleam in Dani's eyes.

The sea breeze wafting in from the crashing waves beneath them did nothing to cool him, and

Vince felt hot, his cheeks burning. Peter turned his hand over, lacing his fingers together with Vince's.

"Guys?" he said, wincing as his voice cracked.

Peter slid his other hand up the inseam of Vince's shorts, coming close to dangerous territory. Vince grabbed Peter's hand, meaning to pull it off, but before he could do that, Dani slid out of her seat to trace her lips along the length of Vince's jaw. "We're tired of waiting," she told him.

"Waiting for what?" he blurted.

While Vince was distracted by Dani, Peter had managed to slide a hand underneath Vince's shirt, shocking him with the sudden skin on skin contact. Vince snapped his head to the right, his mouth open. Peter took the opportunity to lean forward and capture Vince's lips with his own, the kiss hot and searing. Then Peter pulled away after a final little flick of his tongue against Vince's swollen bottom lip.

"Mmm, lemme taste." Dani cupped his face with one hand and turned Vince back to face her, taking her own turn nibbling at his lips until he opened up to her as well. She tasted bitter like the beer, but with a hint of spice from the cookies.

Vince wondered if somehow he'd slipped more than just herbs into the cookies. He made a mental note to call Angie and ask just what she had stocked the spice rack with. "Dani, Peter..."

he said as Dani pulled away, still keeping her hand on his cheek.

"Yes, those are our names." Peter snickered from his side.

"I thought you two would be great together," he said, still a little shell-shocked.

"Why stop at two?" Dani said, her breath warm on his ear. "C'mon."

She pulled Vince to his feet, and he stumbled for a moment, feeling dizzy. Peter stepped up behind Vince and slid both arms around Vince's waist, keeping him from falling. Dani stood on her tiptoes, drawing Vince's shirt upward as she moved to kiss him again.

Vince didn't know where to put his hands. This must be some crazy dream. He couldn't believe that was Peter nuzzling the back of his neck, fingers playing with the waistband of his shorts, and that was Dani, her mouth taking his in a fierce kiss. He finally gave in, one hand behind him to pull Peter closer to him, the other wrapping around Dani, skimming down her back.

He could feel Peter's erection pressed against him, and Vince wanted to know if Dani felt that same arousal, if she wanted this as badly as he and Peter. So he gave in to the impulse to break away, to swing Dani into his arms and carry her to the bed that taunted them from only a few feet away.

She laughed as he did it, tan legs wrapping around him and nearly tripping him up, but Vince managed to drop her onto the bed without falling. Dani looked up at him, cheeks flushed, hazel eyes wide with desire and yet so vulnerable at the same time.

"You want this?" he asked her. He turned to include Peter in his question.
"Both of you?"

With me? At the same time?"

"You're talking like you've never seen HBO," Dani said, as she arched an eyebrow.

Peter came up behind him, his face dropping, his eyes looking so sad that Vince felt like he had kicked a puppy. "Vince," Peter said, "you don't want this?"

"I didn't say that," Vince protested.

"Just..." Peter pulled back. Vince could see him retreating, and he hated it.
"The guy thing, if you don't..."

Vince hooked Peter's arm, pulled him forward. He couldn't let Peter continue that train of thought. It wasn't like Vince had ever admitted he could be bisexual, not even to himself. But now, now it was crystal clear that he had the capacity to love both of his friends.

Peter made a muffled squeak when Vince wrapped his fingers around Peter's long, blond hair to hold him in place. Vince kissed him soundly. "You kidding?" he asked in a raspy voice.

"It's like my craziest fantasy come to life."

"Mmm," Dani said, still seated on the bed, though now her shirt gaped open at the top. "Do that again. Love watching you guys kiss."

Vince obliged, loving the feel of Peter's stubble against his own as their cheeks brushed ever so slightly together. Vince stroked a thumb against Peter's cheek, tracing the fine white lines of the scar along his jaw line. Peter closed his eyes, and Vince took his lips, in control this time, able to enjoy the feel of Peter, the taste of him, something sweet and wild at the same time.

"More," Peter whispered, pulling away long enough to tug at Vince's shirt.

Vince tore it off, needing the fabric off, needing to feel Peter's skin against his own. He couldn't forget Dani's eyes on them, so it was almost as if they performed just for her.

"Mmm," Peter murmured, skimming his fingers up Vince's chest, stopping in the dusting of hair to tweak Vince's nipples.

Vince gasped sharply. Though he'd fantasized about it many times, he'd never actually been with a man, never had this feeling that another knew exactly how to play with his body. He explored Peter in turn, the hairless chest and smooth skin over tight muscles. Suddenly he needed Dani with them, needed to feel her softness and curves just as he touched Peter's muscles and hard angles.

He kicked off his shorts, pulling Peter with him as he made for the bed. Dani laughed as they curled around her. "Eager, much?" She tugged on Peter's khakis. "Get these off."

"You're one to talk," Vince said. He pulled her shirt open and stroked one peaked nipple through cotton before dipping to kiss between her breasts.

"Vince," she whispered as he slipped the shirt off her shoulders, undoing the back of her bra and baring her completely.

Peter, on the other side, had started work on Dani's shorts, undoing the fly. She threw her head back as Vince suckled at her, stroking her firm breasts, wanting to hear her moan. She did, but only after Peter pulled off her pants and dipped his head between the V of her legs.

"Fuck," Vince murmured at the sight of Peter's blond head bobbing at the very center of her.

He felt dizzy again, the blood rushing to his cock making it hard against his thigh as he knelt on the bed. He moved to the end table, remembering he had stocked all the bedrooms with condoms and lube.

Vince pulled out a strip of condoms and tossed them on the bed, leaving the bottle of lube on top of the table for now. He wasn't sure Dani needed it, but he'd find out himself for sure.

"Switch," he said, and nudged Peter gently, wanting to taste Dani.

Peter slipped away, and Vince didn't notice until he felt warm suction around his dick just as he bent to lick at the sensitive skin between Dani's legs. "Oh," he whispered, and Dani's hips

jerked, as if seeking him out. He used his fingers to open her up, spreading her for his tongue.

Her flavor exploded on his taste buds, another sensation that nearly overwhelmed him tonight.

Vince could barely concentrate as Peter continued sucking on his cock. When talented fingers slid behind his balls, Vince paused and pulled reluctantly away from Dani. "Peter?"

"Trust me?" Peter asked.

Vince did trust him, he trusted Peter and Dani both. He couldn't help but let them take the lead, let Peter stretch him with gentle fingers.

He put himself in their hands, sinking into Dani, who opened for him just as he opened for Peter.

Vince had to close his eyes at the sensation; being filled and surrounded by heat was almost too much. They held him together, encircled him no matter which way he moved.

It shouldn't have been so strange -- all through his life Vince had depended on these two people. They'd given him friendship and love for so long that maybe this was inevitable. They were meant to be lovers. Who cared what society thought? Why should there be only two anyway?

"C'mon, Vince, c'mon," Dani chanted, and he was lost in her as she clamped around him, pulsing as she came. Peter shouted and followed Vince, the three of them tumbling down onto the bed in a mixed-up tangle of limbs.

They should move to the bigger bed, Vince thought absently, his thoughts breaking as sleep tugged at him. He didn't fight it, just snuggled against whichever lover was closest and let the darkness claim him.

Vince woke to a cool sea breeze slipping over his body while bright sunlight stabbed his eyelids, tearing him from his rest. He blinked and moved out of the light, causing Peter to mumble behind him. At the reminder, Vince stilled, glancing around the bedroom, his heart thumping at the memory. It had actually happened. He'd slept with both of his best friends last night -- at the same time!

They had left the balcony doors open, too tired after the long day and good sex to do anything as difficult as clean up after themselves. Vince's eyes lit on the platter of cookies still sitting on the tray table so innocently. He felt sick, his stomach churned, and he pulled himself out of the bed, stumbling onto the hardwood floor with his bare feet.

He snagged his shorts before he left, not quite that out of it to wander around the house naked. Vince retreated downstairs, as far from the bedrooms as he could get. How the hell could he have done such a thing?

Honestly, he hadn't expected the cookies to work; Vince didn't believe in magic spells. He might try one for a lark, but really he had more trust in his own powers of persuasion than in anything supernatural. But somehow that damn recipe had gotten the three of them into bed together. It must have been the cocoa, he thought, realizing he had added a third ingredient to represent himself. It must have thrown everything out of whack.

Vince grabbed his cell phone from the counter and pulled up Angie's number. As soon as she answered, he said, "I'm a terrible person."

"There is not enough coffee in the world to get me to deal with you right now..."

"Angie!"

"Vince, what part of me not being a morning person don't you understand?"

"And yet you always seem to answer when I call... That's not what's important right now."

He looked over his shoulder, making sure the stairway was clear before going back to the window, staring out at the ocean. "Why didn't you tell me the spells in that book were real?"

There was silence on the other end of the line for a moment, and Vince thought he'd lost the connection. Then Angie finally said, "What do you mean?"

"The cookies, Angie, the love potion crap. It worked, all of it." He didn't mention the more delicate details, how he had ended up in bed with his friends instead of just playing matchmaker.

She laughed, but he could hear the strain. "Vince, you've been trying to get

them together for ages, maybe it just finally clicked for them."

"No, Angie, trust me." The guilt formed a knot in his belly. Vince rested his head against the glass pane of the window and closed his eyes. "They wouldn't... they wouldn't do this normally."

"Vince, listen to me. Even if you did everything in that spell book right, the recipes wouldn't work, not unless you had a touch of the gift like Grandma."

"And you?" Why else would Angie have known about the book, how the intricacies of the recipes worked? Had Grandma trained her? Vince felt left out, as if there was a whole part of his family he knew nothing about. "It runs in families, doesn't it? What's to say I don't have this talent? Am I a witch, Sis?"

"You're my brother," she said finally, which didn't answer the damn question, but Vince let it pass.

"Could I do this?" he asked, wanting her desperately to say no, that Vince hadn't forced his friends into a course of action they wouldn't normally take, all because of some stupid cookies.

"Could I make them--?"

"Vince!" Angie's voice reached out like a slap in the face. "What recipe was it again?"

He pushed himself away from the window and pulled out the book from where he had

tucked it away. Vince had marked the page with a colored sticky and found it again easily. "To make true love reveal itself," he read to her.

Angie let out a relieved sigh. "You didn't make them do anything, Vince. The recipe will only get people together if there's already a mutual attraction."

"You're saying there's a recipe that will do otherwise?" he asked.

"Vince, put the book away and stop fucking with things you don't understand!" she snapped.

"You lucked out this time."

Wait, Vince thought, if the spell only revealed true feelings, did that mean everything that happened last night was real?

"I told you he was freaking out."

Vince whirled around at the sound of Dani's voice. She and Peter stood at the top of the stairs. She wore nothing but Vince's shirt and it reached mid-thigh, only enhancing those long legs. Peter's sweats hung low on his hips, so low Vince knew it wouldn't take much to drop them and bare all. He hungered to touch both of them again, now that he knew for sure.

"Angie, I'm going to have to call you back." Vince cut the connection. "I'm not freaking out."

"So you always call your sister right after you have sex?" Dani looked doubtful. "Vince, that's kinda creepy. I don't know if I can deal with that every time we're all together."

Peter had a little smirk on his face as she spoke. It took Vince a moment to process exactly what she had said. "Wait. You guys want. Like, a relationship?"

Dani came down the stairs, her bare feet balancing carefully on the slippery steps. Vince wanted to start at those pink toes, nuzzle up those long legs until he could dive between them and made her moan just like she had last night.

"Try that again. This time, use complete sentences." She grabbed his head and pulled him down for a kiss, her lips minty sweet, probably from toothpaste.

Vince barely came up for air before Peter came over to take his turn, forcing Vince's lips open with his own, biting gently on the bottom lip. Vince never

expected Peter to kiss like this, to just take.

Peter winked as he pulled away to lean down and kiss Dani. Vince felt arousal curl in his gut at the sight, surprised at his own voyeuristic streak. "I guess you guys have thought about this?"

All that worry, the fear that he had inadvertently forced his friends into this, just dissipated.

"A bit," Peter said. "I didn't think you'd go for it, but you surprised us, Vince. I'm really glad you did."

It would have been Peter he would have hurt, if Vince had rejected them. He gave thanks to his magic cookies -- otherwise, he knew, he might have reacted differently, unable to see the love between the three of them for what it was, something special and rare.

Vince wondered if the cookies really were magic, or if he'd acted simply because he thought they were. He might have to test out another recipe or two, just to be sure. Right now, though, he had more important things to take care of.

"I'm glad I did, too." He matched Peter's grin.

"Wonder if it's early enough that no one would notice if we went skinny dipping at the beach," Dani said

Vince laughed. "I know a little place behind the rocks where we can go."

"No sex on the beach!" Peter declared. "Sand ends up everywhere."

"How do you know that?" Vince teased, as he threw his arm around Peter's waist. Peter might blush at the notion, and he had a good point about the sand, but he didn't say anything about having sex in the ocean.

And they had two whole days left of the weekend. Vince knew he was going to end up

borrowing the shore house more often; it was only the very beginning of summer.

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About the Author

CC Bridges is a mild-mannered librarian by day, but by night she writes about worlds of adventure and romance. When she's not busy solving puzzles in an escape room, she can be found diving into comics or binge-watching superhero movies. She writes surrounded by books, spare computing equipment, a fluffy dog, and a long-suffering husband in the state of New Jersey. In 2011, she won a Rainbow Award for best gay sci-fi/futuristic novel.

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