The boat silently glided into the cove towards its target, a fallen tree in the water. Ashlyn sat in the casting seat while she controlled the trolling motor with her foot. She readied her rod. With the flick of her wrist she sent the bass jig just to the side of the log and let it fall before jigging it in. No takers this time but she knew the fish were there.

“Hello. Help.” The voice called out startling Ashlyn. She looked around, failing to find the source. The she saw the brush up the bank start to rustle.


It was a woman. The woman’s hair got snagged on a snarl of underbrush. “Fuck.” Was the woman’s response as she pulled at her hair. Suddenly by the movement of the brush Ashlyn could tell that the woman had fallen. She saw a foot and a hand as gravity delivered its latest victim to its end game. The woman tumbled out into the lake where it she finally came to a stop in waist deep water.

Ashlyn just sat there staring at life’s latest victim while trying not to laugh. “Need some help?”
Catch Of The Day

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“Hello. Hello. Help.” The voice called out startling Ashlyn. She looked around, failing to find the source. Then she saw the brush up the bank start to rustle. Ashlyn grabbed her oar. It could be trouble.


It was a woman. The woman’s hair got snagged on a snarl of underbrush. “Fuck.” Was the woman’s response as she pulled at her hair. Suddenly the head disappeared. By the movement of the brush Ashlyn could tell that the woman had fallen and was now tumbling down the steep bank. She saw a foot and a hand occasionally as gravity delivered its latest victim to its end game. The woman tumbled out of the brush and into the lake where she finally came to a stop in waist deep water.

Ashlyn just sat there staring at life’s latest victim while trying not to laugh. She reeled in her line and stowed her rod. “Need some help?”

“'I think I need everything.”

“Well swim over to the boat. I’ll help you in.”

The woman made it to the boat and Ashlyn hoisted her over the side where the woman fell in to a heap on the floor gasping for breath. Ashlyn handed the woman a dry hand towel she had. “Sorry. That’s all I have.”

“Thank you.” The woman replied as she began toweling off her face. Once the woman settled Ashlyn held out her hand. “My name’s Ashlyn Harris.”

The woman took her hand and said, “I’m lost.”
“Your name is Lost? Wow. Your parents didn’t do you any favors.”

“What? No. I am literally lost. My name is Ali.”

“Gotta say Ali is a whole lot better than lost.” Ashlyn chuckled.

“I’ll agree with that.” Ali replied good naturedly despite her predicament.

“How did you happen to be in the woods?”


“Ok. Got an address or something I can go off here?” Ashlyn could not keep the smile off her face.

“I do but when I tell people the always say, oh the old Smith place.”

“Oh, the old Smith place.” Ashlyn replied so as not break form with everyone else Ali had talked to. “I know exactly where you live.”

“Well that makes one of us. Any chance you could help me get back there?”

“By land or by lake?” Ashlyn asked.


“We could motor down the lake bank to your house. There should be a path there leading up to the house or I could motor over to my dock and then drive you home. Your choice.”

“Well I feel bad about interrupting your fishing. I guess I’ll go with you dropping me off on the
bank, but I have kinda had it with these paths. They are like a maze.”

“I believe my fishing is done. All that splashing around you did has scared all the fish away. Let’s go by land. I can drive you right up to your door.” Ashlyn was enjoying this and going by land she would extend her time with Ali.

“Sorry about that. I will be happy to see that door. I think I have been wandering around for two hours.”

“Two hours? You didn’t get far.” Ashlyn teased while pulling up the trolling motor and stowing the rest of her gear.

“Well I’d like to think I made it part way back before getting lost. I know I passed an apple tree a couple of times. I was beginning to think that was going to be my lunch.” Ali said while settling herself into the seat next to the cockpit.

Ashlyn sat behind the wheel. Fired up the engine and backed out of the cove. She motored towards her dock at a gentle pace. “Those apples are nasty. So what’s your story if you don’t mind me asking? I knew that the kids sold the house after Alice died. What brings you here?”

“I got grant money to pay for college and the agreement was that I would teach in an underprivileged area to settle that debt. I thought it would be inner city but surprise surprise here I am in rural South Carolina.”

“A teacher, hum. I had heard there was a new one at the school. Fourth grade right?”

“Word gets around here. Yep, fourth grade. I have a month before school starts. I’m looking forward to it.”

“Here’s my dock. Just let me get the boat squared away and I’ll drive you to that door you’re so happy about seeing.” Ashlyn said as she pulled the boat gently to the dock and set about tying it up and unloading her gear.

“Let me help you carry your stuff. This is a tackle box right?” Ali inquired.
“Yes. Is this the closest you have been to one?” Ashlyn said with a smile. A smile that had been plastered on her face since Ali had hit the water.

“When I was younger my Grandfather used to take me fishing. I’m not sure what we caught but he called them sunnies and gills.” Ali couldn’t help but notice how easy the conversation with Ashlyn was.

“Small pan fish. Good for teaching kids how to fish. They are willing biters and taste good too.”

“We didn’t eat them. I would have cried my eyes out if we had killed them.” Ali admitted.

“I can see that. I always feel a little bad but if you harvest to feed yourself I’m good with it. If you harvest for trophies then not so good with it. Here’s my truck. Hop in and I’ll have you home in minutes.”

“Great. I need a shower and dry clothes. I imagine I look like a wreck.”

“Actually you’re sporting the drowned rat look pretty well. Not as good as me but I have had more practice.” Ashlyn boasted with a wink.

Ali just blushed and looked out the window. They were pulling into her driveway now. Ali didn’t want this to end. She had been there two weeks and this was the first real contact she had had with anybody.

“Hey…..uummm……if you don’t have any plans how about I fix you some lunch after I get cleaned up since you have been so nice helping me out an all.” Ali crossed her fingers. “It won’t be much. Just a sandwich and chips but it would be nice to have some company.”

“No real plans. Lunch would be nice.” Ashlyn couldn’t believe her luck.

They entered the house. “Would you like to sit on the back deck while I shower? It has a nice view. I have pop and beer. Which would you like?” Ali offered.

“It’s 5:00 somewhere so I’ll take the beer.” Ashlyn joked. “After all it is Saturday.”
“Beers in the fridge. Help yourself. I’m going to hit the shower.” With that Ali walked down the hall.

Ashlyn wandered into the kitchen and found the beer. She looked around. Ali had obviously had been painting. Alice Smith stuck with white walls. The hues were nice. The furnishing were a little on the slim side but they really fit with the rustic charm of the house. Ashlyn settled herself on the deck. The view was nice. The old porch swing was still under the oak tree in the yard. Ashlyn had sat on that swing many a time as a child.

It wasn’t long before Ali walked out the door carrying two plates and a beer for herself. Her wet hair up in a bun. “Want to sit at the table?”

“Wow. You’re fast.” Ashlyn said with surprise.

“You learn that sharing an apartment with three other people.” Ali informed. “I just love this deck. One of the main reasons I bought this house.”

“Glad you like it. I built it.”


“Yes. Got a little rag tag crew. They are almost more trouble than their worth.” Ashlyn laughed. Ashlyn couldn’t help but notice how Ali’s nose got a little crinkle in the bridge when she laughed. It was cute. Hell, Ali was beautiful and she didn’t seem to know it.

“Do you just do exterior work? There are a few things I would like to change in the kitchen and bath. I want to do it myself but I have a feeling I’ll need some help.” Ali just loved that smile on Ashlyn’s face and that dimple was a killer.

“Exterior and interior. I’d love to give you a hand. When you’re ready to buy anything let me know and I’ll go with you. I get a business discount at most of the hardware stores around here. It’s not much but it helps.” Ashlyn offered.

“Gotta say you’re the best catch I’ve had in a while.” Ashlyn teased.

Was that flirting? Ali pulled out her phone. “Would you please enter your number? I don’t know when I am going to get started on the changes but it would be nice to have someone to call if I get lost again.” Ali held her breath. Was that too much?

“Sure.” Ashlyn said as she took Ali’s phone. “Call any time. It doesn’t have to be business related.” Ashlyn handed the phone back. “Send me a text so I have your number?”

Ashlyn’s phone vibrated. She looked at the text. It read, splish splash. Ashlyn sent one back. Not your ordinary bath, it read.

Ali laughed as she took a sip of her beer. This is going great.

“I notice you frown a bit when you take a drink of your beer. You don’t have to drink it just because I am.”

“I’m usually a wine drinker. The stores around here don’t have much to offer. That little grocery store is a hoot. I keep expecting Andy Griffith to walk in every time I’m there.” Ali froze. “Sorry. I’m not making fun of the town. I really do like it. It’s quaint in a good way and the people are so friendly. Please…” Ali didn’t know what else to say. She felt she might have hurt Ashlyn’s feelings.

Ashlyn reached out her hand and placed it on Ali’s arm. “I didn’t take it that way. Mean. I’ve only known you for two hours, but I’d bet you don’t have a mean bone in your body.” Ali relaxed.

“Most people go into the city for groceries every week or two and only get staples to tide them over at our little store. I always expect to see Barney Fife walk in the door.” Ashlyn joked to smooth over Ali’s anxiety. “Before I wear out my welcome I really should be on my way. Thanks for the hospitality.” Ashlyn said as she rose to her feet.

They carried their plates into the kitchen and walked out the front door to Ashlyn’s truck. “You have my number. Give me a call if you need any help, directions, or just want to talk ok?”
“I’m sure I will. Thanks again for fishing me out of the lake. You’re a life saver.”

“And you, are the catch of the day.” Ashlyn said as she put the truck in gear and backed out of the drive.
Ashlyn was driving past Hanks old two pump gas station when she noticed Ali there. Ali was standing by her car at the pump looking confused. Ashlyn bet she knew why and pulled in. “It’s another one of those old timey quaint things we keep around to confuse you city slickers. We’re a mean bunch.” Ashlyn teased as she walked over to Ali.

Ali turned around and relief washed over her face. “Ashlyn thank God. You’re right on time again. Help me out with this. How does it work?”

“Take this lever and flip it down and then pull out the nozzle and place it in your tank filler.” Ashlyn demonstrated. Ali placed the nozzle in her car. “Now flip this smaller lever up and punch the button on the grade you want.” Ali followed Ashlyn’s directions. “Now squeeze the handle on the nozzle and your good to go.”

As the tank was filling the pump gave off a small ringing noise and Ali jumped. Ashlyn couldn’t help but laugh. “It dings at every gallon. In the old days an attendant would do the pumping. People would pull in and ask for a certain number of gallons and the pump would ring out each one so the attendant wouldn’t have to watch the pump. They could just count the rings. The other pump doesn’t ring any more. I like this one the best. Call me old fashion but I can’t help it.”

“I think it’s charming. I agree with you. I also think it’s charming when I happen to walk by the post office and Ruby comes running out the door calling my name to inform me that I have mail. Sometimes she tells me if it just a letter or bills. I don’t find it nosy. I think it’s friendly.” Ali declared.

“Anything you want to know Ruby can tell you. She’s seen it all.” Said Ashlyn shaking her head. “Well looks like you’re filled. See you around.” Ashlyn said as she turned to walk back to her truck.

“Wait!” Ali panicked. “Help me make sure I turn this thing off right.”
Ashlyn just broke a big dimpled grin. “OK. Hose in the slot. Small lever down, large lever up. Good, you got it.” I could stand here all day.

“Thanks again. Hope to see you around.”

“I’m sure you will. Town isn’t big enough to hide in.”

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It was three days later and Ashlyn and her crew were at their work site. They were building a room on to the side of the Jones house. It was to be a bedroom for the baby they were expecting in about four months. Hope and Kelley were fussing with each other again.

“Hope why are you mad?”

“Kelley you know darn well why I am mad. You know what you did.”

“What? Nothing has happened today.”

“You did it last night.”

“Last night was fine. You were fine when we went to bed.” Kelley said exasperated.

“No. Don’t give me that. You did it. I found it this morning.”

“You did? I didn’t hear you scream.” Kelley snickered.

“Hard to scream while you are having a heart attack Kelley.”
“Dam I missed it.”

“Ok you two. Let’s knock off for lunch.” Ashlyn said as she returned from her truck carrying everyone’s lunch box. They walked over to the picnic table under the maple tree in the front yard. Just then a car pulled in. Ashlyn’s face lit up. “It’s Ali. The woman I was telling you about.” I can’t believe she’s stopping.

“The one you fished out of the water? Or as you like to say, your catch of the day.” Kelley asked while craning her neck to get a good look at this Ali woman Ashlyn hasn’t shut up about for the last week.

Hope poked Kelley in the side. “Stop gawking would you. Try and act normal for a change.”

Kelley just stuck out her tongue in response.

“Lovely.” Hope deadpanned.

Ashlyn had just reached Ali’s car as Ali was getting out. “I was just driving by and saw your truck. Is this ok? Stopping by.” Ali asked. I cannot believe I am actually doing this.

“More than ok. Glad you did. We were just stopping for lunch. Care to come over to the table with us? I will introduce you.” Hope and Kelley better not mess this up.

Ashlyn and Ali reached the table. “This is my rag tag little crew I was telling you about.”

Kelley scoffed at that denouncement. “If she’s going around calling us rag tag I’ll just let you know that Hope here is rag and I’m claiming the tag.” Kelley joked earning a swat from Hope.

“Tag here will also answer to the name Kelley.” Ashlyn added. “Hope, Kelley, this is Ali the new fourth grade teacher at the school.”

“Nice to finally put a face to the name,” Hope said. “Ashlyn has been telling us about your adventure at the lake.”
“What? You told them.” Ali exclaimed giving Ashlyn her own swat. Ashlyn just let out a light chuckle as they settled at the table.

“Don’t feel bad Ali. Everyone around here has taken a header into that lake at some point. Think of it as a tradition. Your one of us now.” Kelley explained.

“So that is the towns hazing ritual?” Ali asked. “Glad to know I got that out of the way.”

All of the sudden Kelley screamed and threw her lunch box into the air while falling off the seat of the picnic table backwards.

Hope calmly looked down at her. “Pay backs a bitch isn’t it Kelley?” *Got her good for once.*

Ashlyn and Ali were clutching their chests looking wide eyed at the two. “What just happened?” Ashlyn asked. *There goes hoping they don’t do anything stupid.*

Kelley struggled to her feet and picked up her scattered lunch and the fake mouse that was in it.

“That’s what this is about.” Hope said while pointing at the mouse. “Kelley put that thing in the cookie jar last night. I found it this morning while I was packing our lunches. I nearly had a heart attack. So I took that mouse and put it in her lunch box for my big get even. I’ve hardly been able to contain myself all day while waiting for this moment.” Hope said with relish.

“Yep you got me good Hope. You never do this kind of stuff.” Kelley said while taking a bite of her sandwich. “You are more the chase me around and threaten to kick my ass kind of responder.” Kelley stopped mid chew and looked inside her sandwich just to make sure Hope hadn’t done anything to it either.

“I know. It was perfection.” Hope grinned.

“I’ll keep that in mind.”

“Ashlyn I was going to call you today but when I saw your truck on my way back from the library I just decided to stop and ask you in person.” Guess I really am going to do this.

“What’s up? Need a hand with something?” I’d do anything she wants.

“No. I have been noticing flyers in the store windows about a street fair this weekend. A hog roast or something. It looks like fun and I wondered if you would like to go with me?” Ali asked without looking at Ashlyn directly. I can’t look at her. God, Ashlyn probably already has a date. Why did I do this?

Kelley and Hopes mouth both just dropped open. Ashlyn shook her head at them. Ali didn’t seem to notice the exchange.

“Oh! The annual end of summer street fair and hog roast. Sure. I’d like to go with you. Is Saturday good for you? We could go mid-afternoon and have dinner there. You don’t want to miss those hog roast sandwiches.” Holy shit. I can’t believe she just asked me.

“Great. How about 3:00. I can pick you up.” Ali offered. She said yes!

“Three is good. How about I pick you up. The streets in the town can’t hold all of the cars so we park in the fields. My truck would be better. There are a lot of ruts.” Ashlyn explained. “If you get bored on Thursday you can wander over to the hog roasting pits. The town’s old dogs will be out there all night tending the pit and drinking beer. I’m sure they would like the company.” Ashlyn teased. Why the hell did I say that?

“Great. It’s a date………or a thing………or something.” Ali trailed off embarrassed. “Saturday, not the hog pit thing. Well I should shove off and let you three get back to work. I can’t wait to dive into those home remodeling books I got at the library. I am hoping they give me some ideas.” Ali said as she and Ashlyn rose and started the walk to Ali’s car. I managed to make that awkward in a flash.

Chapter End Notes
Chapter 3 theme, when everybody knows your name.
Going Steady

Chapter Summary

While Ali try's to figure out "is it or isn't it" she gets first hand exposure to what it means to live in a small town.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ashlyn walked back to the picnic table. She knew what she was in for.


“Stop it Kelley.” Ashlyn warned.

“Does she know she just asked you on the “town announcement” going steady date?” Hope asked.

“She has no idea Hope. And neither one of you two tell her that either. Truthfully, I wanted to ask her but I just couldn’t figure out how knowing it will be perceived as something it’s not.” But it’s going to be.

“The town is gonna marry you two off in a heartbeat.” Said Hope gleefully while Kelley snickered along.

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“This is just great”. Ali muttered to herself. What do you wear to on a hog fest date? I can’t believe I have only been here two weeks and I’ve gone and asked out the town’s most eligible lesbian. Pretty sure she’s gay. Her crew definitely is. Does she know I am? Does Ash think this is a date? Did she only agree to go to be nice? Alright sleeveless shirt, shorts, tennis shoes, and hair in a ponytail. That is just going to have to do. It’s just a fair for Christ’s sakes and I’m acting like I’m going to a prom or something.
Ashlyn knocked on Ali’s door while straightening her shirt and smoothing her hair. She had to admit to herself that she was nervous. Did Ali think this was a date? Ashlyn hoped so.

“Hi.” Ali greeted as she opened the door. *Damn Ashlyn looks good. White button up with the sleeves rolled, tan board shorts, and work boots only tied half way up. That snapback she is wearing backwards just finished the look off.* “You’re right on time. So tell me? Is this appropriate hog fest wear?” Ali asked while performing a turn. “I’ve never been to one and don’t want to stand out as the resident city slicker.”

“You look great. Nailed it I would say.” Ashlyn answered genuinely.

Ashlyn followed Ali around to the passenger side and opened the door of the truck for her. “Thanks Ash. Is that ok, saying Ash?”

“It sure is Ali.” Ashlyn said while closing the door.

Ashlyn climbed into her seat and started the truck. “Nice to see that chivalry is still alive and kicking.” Ali stated. *Ok. Opening car doors is definitely date behavior.*

“On my watch it is.” Ashlyn said looking directly at Ali. They both just looked at each other for a minute wearing wide open smiles.

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“Well here we are.” Ashlyn proclaimed. “Ali welcome to you first hog roast fest. First up is field parking. Hang on it might get bumpy.”

Ashlyn held open the door as Ali climbed out of the truck. “That wasn’t so bad but I agree taking your truck was the best choice.”

“Stick with me Ali. I know all the best games, rides, and food trucks. Just to let you know when you play a game you get a chit if you win. At the end of the night there is a little store with prizes. You trade in your chits there. Works out kind of nice. You don’t get stuck carrying stuff around all day and night. Hope and Kelley are here also.”

“You’re on woman. Going to make you eat those words.” Ashlyn promised.

“Yeehaw.” Ali cried out as her balloon burst.

“My gun didn’t work right.” Ashlyn claimed with fake outrage. *I can’t believe she beat me.*

“It’s a poor workman that blames his tools.” Ali teased smiling all the while.

“Hey. My Dad used to say that.”

“Same here.”

“You chose our next contest.” Ali told Ashlyn.

And so it went throughout the afternoon. Darts, milk bottles, ring toss and more. Along the way they ran into Hope and Kelley and hung out while they all played.

“Hang on I need to get another lemon shake up.” Kelley called out to the group as she joined the line.

“On no you don’t Kelley. You have already had two. Any more of that lemon flavored liquid sugar and you’ll be bouncing off the walls. You get water from here on out.” Hope schooled Kelley while wagging her finger in a no nonsense way.

“Aw man.” Kelley pouted.

“Anyone else ready to eat?” Ashlyn asked.
“Bring on the hog.” Kelley cried. As the group walked over to the food tent.

Ali was just getting settled at the table with Kelley while Ashlyn and Hope waited in line. “I heard what happened to you and Ashlyn at the farmers market. All those oranges. I’ll never look at a fruit pyramid the same. Did you really get an orange down your shirt when they all fell?” Kelley asks while snickering at what it must have looked like.

Ali froze. “You heard about that?” Lord I hope that didn’t get all over town. I’m never going to that market again.

“Yes, Hank over at the gas station told us. We were just walking in as Hank was telling Tom about Ashlyn training you on how to use the gas pump. Cracked us all up.” Kelley was giggling at the memory. “So is it true? Was there an orange in your shirt?”

Ali felt herself blushing. “Yes. When all the oranges started falling and I tried to hold them back one went down my shirt. Ashlyn just happened to be there and helped me restack everything. Is Hank really telling people those stories?”

“That’s not all I heard. When we pulled into the field to park Stan let us know that “Ashlyn and her girl” were already here.” Kelley stole a look at Ali to gage her reaction.

“What? I can’t believe this.” Ali was now looking around at all the tables wondering who else was talking about her.

Hope and Ashlyn arrived at the table with the food. “Ali, I didn’t put any sauce on your sandwich because I didn’t know which you would like. The sauces are right over there.” Ashlyn point to a table about 20 feet away. “I recommend the thin mustardy one.”

Ali took her sandwich over to the sauce table and was scouting out the varieties.

“Hi Ali. I saw Ash up here a minute ago. I asked her where you were. I was going to stop by your table to introduce myself. Sorry. I’m Janice. I teach sixth grade at the school. Ash has my number. Give me a call and I tell you about the school. Dang, there goes my kid again. Call me.” Janice finishes as she ran off to chase down her daughter.

Ali is just standing there wondering just all what Janice had heard about her and Ashlyn. Ali returns
to table just in time to hear Kelley ragging on Ashlyn.

“You’re going down this year Harris. I feel it.”

“Kelley what you feel is crazy sugar high delusions. You can’t beat me.” No way I am going down in front of Ali. I already lost at enough of those fair games.

“What’s going on?” Ali asked eyeing the two.

Hope again supplies the explanation. “These two are arch rivals in the annual corn hole toss off.”

“Arch rivals my ass Hope. I am the reigning champion three years straight.” Ashly puffs out her chest.

“Reigning braggart more like it.” Kelley skewers her.

“Yeah well meet me on the court after this and be prepared to lose.”

“So you two are doing corn hole next I take it?” Ali inquires.

“Yes. The tournament has already started. Kelley and I don’t have to play in the initial rounds because of our standing last year. It will take about an hour. Do you mind?”

“I wouldn’t dream of standing in the way of this rivalry.” Ali said with mock seriousness.

As they leave the tent Ali says she’ll catch up with them after picking up some gum at the stand down the street.

Chapter End Notes

Chapter 4 - Ali gets the low down about Janet from Bob and Viv.
Going Steady

Chapter Summary

Hey. Trying to keep this up, but my heart hurts Read my stuff to know where I am.

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And so it went throughout the afternoon. Darts, milk bottles, ring toss and more. Along the way they ran into Hope and Kelley and hung out while they all played.

“Hang on I need to get another lemon shake up.” Kelley called out to the group as she joined the line.

“On no you don’t Kelley. You have already had two. Any more of that lemon flavored liquid sugar and you’ll be bouncing off the walls. You get water from here on out.” Hope schooled Kelley while wagging her finger in a no nonsense way.

“Aw man.” Kelley pouted.

“Anyone else ready to eat?” Ashlyn asked.

“Bring on the hog.” Kelley cried. As the group walked over to the food tent.

Ali was just getting settled at the table with Kelley while Ashlyn and Hope waited in line. “I heard what happened to you and Ashlyn at the farmers market. All those oranges. I’ll never look at a fruit pyramid the same. Did you really get an orange down your shirt when they all fell?” Kelley asks while snickering at what it must have looked like.

Ali froze. “You heard about that?” Lord I hope that didn’t get all over town. I’m never going to that
“Yes, Hank over at the gas station told us. We were just walking in as Hank was telling Tom about Ashlyn training you on how to use the gas pump. Cracked us all up.” Kelley was giggling at the memory. “So is it true? Was there an orange in your shirt?”

Ali felt herself blushing. “Yes. When all the oranges started falling and I tried to hold them back one went down my shirt. Ashlyn just happened to be there and helped me restack everything. Is Hank really telling people those stories?”

“That’s not all I heard. When we pulled into the field to park Stan let us know that “Ashlyn and her girl” were already here.” Kelley stole a look at Ali to gage her reaction.

“What? I can’t believe this.” Ali was now looking around at all the tables wondering who else was talking about her.

Hope and Ashlyn arrived at the table with the food. “Ali, I didn’t put any sauce on your sandwich because I didn’t know which you would like. The sauces are right over there.” Ashlyn point to a table about 20 feet away. “I recommend the thin mustardy one.”

Ali took her sandwich over to the sauce table and was scouting out the varieties.

“Hi Ali. I saw Ash up here a minute ago. I asked her where you were. I was going to stop by your table to introduce myself. Sorry. I’m Janice. I teach sixth grade at the school. Ash has my number. Give me a call and I tell you about the school. Dang, there goes my kid again. Call me.” Janice finishes as she ran off to chase down her daughter.

Ali is just standing there wondering just all what Janice had heard about her and Ashlyn. Ali returns to table just in time to hear Kelley ragging on Ashlyn.

“You’re going down this year Harris. I feel it.”

“Kelley what you feel is crazy sugar high delusions. You can’t beat me.” No way I am going down in front of Ali. I already lost at enough of those fair games.

“What’s going on?” Ali asked eyeing the two.

Hope again supplies the explanation. “These two are arch rivals in the annual corn hole toss off.”

“Arch rivals my ass Hope. I am the reigning champion three years straight.” Ashly puffs out her chest.

“Reigning braggart more like it.” Kelley skewers her.

“Yeah well meet me on the court after this and be prepared to lose.”

“So you two are doing corn hole next I take it?” Ali inquires.

“Yes. The tournament has already started but Kelley and I don’t have to play in the initial rounds because of our standing last year. It will take about an hour. Do you mind?”

“I wouldn’t dream of standing in the way of this rivalry.” Ali said with mock seriousness.

As they leave the tent Ali says she’ll catch up with them after picking up some gum at the stand down the street.
Chapter Summary

Please forgive me. I posted the same chapter. Cap America told me. Kind she was. And yes, this means the story to a degree is pre-written. Just not myself right now. The people that follow my name know why. Thank you for not ganging up on me. Thanks Cap for setting me straight.

“Hi Ali.” The man running the stand says as she pays for her gum. “Is Ash down at the toss off? Going to cheer her on? I think O’Hara might just get it this year.”

“Uuumm…….Yes. Ashlyn and Kelley just went to the courts now.” Ali mumbles as she backs away from the stand. Who is this man and why is her talking to me with such familiarity about Ashlyn? Ali backs right in to what appears to be a pregnant woman.

“Are you all right? I’m so sorry. I wasn’t watching where I was going.” Ali begs.

“Relax Ali. I’m fine. I saw you stop by my house the other day to have lunch with Ashlyn and the crew. That was nice of you to stop and see her. I was going to come out and introduce myself but by the time I finished folding my laundry you were already gone. That mouse Hope put in Kelley’s lunch box was hilarious.”


“Oh sorry. I just been hearing so much about you two I guess I felt like we have met. I’m Barb. It’s nice to finally meet you? Next time you stop by to see Ashlyn come up to the house and say hi. Well gotta go. Frank is waiting on me. Hey that was a funny story about the oranges. Tell Ashlyn and Kelley good luck for me at the toss off.”

“I’ll do that Barb.” Ali replies with a feeling of rising panic in her chest.

Ali is standing there stunned but in mere minutes she gets another earful of “Ali and Ash” from Fran the librarian.
“Hi Ali. Did Ash give you those magazines I gave her for you? She was in the library and I had been holding them. I asked her to drop them off to you. You can keep them for a couple of weeks. They are old issues of *House Remodel*. Since you told me you were drumming up ideas on your bathroom and kitchen I pulled a few issues dealing with that. My husband is over with Ash and Kelley at the toss right now. I’ll see you over there in a bit.”

“Ok. See ya.” Ali said as she walked off towards the courts. *This is getting weird. This is getting out of hand fast. The entire town thinks I’m having some sort of torrid dating affair with Ashlyn. If only it was as true as everyone thought it was. Ashlyn has to know about this.*

Ali arrived at the toss off court and took a seat next to a man. She hadn’t spied Hope yet.

The man turned towards her. “Hi Ali. Come to see Ashlyn smoke the field of contenders? I’m Bob Adams. I have a house out on the lake between you and Ashlyn. Saw you out cruising the lake with her two weeks ago. You looked wet. Did she toss you in the water too?” Bob laughed.

“No. I did that all on my own. She actually fished me out of the water?” Ali admitted.

Just then the woman sitting on the other side of Bob leaned forward. “Hi. I’m Bob’s wife Vivian but call me Viv, everyone does. I was hoping Ashlyn was going to bring you to the festival. I’ve seen you two around town a few times. It’s been a couple of years since she brought anyone.”

“Yeah.” Bob added. “After I saw you in Ashlyn’s boat all wet I thought maybe things had taken a wrong turn and Ash had tossed you in the water just like she did Janet. Glad to see that wasn’t the case.” Bob said warmly.

Ali finally saw Hope on the other side of the court. “Bob, Viv it was nice meeting you but I see my friend over on the other side.” Ali said as she rose from her seat. *Just when I thought it couldn’t get any weirder it does.*

“Yes. I see Hope over there. You two go root for your girls.” Viv called out as Ali stated walking away.

“Hope thank God I found you.” Ali said exasperated.

“Why? What’s wrong? I saw you over there talking to Bob and Viv. Everything looked ok. Well
you looked a little stunned to be honest. Was he telling more of his raucous jokes to you?” Hope said
with a frown.

“Jokes? I feel like the jokes on me. Or maybe it’s on the whole town. I don’t know.” Ali swiveled
in her seat so she could look Hope in the eye. “You know don’t you. What they think.”

“What.” Hope said trying to fake misunderstanding.

“Don’t give me that. Kelley already told me about Stan in the parking lot. You know coming here
to this festival with Ashlyn is taken as a big public dating statement. Bob and Viv just told me so.
They also let me know that they were glad Ashlyn hadn’t tossed me the water like she did Janet.
They made it sound like I was out cruising the lake with her. Fran is giving Ash magazines to
deliver to me. Hank is telling everyone about the oranges and Ashlyn teaching me how to pump
gas. Janice just told me to get her phone number from Ashlyn. Barb Jones watched me with you on
your lunch break and invited me back any time. Even the guy I bought gum off of knows I’m here
with Ash. This whole town thinks we are on some hot dating spree don’t they?”

“I might have heard something like that.” Hope hedged. “Do you want to go on a hot dating spree
with her?”

“Apparently I already am.” Ali threw her arms up in the air. “Why didn’t you tell me that this was a
big thing?”

“If I had what would you have done? Canceled on Ash? She has been looking forward to this all
week. Remember, you asked her. How would you be feeling right now, knowing that this is a big
thing if she had turned you down when you asked her?”

“Crappy. I would be feeling crappy. What do I do now?” I don’t think I can look Ashlyn in the face
after this.

“What do you want to do? Do you like her that way? I can tell you that she does you. She hasn’t
said that but I have known her long enough to be sure she does.”

“Please don’t tell her I know all of this stuff? I’m not sure what I’m going to do. I do like her but
I’m so new to this town this is kind of weirding me out. I’m their kids’ school teacher for crying out
loud. How does this look? I arrive and snag me a woman right off the bat. Sighted all over town
with her.”
“Did you get a sense that anyone had a problem with it? I won’t say a thing. Not even to Kelley because if I do it will all over the place in two seconds.”

“Thanks Hope and no, I didn’t feel like anyone had a problem with it. I got the feeling they were glad.”

“I know my town Ali and they are, but don’t let that push you into something. Damn. We talked away the whole tournament. Ashlyn and Kelley are in a toss off for the win. Your gals going down Ali.”

“Like hell Hope.” Ali ribbed back as they moved to the side lines.
“YYEEESSSS.” Kelley bellowed as her bag found the hole. “I win! I win!” Kelley chanted as she ran across the court and leapt onto Hope. Waving her arms in the air like she had just won the World Cup. “That trophy is coming home with me.” Kelley shouted into the air as everyone applauded.

Ashlyn and Ali walked into the prize tent. “Here Ali take my tickets. Get a good prize.” Least I can do since she won most of them.

Ali gleamed as she looked everything over. “This is the one.” Ali pronounced as she pulled the stuffed fish off the shelf. “I think it’s just the thing seeing as we met when I fell in the lake while you were fishing.”

Ashlyn just beamed at Ali’s take on her selection.

“I’m going to call him Mr. Limpet.” Ali declared.

“Mr. Limpet?”

“Yes. I watched this movie over and over with my Grandfather. Mr. Limpet was a man that loved fish. He had a wife that didn’t appreciate him. One day he fell in the ocean and turned into a fish. He then met his one true love, Lady Fish. He ended up joining the Navy and helped sink subs ending the war and…………….well I just like the story.” Ali trailed off.

“Mr. Limpet it is.” Agreed Ashlyn.

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“Well, this second place trophy isn’t so bad.” Ali offered up as Ashlyn’s truck sped down the road.

“Nope. Not bad at all.” Ashlyn agreed.
“Hey, Fran said you have some magazines for me.” Ali asked.

“I do. Sorry I forgot to bring them in with me when I picked you up. They are rolled up in the glove box.”

“Rolling up library materials. Fran will get you for that.” Ali said as she opened the glove box and pulled them out. “Yep, they are curled.”

“Guess I need you to flatten them out before you return them to keep me in Fran’s good graces.” Ashlyn said as she pulled to a stop in the driveway. “Show me your bathroom and talk me through what you want to do. It’s a smart move to start with something smaller.”

Ashlyn followed Ali into the house and down the hall to the bathroom.

“I want to take the wash stand out. It so small and there is plenty of room for a larger one. I was thinking 48” with a single under mount porcelain bowl. There are some nice ones available with a green and black marble. I think an oak cabinet. Anything else wouldn’t go with the house. Maybe shaker or mission style. I just want the counter space and drawers. I have a lot of junk I need handy.” Ali felt a little embarrassed over the two totes of make-up, gels, nail polish and what nots she had sitting there on the floor. “I’m not sure about the floor. Maybe later. Bamboo or cork. All of the fixtures need replaced also. Some of them don’t match and they really aren’t what I’d prefer.” Ali said as she gazed around the room.

“If you are going to do the floor we should do that before the wash cabinet. I think the cork would go good. Easier on your feet and it will hold up nicely done right. Water won’t be an issue.” Ashlyn allowed.

“To do the floor I will need to pull the toilet. I’m not sure I am up to that.” How do I bring this whole town thing up? Should I?

“Well that’s why you have me. Let’s go to the hardware store tomorrow. Pick up a new wax ring and the flooring. They might have the cabinet and top in stock. It will fit in my truck bed. Just be sure to pick out quality fixtures for the holders and faucets.” Said Ash as she paced the room imagining the work.

“Who’s Janet?” It just fell out of Ali’s mouth. She wanted to take it back as soon as she said it.
“Wwhhaat?” Ashlyn asked with eyes the size of saucers. *How does she know about Janet? Was it Kelley? I’ll wring her scrawny neck.*

“How? How could I start with Janet?”

“Bob and Viv said they were glad I didn’t meet the same fate as Janet.” Ali could not believe she was saying this. Suddenly the bathroom got a lot smaller. “Bob and Viv saw me in your boat.”

Ashlyn just kept repeating, “WWwwhhaat.”

“I got the low down on what tonight was.” Ali felt bold. “And you knew. The whole time you knew. Were you staking a claim or claiming a stake?” *What does that even mean?*

“I, I, I,” Ashlyn blubbered. *I think staking a claim. No way in hell I’m saying that.*

“I heard it all. From Stan in the parking lot. Kelley told me. Everyone educated me.” Ali added. “I know you know going to the festival with me is taken as a big public dating statement. Bob and Viv told me so. They also let me know that they were glad you hadn’t tossed me in the water like you did Janet. Fran told me she gave you magazines to deliver to me. Hank is telling everyone about the oranges and you teaching me how to pump gas. Janice just told me to get her phone number from you. Barb Jones watched me with you on your lunch break and invited me back any time. Even the guy I bought gum off of knows I was there with you Ash. This whole town thinks we are on some hot dating spree don’t they? And you knew it.” Ali said as she closed the gap between herself and Ashlyn.

Ashlyn collected herself while Ali filled the space before her. “What was I supposed to say? Don’t come to town because we will run into each other. Don’t talk to me. Refuse magazines. And just so you know that whole orange thing is totally cute. Everyone thinks it is.” With that admittance Ashlyn let Ali know she knew what had been happening.

Ali entered Ashlyn’s space. Her arm snaked around to Ashlyn’s neck and pulled her down to a kiss. The first kiss and many more followed after that.

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Ali woke at the stirring of Ashlyn by her side.
“What? Where are you going?” Ali groggily asked.

“I need to go or pull my truck around the back of your house so they don’t see it.” Ashlyn said with a touch of embarrassment. *How did it get this far? Is Ali going to back pedal on this?*

“Ash they already have us to this point. Glad we caught up.” Ali said while she kissed Ashlyn’s shoulder. *Did Ashlyn regret this?*

“Ali they know what they think they know. We haven’t been where they put us. There is a big difference.” Ashlyn said as she tried to find her shorts. *Ali is fine.*

“The only difference I see is that they had it right. We are just catching up according to the latest gossip.” Ali said as she bit Ashlyn’s shoulder. “Leave it there. If you have some energy to spend then spend it here.” Ali said as she pulled Ashlyn over to her.

Ashlyn was not going to fight that suggestion.

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“Jesus God why are you driving like a mad woman?” Kelley asked.

“It was your idea to scope them out.” Hope tossed off with a hint of frustration. Until she saw it. Kelley did too. Ashlyn’s truck in Ali’s driveway.

“You know why we are here.” Hope reminded Kelley as she pulled off to the side of the road in their SUV.

“Mission confirmation. Now pull a u-turn and get us home.” Kelley ordered as she slid across her seat while grabbing Hopes thigh.

“Tell me there will be no fake mice.” Hope said while she turned the car around.
“It depends on your definition of fake. Mice notwithstanding.” Kelley whispered as she sucked on Hopes neck.

“You’re on.” Said Hope as she pressed on the gas pedal.

“So on.” Kelley agreed while Hope drove them home.

Chapter End Notes

A wedding is going to happen. One I totally want. Sorry I did not say this earlier.
Prepping The Altar

Chapter Summary

Goin’ to the chapel and we’re gonna get married
Goin’ to the chapel and we’re gonna get married
Gee, I really love you
And we’re gonna get married
Goin’ to the chapel of love

Partial lyrics, Chapel Of Love.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ali was cleaning out her class room. Buttoning it up for the long summer break. Her desk was last. Ali picked up the picture of Ashlyn that sat on it front and center and sat in her chair. June already. Pretty soon she will have been there a year. Ali found it hard remembering she has been anywhere else. Things had just seemed to fall into place after the hog fest last September. If she was really being honest it had happened after she fell into the lake the day Ashlyn had fished her out and taken her home. Or as she and Ashlyn referred to it, the catch of the day, day. She just hadn’t known it at the time. Early on Ali had admitted her concerns to Ashlyn. “Was this too much too soon?”

Ashlyn had just replied, “I can’t imagine anything with you being too much Ali.” After that, Ali had relaxed and just let the natural order of things take over.

“Hi Ruby. I have a few letters to post. Any mail for me?” Ali called out as Ruby walked up to the counter.

“None today. Maybe tomorrow. How are things going for the wedding? Lord I love a June wedding.” Ruby said wistfully. “The whole towns going to be there”

“Don’t I know it. I am on my way to the park now to help set up for tomorrow. Everyone’s a wreck. Seems like we are just following ourselves around in circles.” Ali laughed. “See you tomorrow then.”
“You bet Ali. Wouldn’t miss it for the world.”

Ali was driving by her house and noticed Ashlyn’s truck in from of the garage. I looked like she was unloading something. Ali pulled in. “Ash what’s going on? I thought you were supposed to be at the park doing set up?” Ali asked with confusion on her face.

“I got a call from Tom at the hardware store. The flooring for the living room came in so I went down to pick it up.” Ashlyn said with a huff as hefted another bundle of said flooring to carry it into the garage.

“Ash you shouldn’t be doing that by yourself. What with the wedding tomorrow you could pull something then where would we be?” Ali frowned as she took an end of the bundle and helped Ashlyn carry it to the garage.

“I’m ok. Just two more bundles. Go on to the park. I’ll meet you there in a few.”

“No. I’ll help you with the rest and then we can ride to the park together.”

Stan was there setting out chairs in neat orderly rows. Hank and Bob were stringing lights up along the dock that served the park. Janice and Barb were debating proper table placement in the food tent.

Hope sang out a hello to Ashlyn and Ali as they walked up. “Ready to help me with these streamers Ash?”

“You bet. Are we keeping with tradition and stringing them in a fan culminating at the altar.” Ash asked while pulling a ladder over to Hope.

“Well this is going to be a traditional town public marriage. What do you think?”

“I like my traditions.” Ashlyn agreed while each walked to their post to begin the process.
Ali walked over to the table Kelley sat at where she twisted squares of netting around piles of bird seed and tied them off with ribbons. Ali was met with a hand full of bird seed thrown at her as a means of hello from Kelley. By the looks of things Kelley had been flinging seed at a number of people. “Hey Kelley, you might want to hold off on that. It will attract birds that will crap all over everything.”

“Didn’t think of that. Sorry.” Kelley sheepishly apologized. “Tom and Frank are just starting to put up the tents for us to change in tomorrow.”

“I see that. Things are really coming together. I can’t wait. We have our clothes in the car for when we split up tonight.”

“Hey Kelley, you might want to hold off on that. It will attract birds that will crap all over everything.”

“It will be fun just you and I spending the night together. I hope Ash and Hope don’t get caught up in a Bachelor Party type thing tonight.” Ali questioned.

“Nope. Those two will just sit around Ash’s house having a couple of drinks telling tales on each other.” Kelley said with assurance.

An hour later Hope and Ash arrived at the table. “We’re all done here. Time to pack up and head off.”

Ali and Kelley rose and the four walked to the cars. Hope retrieved her clothes from the SUV and put them in Ashlyn’s truck and each couple headed out.

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“God I’m so nervous.” Ali exclaimed in the tent she and Kelley were dressing in. The both were sipping on mimosa’s to calm their nerves. They could hear the noise from the crowd as the park filled up with well-wishers.

”Ali that dress is a knock out. Ash is going to faint dead away when she sees you.” Kelley exclaimed.

“Well Hope is going to be over the moon once she gets a look at you.” Ali assured Kelley.
Just then Fran stuck her head in the tent. “You two ready? Ash and Hope are at the altar. Oh here, let me fix that strand of baby’s breath in your hair.” Just then the organ struck it warning note that things were about to begin. “All right girls get your bouquets in hand and let’s get this show on the road.” Fran ordered as she pulled back the tent flap for Ali and Kelley to walk out. Ali and Kelley just grinned at each other as they strode out of the tent to begin their walk down the aisle.

Chapter End Notes

Just as a side note, does anyone know how to tell if your ribs are broke? Asking for a friend (yeah right).
Who’s At The Altar?

Chapter Summary

I had better get busy and marry someone off or there will be a mutiny.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

They reached the end of the aisle and Ali stepped to the left followed by Kelley. Hope was to Kelley’s right followed by Ash. The Minister spoke up. “Ladies and Gentlemen we are here today to witness the joining of Hope and Kelley in holy matrimony.”

“Wow. I can’t believe this. Seems like the whole towns here.” Ali said wide eyed. “I like the pot luck style. Everyone brings a covered dish.”

“Would you expect anything less?”

“Not here I wouldn’t. What is this plaque with all the names and dates on it?” Ali asked as she wandered down the wall recognizing names.

“It’s a record of everyone married here in the public park. Hope and Kelley’s names will go right here.” Ashlyn pointed. “Back here you have Kelley’s parent. Over here mine and back here Hope’s”

“Is this how you imagined you’d get married someday Ash?” Ali wondered out loud.

“Growing up here, yes I did. Do.” Ashlyn admitted. “What do you think of it Ali?”

“I think it’s one of the most loving things I have seen to date in this town. I like it.” Ali responded honestly.
“Did you envision a wedding back home?” Ashlyn probes gently.

“I have. Things change though. This feels like home more every day. It definitely feels like my future.”

“I like the sound of that Ali.” Ashlyn said as she bent to kiss her. “I like the sound of that.”

“Ashlyn, Ali it’s time” The duo swiveled to see Ruby running towards them waving her hands in the air. “It’s time to throw the bouquet and garter. Come on.” She waved them frantically over.

Ali and Ashlyn joined the crowd around the newly married couple. At some point someone had attached a ball and chain to Hope’s leg with the name Kelley painted on it. Ali and Ashlyn cracked up at the sight. Kelley took her place in front of the single friends of the Bride crowd. Taking the traditional pose with her back to the group, readying for a toss over her shoulder. Suddenly Kelley whirled around and rocketed a straight line fast ball with the bouquet straight to Ali’s chest. Ali’s arm instinctively clasped over the flowers. Shouts of “Way to go Ali” filled the air while she blushed and snuck a peek over at Ashlyn who was flying one of her dimpled grins.

Hank brought a chair over and Kelley settled herself on it while crossing her legs. Hope kneeled before her to slide off the garter Kelley wore. Hope blushed at the task and Kelley gently teased her. Hope stood in front of her single group of friends of the Wifey and laced the garter on her index finger while pulling the rest back rubber band shooting style. Hope roved her hands around and then let the garter fly. It sailed right to Ashlyn who had to jump in the air to snag it. Ashlyn hit the ground running towards Ali. The crowd rubber stamped their approval with a round of applause while the photographer set up to take pictures of the two.

Kelley and Hope high-fived each other.

********************************************************************

Dusk was settling in. Ashly and Ali were down on the dock turning on the party lights that had been strung the day before. Ashlyn jumped in Hope’s boat and started the engine while turning on the running lights and spot light to show the way across the lake to the Lodge where the Bridal Suite was reserved for them.

Ali laughed in delight as she took in the boat. A JUST MARRIED sign had been placed on the back and a flotilla of pool floaty toys had been strung off the back to replace the traditional tin cans.
“I love it.” She giggled as Ashlyn stepped out of the boat.

“Hank and Bob did it up. Pretty cool. I can just see them pulling into the dock over at the lodge.” Ashlyn snickered. Just then they could hear Barb and Janice trying to get the crowd to line up in two rows while they handed out bundles of bird seed.

There they were. Hope and Kelley arm in arm as they walked through the hail of bird seed wearing 1000 watt smiles. The two couples exchanged hugs on the dock. Hope had whispered “your next” into Ashlyn’s ear. Hope stepped into her boat and helped Kelley in and got her settled in her seat. Hope took the wheel and nodded at Ashlyn who then loosened the tie lines and tossed them into the boat. With one last wave the couple pulled away from the dock and began their journey across the lake to the lodge and their new life.

Chapter End Notes

Thank you for all your replies concerning my rib issue. I did finally seek professional help. It was decided that -

1. Yes, I am stupid.
2. Although not stupid enough to kill myself at this time.
3. I will continue to inflict grievous bodily harm to myself at random times.
4. I will continue to ignore this "trend."
4. My Doctor will continue to enter the exam room while asking, "What did you do now?"
5. One day I may surpass all of my past stupid feats and actually succeed at ending myself.
6. Nobody will be surprised by this. Especially me.
Chapter Summary

Hey. Sorry it has taken me so long to update. Hard week it has been. I just had to dash off the one-shot Phone Call from Hillary C. I do hope you are not avoiding that because you think it is strongly political. It isn't. It is really a madcap romp of a dream on how the USWNT manages to right the world by taking over the public address system during the US VS ROM game.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ashlyn helped Ali into the truck. It had been a long day at the wedding but the two couldn’t be happier. “I have to be back at the park at 8:00 tomorrow morning to help with the tear down.” Ashlyn informed Ali.

”I’ll come along.” Ali offered. “Hope and Kelley are staying at the lodge for two days and then going to Key West for a week. Can you just imagine Hope trying to keep a handle on Kelley in Key West?” Ali laughed at the thought.

“That will quite the task for Hope I’m sure. I think she knows by now what she’s getting into.” Ashlyn grinned. “Those two have known each other all their lives. Seems like as kids whenever Hope and I would go try and do something there would be Kelley, tagging along. We couldn’t shake her for nothing. She’s always been trying to catch Hope.”

“Well now she has finally caught her.” Ali sighed. “Those two are a matched pair of opposites if there ever was one. I can’t imagine either one of them with somebody else.”

“I second that. Don’t think I have done so shabby myself.”

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It’s late August now and Ali had just exited the grocery store when she noticed the flier. It was time the annual summer fest again. Ali smiled as she got in her car. Seems like a good time to stop and see Ashlyn.
“Hi Ali. What brings you here today?” Ashlyn asked as she climbed down the ladder.

“Hey Ash? I have been noticing some fliers up in store windows. There is going to be a big street fair and hog roast. Would you like to go with me?” Ali said as she rested her arm on the ladder and curled her other one around Ashlyn’s waist.

“A Street fair and hog roast you say?” Ashlyn asked she wrapped her arm around Ali’s shoulders. “Sounds like a big town event.”

“Sure is. The biggest event of the year.”

“Sounds like fun. Pick you up at 3:00 on Saturday?” Ashlyn suggested.

“Sounds like a date……or a thing……or something.” Ali said repeating her asking of Ashlyn that had occurred one year ago as she pulled Ashlyn in tighter.

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Hope and Ashlyn were relaxing on Ashlyn’s back deck enjoying a couple of beers. Kelley and Ali had gone over to the wedding photographers’ studio to select pictures for the wedding album.

“Two months in Solo, how’s married life.” Ashlyn asked while handing Hope a beer.


“Wwhhhaatt!” Ashlyn gasped.

“Gez Ash. Nothing like that. It’s just Kelley’s always been there. When we were kids. Hell, when I went away to college she wrote me every two weeks for four years. When I came home for holidays or summer break, there she was. Like I was never gone.”

“I know you have told me about some of your sowing of wild oats at school.” Ashlyn crooked an eyebrow at Hope.
“Yes I did but there was Kelley always dumping a bucket of water on it before anything too serious could start up. She had a knack for that.” Hope shook her head. “I’d be all day dreamy about some girl and a letter from Kelley would show up telling me about some wild ass thing that happened. Or I’d be home on Christmas break just hanging up the phone after telling some girl I missed her and there would be Kelley standing on the front porch knocking on the door all bright eyed and smiley. She always made me forget about what’s her name. Kelley’s arms had a long wide reach and luckily I never exceeded their grasp.” Hope mused looking wistful. “Stopped over to pay the rent on the house on our way here. Mike asked me when we would be moving.”

“Moving? Is he wanting to sell the house?” Ashlyn asked concerned.

“No. Nothing like that. You know how things work around here. Get married, buy a house. Kelley has started up also. She covets the Evans house. Almost afraid Kelley might do something to speed things up. You know the Evans are nearing their 80’s.”

“That’s just like Ali’s house.”

“I know. Hey Ash, I talked to Walt the other day.” Hope said with a side eye on Ashlyn.

Ashlyn choked on her beer. “What did Walt have to say?” Ashlyn asked cautiously? He better have not told.

“He just mentioned how my business partner had been in his store recently. His jewelry store.” Hope said pointedly while crooking an eyebrow of her own.

Ashlyn sighed as she got up and walked to the back bedroom. When she returned she held out a small box to Hope.

Hope opened it. “Nice. One and three quarters she asked?”

“A little under two,” Ashlyn replied.

“Close enough. Kelley won’t get jealous. When are you going to do it?”
“Soon. Ali just asked me to the hog roast. So cute. She did like she did last year.” Ashlyn grinned at the memory.

“Before, during, or after.” Hope asked.

“I think after. If you will remember the town was all up in Ali’s business last year. Let’s let her have a normal experience this year.”

“Sounds like a plan. I should get going. Ali is dropping Kelley off at the house on their way back. I won’t breathe a word to Kelley.”

“Thanks for that. Hope, I think it’s time for a change.”

“Getting married?”

“No. The business. It’s time, past time to add your name to it. On the trucks. The signs, letterhead, t-shirts, advertising, everything. Hope you kept the business going for two years while I finished school when Dad’s health was so bad. Then you had enough faith in me to buy half of it so we could keep it going. We should have done this back then.”

“Ash you know I never cared about that. Where is this coming from?”

“It’s not just you now. It’s Kelley also. She would be so proud to see your name on everything. Over the moon proud.”

“Yeah she would. Ok. Don’t tell ……………

“Kelley.” They both said in unison.

“I say we get the t-shirts and then have the trucks painted and not say anything. She will probably walk by the truck 10 times before she notices. Then look out, wild connipation.” Ashlyn said gleefully.
“She might even faint.” Hope dead panned.

“We should make sure there are some smelling salts in the first aid kit.”

“Ash when you and Ali move forward with this if you make a decision to sell her house could we be first on the list to know?”

Ash look at Hope stunned. She hadn’t thought much beyond popping the question. “Sure Hope. We wouldn’t want anything dreadful to happen to Mr. and Mrs. Evans.” Ashlyn said with a chuckle.

“No we wouldn’t.” Hope sat back satisfied with the understanding.

Chapter End Notes

A couple of things have come up a few times that I feel I should address. I share your feelings about fleshing out the relationship of A/A. Really I do. Unfortunately it did not work out that way. Why? Of course I am only toooo happy to tell you why. First off, I had commenters in other stories complain I did not have enough people. So, in this one I worked more in. Got up to 25 people. I actually have a cheat sheet that tells me who they are, what they do, and their relationship to others. Misplaced it once and had a near heart attack. This is just to maintain the sense that it really is a town. I had no idea how big an under taking that is. I am sure in a chapter or two someone is going to complain I am not doing families. It is beyond my capabilities to manage this many characters. I will never do that again. So I say now. Believe me. I have vowed similar things in the past and promptly broke that vow. I think the only original vow that I made that I have kept is no smut. I came really close to breaking that one in Key. Originally this story was to stop at Chapter 4 when A/A got together. Conceived it that way. Then I knew people were not going to be happy. Same thing happened in my first fic This Means War. So I added more to War as I am now doing with Catch. Same damn thing happened in Key. I just had to marry Carli off and tell why O’Solo hadn’t married. I have had several stopping points in Catch. Each time I knew readers would not be happy. Right now I am sketching out Chapter 14 for Catch. Mind you it was supposed to end after 4. I pray this does not turn into a 50 Chapter story. However, I do want to get you where you want to go. I think I owe it to you. Right now, as I fill in Chapter 14, if I end it there (screw me, but I mistakenly thought it was the end) I am going to get a butt load of complaints. I know where you all want to go. So do I. Not sure I can deliver. It might be one of those times when you need to curl up in your mind to flesh it out. One thing I will not do is abandon the story. When I end it you will know.
2nd Annual Hog Roast

Chapter Summary

Everything you want.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes


“No Stan.” Ashlyn replied as she raised her arm to brush him back.

“Park on the right in the third row. It’s nice and smooth there so you don’t have to worry about Ms. Krieger twisting an ankle.” Stan said stressing the Ms. Krieger part.

“Thanks Stan.” Ashlyn said as she pulled away. Ashly looked at Ali as if to ask what that was all about. Ali just shrugged her shoulders.

“Water guns first. It will be our tradition.” Ali informed Ashlyn as she sat at the game and took up her pistol.

“You are going down this time Ali.” Ashlyn boasted taking up her gun. The bell rang and water flew. All of the sudden Pete’s head shot out in front of Ashlyn’s gun blocking the spray while he stared at Ali’s two fisted grip on her gun.

“What the hell Pete.” Ashlyn said indignantly. Ali took full advantage of the situation and continued to fire away breaking her balloon in record time.

“Yes.” Ali crowed jumping into the air.

Pete just handed Ali her chit and scurried off to talk to Al who was running the dart booth next door. Pete whispered in Al’s ear something and then Al bent over and gave Ali the once over.
That was weird. Ali thought.

“You paid him to do that.” Ashlyn pouted.

“Ash I did not pay Pete to take a blast of water to his face.”

Just then Hope and Kelley walked up. Kelley was sucking on the straw of her beloved lemon shake up when she saw Ali. Kelley immediately shoved the drink into Hope’s chest and ran over to Ali. Kelley grabbed both of Ali’s arms and slid her hands down to Ali’s palms. Ali felt Kelley finger her knuckles.

“Oh.” Kelley said as she dropped Ali’s hands and retrieved her drink form Hope. “How about ring toss?” Kelley offered as the group turned to walk to the game.

“Here you go Ali.” Syd said as she handed Ali her rings in two different bunches causing Ali to have to reach up with both hands to collect them. Syd frowned and then she hurriedly passed out the rings to the other three before running over to the side to talk to Betty who was running the duck pond. Betty glanced over and shook her head.

“What is up with these people?” Ali asked out loud.

“What’s up?” Asked Ashlyn.

“Things just feel weird.” Ali replied as she took aim.

The group played on through the early evening with some semblance of the weirdness playing out at every game. Ali was the only one who seemed to notice. Finally Ali called out. “Hey Kelley is it hog time?”

“You know it.”

“Bring on the hog.” They all shouted out as they walked to the food tent.
As before Ali and Kelley claimed a table while Hope and Ash ordered the sandwiches and drinks. Kelley was just about to say something when Barb Jones arrived at the table.

“Hey Ali. Haven’t seen you in a while. Look how big this little girl is getting.” Ali stood up to take a closer look when Barb shoved the baby at her chest causing Ali to instinctively wrap her hands around the baby.

“I see.” Said Barb. Barb was looking at Ali’s hands rather than her face. “Too early.”

A puzzled Ali asked, “Am I holding her right?”

“Oh, you’re fine Ali. Would you mind holding her while I take some napkins over to Frank and JR?” Barb asked while not waiting for an answer. So there Ali stood in the middle of the food tent bouncing from foot to foot in that cajoling baby bounce that some people just seemed to know. Several people stopped by to say hello. All stared at her hands rather than her face. Ali wondered again if she was holding the baby correctly. The baby wasn’t complaining.

Barb came back and picked up her daughter. “Thanks Ali. Tell Ashlyn I’m rooting for her. Uh, sorry Kelley.” Kelley just scoffed. Hope and Ashlyn showed up a minute later with the food.

“Here’s yours Ali. I didn’t sauce it. The sauce table is over there.” Ashlyn absently said while she fussed with her own food.

Ali walked over to the sauce table and set her sandwich down and took off the top bun. She was just reaching for one of the sauce bottles when she noticed that the other nine people at the table had frozen in place and were staring at her hands as she readied her sandwich.

What am I doing wrong? Ali asked herself. Sauce on top, on bottom, maybe on the side? She looked around at everyone else’s sandwich. Looked like it was an on top thing.


“Fine.”
“Great.”

“Got a blister.” Voices rang out while they still stared at her hands.

“Ok then.” Ali said as she closed up her sandwich and walked back to the table. The three were bickering about the toss off. No surprise there.

“You alright?” Ashlyn asked with concern on her face.

“Huh? No. Everything’s fine.” Ali said as she scanned the room. People were talking and taking furtive glances over at their table.

“Did someone say something? Do something?” Ashly said as she threw down her napkin and looked like she was about to fight someone.

“No Ash. They just didn’t have the sauce I wanted.” Ali fudged. As her eyes flicked across the room. Ashlyn rejoined her toss off bickering with Kelley. Am I about to be fired? No, I just had a great review. Ash is going to break up with me. Her eyes went to Ashlyn. No. Ashlyn is having a great time. She couldn't fake that and then dump me. Ali’s eyes then landed on Hope, just catching Hope adverting her eyes. Hope knows. Ali counseled herself. Hope always knows.

With dinner finished the four got up to walk over to the toss of courts. Kelley and Ashlyn were harassing each other about who the loser was going to be this year. Ali grabbed Hope’s elbow. “Hope, I need to talk to you.”

Hope got wide eyed. “What’s…..”


“Yes Janice. What did you need to talk to me about?”

Hope took the opportunity to book away from Ali at a fast clip.
“Catch up to you later.” Ali called out to her group.

“I wanted to ask you if you could help me clean out the supply closet at the school. It’s a wreck. I made a list of what I think we should have. I have it in my purse.” Janice starts rummaging around in her purse and handing Ali things to hold. Janice is handing her so many things that it is taking two hands to hold it. At that point Ali notices that Janice isn’t looking in her purse at all. She is staring at Ali’s hands. “Oh never mind. I must have left the list at home.”

“Ali. Ali.” It’s Fran. “When you’re ready just come down to the library to re………."

Janice is shaking her head at Fran. “Well Walt said….” Fran trailed off.

Janice is shaking her head even harder and shooting Fran a look that could kill.

“There’s Hank. I need to catch him.” Fran called out as she ran off towards Hank.

“What was all of that about?” Ali asked Janice.

“You know Fran has been chasing Hank around for years. That old coot acts like he doesn’t notice or care but he goes to the library every day to read the newspaper. Who does he think he’s fooling? He sells the paper right there in his gas station. There goes my Kid. I better catch him before he disappears again. Talk to you later.” Janice shouts over her shoulder as she runs away.

Ali walks up to the court and scans the crowd looking for Hope. She spies her on the other side and starts making her way over. About half way there Ali sees Hope look at her out the corner of her eye. Hope gets out of her seat and starts walking the other direction, Ali speeds up. Hope speeds up. They are practically running in a circle around the toss off court. Hope hits a snarl of people and Ali catches up to her and grabs her arm.

“You know Hope. What is going on?”

“I know a lot of things Ali. You’ll need to be more specific.”
“The whole town is talking about me. Again. Whispering to each other. Again. You know.” Ali demanded.

“I don’t know what you are talking about.” Hope said while eyeing her surrounding for an exit.

“Fine. I’ll ask Kelley. She will sing like a canary.” Ali said playing her ace card.

“I wouldn’t ask Kelley. Whatever she tells you it will be wrong. It will be the exact opposite of……….whatever it is.” Damn, now I have to get Kelley away from Ali. Kelley is going to put up a fight for sure.

“I’ll just see about tha………….” The whole crowd erupts in cheers cutting Ali off.

Ali and Hope turn back to the court just in time to see Ashlyn jumping around in jubilation and Kelley is writhing like she just got gut shot.

“We missed the whole thing again.” Hope moans as they begin to walk over to Ashlyn and Kelley.

“Congratulations Ash. I knew you could do it.” Ali says as she wraps Ashlyn up in a big hug. “I guess that trophy is going home with us tonight.”

“Yes. Back to its rightful home.” Ashlyn boasts giving a kiss to Ali. “Let’s go rub it in Kelley’s face shall we?”

“She deserves a little face rubbing after last year.” Ali concedes. They turn around and Kelley is now where to be found. Ali looks around just in time to see Hope dragging a reluctant Kelley past the awards table. Hope swoops by the table and snags the second place trophy and then disappears into the crowd towing Kelley behind her.

Chapter End Notes

OK. Lied a bit. Next chapter I promise and you do not want to miss it. The Hog Roast has to be the Hog Roast. It's a theme. Just going to admit I am a few chapters out am I cackling with glee. Don't hate me for it.
Chapter Summary

Going there cause you want it.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ashlyn had collected her first place trophy and they were just walking off the court. “How ‘bout we call it a night Ali?”

“Sounds good Ash. We just need to stop by the prize tent and trade in our chits. You can pick this time.”

“I already know what I want. I’ve been thinking about it.”

“You do? You have? What is it?” Ali grabs onto Ashlyn’s arm giving it a tug. “Tell me?”

“I’ll show you.” Ashlyn said as they walked in the tent. Ashlyn starts examining all the shelves. “It’s got to be here some place.” Ashlyn is muttering as she walks among the shelves. “Aha! Here it is.” Ashlyn exclaims triumphantly as she turns around and holds out her selection.

“A fish? We got that last year.” Ali says in surprise.

“We got Mr. Limpet last year. This is Lady Fish.” Ashlyn smiles smugly.

“Aaww. Ash that’s so sweet. I can’t believe you remembered that.” Ali said tearing up a little.

“I have sat thru that movie with you three times. Mr. Limpet has been waiting a whole year for his Lady Fish. High time he got her.”

Ashlyn declares as she makes her way to the checkout table.
Ashlyn and Ali are walking into the field parking lot. “Congrats on the win Ashlyn.”

“Thanks Stan.”

“Here we go.” Ashlyn said as she opened the truck door. She pulled the seat back up and stored her trophy behind it and then placed lady Fish up on the dash before turning to help Ali up into the cab. Ali settled and turned toward Ashlyn, but Ashlyn wasn’t there. She looked down. There Ashlyn was on one knee.

“Ash are you hurt? Did you step in a hole?” Ali cried out as she tried to exit the cab. Ali’s foot caught in the door and she tumbled out right on top of Ashlyn and sent her flying backwards.

“No! No! Nnooo! Where is it?” Ashlyn howled frantically as she flipped Ali off and crawled Marine style over her. “Where is it? Where is it?” Ashlyn chanted frantically as she combed thru the hay and grass in the newly mowed field.

“Ash what’s the matter?” Ali asked as she watch Ashlyn throw handfuls of hay in the air.


Ali got on her hand and knees and started picking through the field. She didn’t know what she was looking for but she was trying to find it nonetheless. “Is it your keys?” Ali queried.

“I WISH! Gotta find it. Damn it!” Ashlyn howled.

“Aha! There it is.” Screams Ashlyn as she dives prostrating herself across the ground clutching something in her out stretched hands. She whirls around into a sitting position and her flying legs whap Ali in the side knocking her over again.

“Ashlyn Harris.”
“Sorry. Sorry.” Ashlyn says as she helps Ali into a sitting position.

“What the hell Ashlyn.” Ali huffs while brushing herself off.

Ashlyn just juts her arms out and pulls back the lid of a little black box.

Ali’s eye grow big.

“Is that?”

“Yes.”

“You asking?”

“Yes.”

Ali extends her left hand. It’s shaking a bit.

Ashlyn bobbles the ring a little as she slides it on Ali’s finger. Ali raises her hand, looking at the ring and then just launches herself at Ashlyn. They tumble over each other. Back and forth while picking up a coating of hay.

“Harris get a room.”

“Shut up Stan.”

“This is a G rated parking lot. Doesn’t look good for you to be rolling all over the locale Schoolmarm in the hay Ashlyn.”

“Beat it Stan.” Ashlyn calls out as she helps Ali to her feet. They giggle and laugh as they brush hay and grass from themselves before they climb in the truck and start the drive home.
“You never did say yes.”

“You never really asked. Was that your plan? To do it in the parking lot?”

“No. I planned on popping the question on the back deck when we got home. I have a bottle of Champaign waiting in the fridge. I just couldn’t wait any longer. You want me to do it over again on the deck as planned?”

“Heck no! That was the best worst proposal ever. No do overs.” Ali protested. All of the sudden Ali sat upright. “That’s what they were doing.”

“Who was doing what?” Ashlyn asked confused.

“The whole freaking town that’s who. The whole day they were trying to get a look at my left hand. I wondered why they were being so odd about things. The whole sauce table froze and stared at my hands when I went up to do my sandwich. I thought I was doing it wrong. Two different people grabbed my left hand and felt it up. Feeling for a ring I guess. Barb shoved her baby at me so I had to reach up and grab it with both hands. More things than that happened. And all the whispering. I was getting paranoid.”


“Welcome to my world Ashlyn Harris. This is the second hog roast I went to that the whole town was up in my business.” Ali chided. “Although I say we skip next years. I am afraid of what I might find out about me.”

“What else is there?”

“Oh I don’t know. Everyone will be handing me things in groups of three and before the nights over I find out I’m pregnant with triplets.”

“Triplets.” Ashlyn squeaked right before a huge coughing fit over took her. Ali had to take the
“Last year I found out I was on a hot dating spree. This year I find out I am engaged to be married. The next natural chain of events that I can think of is kids.”

“Triplets.” Ashlyn croaked still not fully recovered.

“Just saying that this has been one bizarre experience. Again!” Triplets! God no.

“Bizarre? Hell no. Tonight is the night that Mr. Limpet got his Lady Fish and so did I.”

“Morning future Mrs. Harris.” Ashlyn said as she snuggled into Ali.

“Good Morning to you from the future Mrs. Harris.” Ali answered right back.

“God were sticky.” Ashlyn said.

“Champaign will do that to a body.” Ali shot back with a grin. Just then Ashlyn’s stomach growled its dissatisfaction.

“Sounds like someone’s hungry.” Ali teased.

“Yep. How about I take my new wife-to-be out to a late breakfast?” Ashlyn offered.

“Shower first.” Ali responded as she rolled out of bed.

Chapter End Notes
Not so sure how far to take this. Do you want babies? Taking a poll. I can stop it at the engagement, or maybe the wedding, or take it further. Your thoughts? Just going to admit Solo Harris babies are a dream.

How do you feel about Stan? I love him although I know I see his future development that is not open to you. I am writing him up in future chapters as the little bro for Kelley.

Babies yes or no?
Town Confirmation

Chapter Summary

Ok. Got that. So not into babies you are. It was the quiet readers that said give it to me. Maybe I should pay more attention to them? If they told me what they wanted. So I am going to be selfish. I want the first baby.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ali and Ashlyn enter the dinner and see Hope and Kelley seated at the counter. As soon as Kelley sees them she is leaning back in her stool so far and craning her neck that she flips backwards out of the chair and winds up on all fours in the middle of the isle. Kelley raises her head and stares at Ali hard. Then she raises her right hand, points it at Ali and lets out a combination squeal/howl. It could have been a scene right out of Invasion Of The Body Snatchers. Kelley is on her feet in a flash running down the aisle to Ali.

Kelley grabs Ali’s hand, raises it in the air and shakes it violently. “Ash put a ring on it. Ash put a ring on it.” She loudly declares.

The Dinner erupts into applause.

“Way to go Ash.”

“About time Ash.”

“Should have told Ash no, Ali.”

Ali and Ashlyn are blushing as they make their way to the counter. Ali sits by Hope and Ashlyn sits by Kelley. “Hope did you know this was going to happen?”

“Yes and no. I knew she was going to propose, but I didn’t know when. Walt tipped me off and then I confronted Ashlyn. Ali, she is my business partner and we have known each other all our lives.
“I don’t have a problem with you knowing. Glad I didn’t get ahold of you after the toss off.”

“That’s why I grabbed Kelley and ran out of there. If you didn’t get it out of me I know Kelley would have told. I didn’t tell her by the way. She heard it around town same as everyone else. I had to fake like I didn’t know it when she came home yelling about it.”

“I can imagine.”

“Are you getting married back home or………..”

“Here I think. Ash and I did discuss it once. I think I’d like a town wedding. My people in Virginia can travel down here. I just can’t imagine everyone I have gotten to know here not being there.”

“Good choice. I know it will make the town happy. Do you know when you would like to get married?”

“We haven’t discussed that yet. It’s all so new.”

“Once you know when, go see Fran at the library. She takes care of park reservations. I know she has been waiting on you to come in. Don’t wait too long. The park fills up quick.”

“Thanks for the tip Hope. That must have been what Fran was trying to tell me last night.”

“There they go.” Hope says while eyeing the Diners door.

“There who goes Hope?”

“Fran and Hank.”

“So.”
“Do you know anything about them?”

“I know Hank goes to the library every day to read the paper even though he sells them at the gas station.”

“Yes, he does do that at lunch time which happens to be the same time Fran goes to lunch every day. Did you also know that Fran only gets two gallons of gas at a time and Hank actually goes out and pumps it?”

“No. Why two gallons?”

“So she can stop by the station twice a week. Every Sunday after church Fran walks down here and takes her seat and then Hank shows up and takes the seat right beside her. Everyone knows not to sit in those two seats. Fran leaves first and then Hank does about five minutes later. I have been told that he has been seen walking down her street.” Hope said giving Ali the eye.

“So what are you saying? Are they are ………….”keeping company” on Sunday afternoon?” Ali asks.

“Hank needs to put a ring on it.” Kelley interjects. “I’ve been thinking on how to move that along.”

“Kelley, I told you to leave Fran and Hank alone.” Hope reminded her.

“Come on Hope. It’s been five years. They need some help.”

“Kelley no.” Hope said with a “that’s finale” voice.

“Yeah. Yeah. Yeah.” Kelley muttered. Not that she was going to leave that alone.

Ash and Ali were sprawled out on the couch like to beached whales. Ali shifted to the side a bit which elicited a groan from Ash. “Babe, please don’t put any pressure on my gut.”
“Sorry. I can’t believe how much food people were sending over to us in the diner. Even after sending some home with Hope and Kelley we have a week’s worth stuffed in the fridge.”

“I don’t think I’m eating for the next two days.” Ashlyn moaned. Ash laid back, staring at the ceiling. I’m getting married. Yes I am. Ash tried to picture that day. I can just see us in the park on a Saturday. I’m going to be nervous as hell. Saturday? Saturday when? “Hey Ali?”

“Yes.” Ali answered distracted in her own thoughts.

“When do you want to get married?”

“I don’t know Ash. So many details to plan. Usually takes a year I think.”

“Hog fest time?”

“Lord no. Maybe after?”

“More than a year? That seems so far away. Could we do it before?”

“August is out. The grass in the park will be burnt to a crisp. July is just too hot.” Ali mused.

“What about June. The weather was great for Hope and Kelley.” Ashlyn tendered.

“In nine months. There’s so much to do and I won’t have any help.” Ali said with a touch of sadness.

“What makes you say that?”

“When I thought about getting married in the past it was back home and my family would be there to help with the planning. There so many decisions. The food. The band. Invitations. Rehearsal. Flowers..........................” Ali trailed off just seeing the mountain of things she would have to
“Honey you’re not alone in this. I’ll help. Hope and Kelley will help.”

“Kelley? God no. We will show up at our wedding to find out it has somehow become a mud volleyball tournament. Hope has already given me a pointer or two already. She said the first thing to do was go see Fran at the library to reserve the park. Evidently Fran has been waiting on me for God knows how long.”

“See there. People are already stepping up to help. Why don’t you go and see Fran on Monday? Once we have a date we can start working on the details. You know these public weddings are kind of the town’s forte. We know what to do. Everyone helps out.”

Ali felt a little better. She glanced up at Ashlyn. “Nap?”

“Best thing I heard all day.” Ashlyn murmured placing a kiss on Ali’s forehead as they snuggled in and drifted off.

Chapter End Notes

So. Looks like Ali needs some help. Who will rise up?
Ali has a confusing day.

“Ali. Ali.” It was Fran running towards her carrying an arm load of binders, magazines and a note pad. “I’m so glad you’re here. We can lock down the park and get the wheels turning.” Fran chirped happily as she led Ali to a table. Fran laid out a large binder and flipped it open as she sat down. ”What date did you have in mind?”

“Available.” Fran exclaimed. “I’ve held every weekend in June open for you. The weather will be great. Not too hot and not too cold. Jill Ellis has been wanting to schedule a family reunion for June but I told her no. Ali gets to pick first. She can be mad as she wants. She can have a reunion on any weekend. You’re getting married. It’s special. You should have your date. Do you know what weekend end?”

“No. We didn’t pick an actual date because we didn’t know what would be available.” Ali’s brow furrows. Her first decision and she had no idea how to make it.

Fran looked at the calendar and then thumbed back a few pages. “The first weekend might be a little cold yet and Kelley and Hopes date is near the second weekend. The fourth one is pretty close to July so it might be hot so what do you think of the third Saturday, the 17th?” Fran said as she shifted her gaze to Ali.

“Sounds good to me.” Hell if I know.

“Great. I’ll just go ahead and reserve it. I should give Stan a call over at the hardware store so he can reserve the tables, tents, and chairs for you. OK?” Fran said not waiting on a reply. Fran picked up her phone and did just that. “Have you thought about a theme? Viv and I have been thinking using oranges. You know, because of that cute story of you and Ash at the farmers market. When you got that orange down your shirt.” Fran stops and laughs here.
“How about the food? You just need to supply the meat and drinks. You could do hamburgers, hot dogs, and brats. Everyone loves that or you could go a little more upscale. The Diner can help you with that. Ellen has been working on a nice ham loaf with an orange glaze if you go with the orange theme. Viv has been toying around with it also. You should stop by the craft store after we’re done here so she can show you.” Fran looks up and give Ali a warm smile.

“Actually I haven’t thought about anything.” Ali says bewildered. “Have you all been, well, sort of planning this?”

“Honey we have been so excited about it. We’ve been kicking ideas around a bit. Doesn’t mean you have to use them. It won’t hurt our feelings in the least. I know your family is in Virginia so any help you need just let us know. We’re here to help you.”

Ali had tears in her eyes. “Thank you so much. When I thought about all the things that needed to be planned yesterday I was overwhelmed at the thought. I can use any help you can give me. I do like the orange theme.”

“So you don’t mind us little old town ladies meddling in your big day? Good. I just love a wedding. Here’s the latest bridal magazines. I thought they might help you. I was talking to Dawn over at the bridal shop in the city. You went with Kelley when she picked out her dress there didn’t you?”

“Yes.” Ali wondered where this was going.

“Well Dawn is holding back four of the latest dress styles for you. The ones she thought might be most flattering on you. She suggested that you and Kelley stop by on Friday. About 9:00 a.m. and take a look. I can confirm that with Dawn right now if you’d like?” Fran said picking up her phone again.

“Sure.” Ali answered in daze.

Fran finished her call to Dawn. “I’ll give Ellen a call over at the Diner so she can whip you up a sample of that ham loaf. Oh. Cheryl over at the bakery has been experimenting with orange cakes also. She has four or five different varieties. I let her know that orange is a go so she can make you some samples also.” Fran said excitedly as she whipped out her phone again.
Ali just sat there. Her mind all in a boggle.

“What about your honeymoon? Any thoughts?” Fran asked.

“Not yet. Do you have some thoughts on that?” Ali asked as she waited to be told where she was going.

“I also pulled some travel magazines for you to look at. I would advise you and Ash taking the Bridal Suite over at the lodge the night of your wedding. It will be a long day and then you don’t want to have to rush to the airport to make a flight. Ed over at the Lodge has been holding the suite open for you and some rooms for your family. Should I let him know you’ll take it?”

“Sounds like a plan.”

“Sam over at the grocery store has been working on your wedding cocktail. He’s using orange liquor of some sort. He has the cutest name for it. He’s calling it the Ali Oops. You know. On account that you knocked over all of the oranges.” Fran giggled. “I almost forgot. Emily over at the florist has been working on the flower theme. Lots of lilies in a bunch of shades of orange, white, and ivory. I’ll let her know also.” By this time Fran is just rubbing her hands together with glee. “Let’s see, food, cake, drink, dress, flowers, and honeymoon.” Fran ticked off. “You just need to go see Viv and Bob Adams over at the craft store and print shop and I think everything will be covered.” Fran said getting up and stacking all of her items. Fran walked around the table handing Ali the magazines. “Honey if you two need anything else just let me know.”

“Thank you so much Fran. This has been such a relief.” Ali said hugging the woman. “I’ll go see Viv right now.” Did I just plan my wedding in two hours with Fran?

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“Oh you’re here.” Viv squealed as she ran down the store aisle and grabbed Ali by the arm, dragging her to the rear of the shop. “Just wait till you see this Ali.” Viv said opening a drawer. “Ta da.” Viv said as she handed Ali a paper mache orange.

Ali examined the orange. Wedding bells were printed on it bracketing their names and wedding date. “Viv. It’s cute. I like it.” Ali smiled.
“I have been working on your flyer to put up in all the town stores and such also. Here’s a mock up. I thought we could use ivory vellum with dark brown type with oranges lightly screened in orange ink in the back ground.” Viv pointed to each item as she described it. “We can use a different type face if you want and work with the information. I just used what I knew but look it over and let me know if there are changes required. We can use this theme on you invitations also”

“I hadn’t even thought about a flyer. I know I have seen them. Wow. I just can’t believe you all have done all of this.” Ali said sincerely, feeling herself starting to tear up again.

“Sweetheart, let’s go next door to the print shop. Bob can lend you the sample books of invitations for you to take home and look at.” Viv said as she placed the orange and flyer draft in Ali’s hand while dragging her to the side door which led to the print shop. “Bob, Ali’s here.” Viv called out while she walked to the counter.

Bob came out of his office. “Hi Ali. Are you here to pick up the sample books?”

“That’s the plan.”

“I have two of them.” Bob said as he handed Ali two large bound books. “Once you and Viv get the flyer locked down I’ll print them off about four weeks before the wedding and distribute them. I’ll also print it in our little town paper a month before the wedding and then a reminder a week before.”

“Gez. You guys have everything covered.”

“We can even stuff the invites into the envelope, slap an address label on them and take them to Ruby over at the post office if you want.” Bob offered. “Now remember when you get your address list together that you don’t need to send anyone in town an invitation. Saves a lot of money using the flyer. Oh, do you want to schedule Jeff now? You know Jeff, our photographer for the paper. He does most of the weddings around here. He did Hope and Kelley’s.”

“You don’t think people will be disappoint or hurt if I don’t send them an actual invitation?” Ali asked. “Jeff will be fine if he is available.”

“No. This is just the way we do things. You can do it whatever way you want. Jeff has kept June open for you. Fran told him to. I’ll give him the date. Don’t let the girls railroad you into anything.” Bob stressed. He was concerned. Ali looked over whelmed.
“They’re not. I’ve liked everything they have done. I just………………..” Ali trailed off.

“Sweetheart anything we’ve decided on today can be changed tomorrow once you think things over. You just go home. It’s been a long day of decisions for you.” Viv said as she escorted Ali out the door.

Chapter End Notes

Next up, Ashlyn has a confusing day.
Ali just sat there at her kitchen table. She was on her second beer. She had just gotten a text from Kelley confirming their dress shopping on Friday. Fran had even taken care of scheduling that. Ali was just dazed at all of the things that had been done for her and Ash.

“Ali. God. Dam. Shit.” Ashlyn fumed as she walked in the door struggling with boxes and bags. “You are not going to believe what happened today. I was driving through town on my way home when Cheryl from the bakery flagged me down. Next thing I know she was stuffing boxes through the window saying these were your cakes. Why do we need cakes?” Ash went on not waiting for an answer as she unloaded her arms not even looking at Ali. “Then she sent me down to the Diner where Ellen gave me a ham loaf for you. Is that dinner? Next thing I know Sam is running out of the grocery store with this bottle saying it’s our drink. What drink? Then Sam told me to stop at the florist where I got these bouquets from Emily. She said you would be expecting them.” Ashlyn held up the bunch of flowers she had stuck under her arm to carry everything in. “They’re pretty enough, but what’s up these? Why has everybody been giving me all this stuff for you? Are we having a party?” Ashlyn asked finally looking at Ali.

“Why are you drinking beer at 4:00 in the afternoon? You look a little upset or something. Did it not go well with Fran?”

Ali looked up at Ash. “Get a beer and sit down.”

Ash followed orders and then Ali began. “You know how I told you it takes a year to pull a wedding together? Not in this town it doesn’t. I don’t know when they started on it. Probably once Walt let the cat out of the bag about you buying that ring. Must have been.”

“Who’s they? What did they start?” Ashlyn had no idea what Ali was going on about.

“They? Everybody in this town it seems. It started with Fran in the library this morning and ended
with Bob and Viv at the print shop.”

“What started?” Ashlyn was really confused now.

“Me being brought up to speed on the details of our wedding. Our theme is oranges on account of the incident at the farmers market. I would have never thought of that. It makes it special in a way. I think that was Fran’s idea. Could have been Viv. Here’s our remembrance to hand out. They are going to stack them up in a pyramid just like a fruit stand.” Ali said as she handed Ashlyn the paper mache orange.

“Are we getting married on the 17th?” Ash asked as she read the lettering on the orange.

“After Fran told me the other days were too hot or too cold or too near Hope and Kelley’s wedding. Yes, it’s the 17th.” Ali said as she handed Ashlyn the wedding flyer.

“Are you good with that?” Ashlyn asked as she took the flyer and studied it.

“Fran’s reasoning’s were sound. That’s our wedding flyer that will be posted all over the town. Viv and Bob worked on that along with the orange. It will also be printed in the town paper.”

“I like it. Well, if you do?” Ashlyn was still struggling to catch up. Ali was clearly in a daze of some sort.

“Fran also reserved the chairs, tents, and whatever else with Stan. They have been refusing to schedule Jill Ellis’ reunion also. Now I know why she was kinda pissy towards me.” Ali said with new insight. “I had wondered what I had done to tick her off. Now I know. Oh. Fran had Ed over at the Lodge reserve 30 rooms that weekend for me and we are staying in the Bridal Suite that night. Fran also got with Stella. Best BNB ever. She is putting my parents and Grandparents there.”

“We are? The Lodge? Fran put your parents in the BNB?” Ashlyn said in an agreement tone rather than an asking one. Was this good or bad?

“Fran sent vacation magazines home with me. To pick our honeymoon get away from. I noticed she has a few pages flagged. She also sent bridal magazines home with me but I don’t think I’ll need them. Although she does have some pages flagged.” Ali said as she thumbed to them. “OH! They
are for you. Well this one’s even a GQ. Way to go Fran.” Ali laughed.

Ashlyn brightened at this. “Can’t wait to see her opinion of what I should wear.” Ashlyn started to relax along with Ali.

“I have also decided on the meat we are supplying. Well, Fran led me to it. Evidently Ellen has been working on a ham loaf with an orange glaze. I think it’s in that bag.” Ali said as she pointed across the table.

“Yes. Ellen gave me that one. Smells good doesn’t it?”

“Can’t imagine I’ll be disappointed. The boxes from Cheryl are probably wedding cake samples. All orange based.” Ali mused.

“When she shoved them through the window she was talking a mile a minute. Orange cream, orange and cranberry, orange and maybe nutmeg I think.” Ashlyn tried to remember. “Sorry. I didn’t get it all. It was confusing.”

“Look.” Ali said pointing again at the bakery boxes. “Cheryl has a diagram on each one. You are not going to believe what our wedding cocktail is named.” Ali giggled.

“Cocktail? Is that like the drink they had at Hope and Kelley’s wedding. The Hope Floats? If that is it then I am going to go with Oranges Are Us.”

“Good one. Oranges are the theme. Sam has a name already worked out. It’s called the Ali Oops.”

Ashlyn cracks up at this. “Totally know where he got the name. Why did I get a text from Fran saying Kelley would not be at work Friday?”

“Did she? Fran is a one woman show. Kelley and I have an appointment with Dawn to look at wedding dresses. Dawn is holding back a few for me.”

“Can I go?” Ashlyn asks.
“What? No. You don’t get to see it until the 17th.”

“Ok.” Ashlyn said as she pulled Ali onto her lap. Ali went willingly. Her confusion and bewilderment about the day forgotten.

Ashlyn stood up as she directed Ali’s legs around her waist. “Just going to put this ham loaf in the fridge for now.” Ashlyn said through a kiss.

Ashlyn walked through the hall way towards Ali’s bedroom. Ali nipped at Ashlyn’s neck. Ali pulled back. “Ashlyn, you get family and a town by birth right. Then later, you get to decide. If you are lucky. You choose well. I’m choosing this town and the people in it as family. I love them and I know without a doubt they love me. Us. I chose it.”

Ashlyn wrapped her arms around Ali. “Then we are in total agreement. We, You, I, Them.”

Chapter End Notes

I think we all could use a Fran in our life.

Maybe this explains Jill not playing Ali?
Fran ran into the tent. “You girls ready?” Fran asked with a strange lilt to her voice.

“Are you ok Fran?” Ali asked with concern.


Just then the organist struck the first few notes of the wedding march. “Show time ladies.” Fran announced as she nearly pushed Ali and Kelley out of the tent.

Ali was walking behind Kelley. Fiddling with her dress, bouquet, and whatever else she could fuss with. She wanted everything to be perfect for Ashlyn. Ali looked up. There was Ashlyn waiting for her at the altar. Smile so big. So expectant.

“Good God she’s gorgeous.” Ashlyn let out as her feet started to carry her towards Ali. Ashlyn felt an arm grab her and she turned to swat it away. It was Hope.

“Ash you need to stay here.” Hope reminded her.

“Oh. Um….yeah.” Ashlyn said as she settled back into place and waited on her Bride.

Ali couldn’t remember walking down the aisle. All she knew is that she was standing next to Ashlyn as the Reverend lead them through their wedding vows. When he got to the part where he asked if anyone wanted to speak now or forever holding their peace all eyes turned towards Kelley, a frequent speaker upper.
“What? No. I got nothing.” Kelley shrugged off as she gave Ali a hug. “Well maybe. About damn time. I called it in the Jones’ front yard. Ali asking Ashlyn to go to the Hog Fest. You should have been there. I thought Ashlyn was gonna rip her shirt when her chest pumped up.”

It was the first dance. Ashlyn had worried about this. She had no rhythm and her size 10 feet didn’t often agree with each other. She had made Ali practice this dance a 100 times and now here she was doing it. *Don’t trip. Don’t step on her feet.* Ashlyn repeated to herself as almost a mantra. The last notes of the song played and she had gotten through it with no missteps. *God why can’t this be over and we just leave now before I screw something up.*

Ashlyn didn’t screw anything up. She hovered around Ali the whole day as their guests ate and visited with each other. It seemed like everyone had some favorite little story about them. She had never felt so proud of her town. She was thankful that Ali had grown to love the town and the town had loved her right back.

Fran swooped in again. “Cake time.” Fran said as she ushered the two women to the tent. “Don’t you dare.” Fran threatened as she handed Ashlyn the knife.

*Like I would you old Biddy.* Ashlyn fumed to herself. *I would never disrespect Ali by grinding cake in her face.* Ashlyn cut the cake and lifted a small piece to Ali. Her hands were trembling. *Don’t get it on her dress.* *That dress needs to be pristine so Ali can vacuum pack it for one of our kids to wear.* *Kids! Kids! I am going to have kids with her.* *Her!* Ashlyn felt like she was going to pass out.

“You ok Sport?” Ali asked as she noticed Ashlyn had paled.

“Yes. Doing fine.” Ashlyn answered as Ali cut off a piece of cake to feed her.

Ali lifted the piece of cake while pivoting to her left. She smashed that piece of cake into Kelley’s face. The crowd roared with laughter. “Admit it.” Ali said. “You all wanted Hope to do that last year. I can do it because I don’t have to sleep with her.” Ali was feeling bold. Might have been the Ali Oops taking effect. She cut off another piece of cake and very carefully placed it in Ashlyn’s mouth. “Ash you keep good company.” Ali said as she looked out and held eyes with many of their guests. *Yes these are the people that will walk through our life.*
Hope was laughing as she picked up a napkin to wipe the cake off Kelley’s face. She had just brushed off the last of the icing off Kelley’s nose and replaced it with a kiss. Yes, we both got the right ones.

Ashlyn and Ali had just carved out a space to themselves when Kelley came flying by. “Bouquet and garter belt now.” Ali and Ashlyn shared an eye roll.

“Ali just throw it to me.” Kelley instructed Ali.

“Kelley you shouldn’t be in the catch group. You are already married.” Ali was confused.

“Just do it Ali. I have a plan.”

Ali knew better than to argue. She found Kelley in the crowd and sent the bouquet her way. Kelley was standing next to Fran. Kelley grabbed Fran and thrust her forward. The bouquet hit Fran in the face and she automatically grabbed at it.

One down and one to go. Thought Kelley. She just needed Ashlyn to do her part. Hope was supposed to take care of that.

Ali was sitting on a chair with her legs crossed as Ashlyn slid her baby blue garter off. Ashlyn jumped in the air like a prize fighter that just got their belt. So proud she was.

Hope slipped in behind Ashlyn as she readied the garter in her hands to be sent out. “You know what you’re supposed to do? Kell will kill if you don’t. I really don’t want to bury your body in a shallow grave somewhere. Sorry, gotta hang with the Wife on this one or she will smother me in my sleep with my own pillow.”

Ashlyn knew what Kelley was doing. She spied her target and let the garter go. The crowd melted away and just left him standing there. The whole town was in on it. I so love Kelley. It hit him in the chest. He caught it. The photographer descended on Fran and Hank. Sorry Hank but your days are numbered. Ashlyn smirked to herself as she joined back up with Ali.

“Gonna be another wedding.” Kelley sang out. “This time next year.”
“Nope. I don’t think it will be that long. Fran has this down to a science. End of the year at best.” Ali could see it now. “Want to place some bets?”

Yes, Ali was fitting right in.

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“Form two lines,” The voice rang out. This is it. The wedding is over. Now we’re finally on our own. Ali was nervous. Ashlyn found her quickly.

“Bird seed walk then we lose them.” Ashlyn said as she led Ali down the line. They were on the dock in a heartbeat. Ashlyn helped her into the boat. All she could see is a bunch of blow up fish trailing behind the boat. The sign on the back didn’t say, “Just married.” No, it said, “Mr. Limpet gets her Lady Fish.” Semantics aside, it was so correct.

“Love it. Love you.” Ali said as she moved into Ashlyn’s lap as Hope threw in the mooring lines. Ashlyn kicked her boat into gear and motored out on to the lake.

“Uumm……. Ash aren’t you going the wrong way?”

“Nope. I thought we would take a little run down memory lane before going to the Lodge.”

“Memory Lane? Are you going back to where I fell in the water and you fished me out?”

“Yes. Here we are. Where it all started.” Ash said as she pulled into the cove. “Where my catch of the day started and has now become the catch of my life.”

Chapter End Notes

There will be surprises. Some expected. Some not.
The Big Reveal

Chapter Summary

Jeez Risk is getting bossy with me and has recruited Net as her little side kick. A posse of thugs they are. Maybe more of a dastardly duo? I’m picturing Boris Badenov and Natasha Fatale here. “What has A03 become?” I ask myself as I do exactly what was commanded of me. Perhaps I need a side kick to stand up to them.

Craigslist Ad: Wanted, a Bullwinkle Moose type character to provide back up for a Rocky the Flying Squirrel type. Must be willing to wage battle against a pair of crazy Russian thugs that are members of the Pottsylvania Locale 12 of the Villains, Bullies, and Scoundrels Union. Must have passport and be willing to relocate to Frostbite Falls, Minnesota and travel to Pottsylvania frequently. I will warn you that Boris has been ranked among the top 10 of the worlds no-goodniks.

Please put Moose and Squirrel in the subject line of all replies.

“Ashlyn that’s the fifth time I have caught you on your phone. Now stop it. It’s the last day of our honeymoon and I don’t want you spending all your time working.” Ali harrumphed. “Matter of fact Kelley has been calling you non-stop this entire time.”

“They just ran into a little snag with that tree house we are building for Barb and Frank Jones house is all.” Ashlyn replied not looking at Ali.

“I thought they were on a trip of their own for their first year anniversary?” Ali questioned.

“They got back a couple of days ago. We need to get the tree house done for the birthday party they are throwing Frank JR. next weekend.” Ashlyn covered. I need to tell Kelley to stop calling. I don’t care where she puts what.

“Well enough of that. You have another whole week. Let’s swim on over to the pool bar and teach them what an Ali Oops is.” Ali said as she took Ashlyn by the hand and led her to the pool.

Ashlyn made a left off the highway and was steering the car down the main drag of their town. The town was out in full force today. Everywhere they looked someone was waving to them and giving
them a thumbs up.

“Well the town seems to be in rare form today.” Ali muttered.

“Got her done Ash.” Stan called out.


“Who knows? It’s Stan after all.” Ashlyn lied.

“All I can think of is all the packing I have to get done this week so we can get me moved into your house next Sunday. Kelley is chomping at the bit to move into mine. Wouldn’t be surprised to find her living in it already.” Ali opinioned.

“What? What makes you say that? Did she say something to you?” Ashlyn questioned while her heart raced.


“You know Kelley. Always hatching some plan. I don’t know how Hope deals with it. Well here we are. Home sweet home.” Ashlyn called out as she pulled in their drive. Ashlyn went around to the truck to get their luggage. Ashlyn looked up just in time to see Ali sliding her key into the lock.

“Wait! Stop!” Ashlyn panicked as she raced to stop Ali.

Ali turned and gave Ashlyn a questioning look.

“I have to carry you over the threshold.”

“Close your eyes.” Ashlyn requested as she picked Ali up. “Are they closed?”

“Yes, but I don’t remember that being part of this.” Ali said as she covered her eyes with her hands.

“Well maybe I have a little surprise for you.” Ashlyn said as she kicked open the door. Ashlyn carried Ali into the living room. “Open your eyes now.”

Ali removed her hands and opened her eyes. She could not believe what she was seeing.

“My stuffs here?”

“Yes. I knew you were dreading coming back with all the packing and moving so while we were gone Hope, Kelley, and Stan got a little group together and took care of it. I tried to tell them everything you had said about what you wanted where. We can change anything you want. All the leftovers are stored out in the pole barn.”

“I can’t believe you guys did this.” Ali looked around in wonder. “Was that what Stan meant by ‘got it done’?”

“Yes. I could have wrung his neck. Between Stan and Kelley, I thought for sure one of them was going to give it away. I couldn’t have my Bride stressing away her first week home.” Ashlyn said as she tightened up her arms and pulled Ali in for a kiss.

“Ashlyn I think you should show me the rest of the house starting with the bedroom.”

“If you insist.” Ashlyn said as she carried her Wife down the hall.

“OH. MY. FREAKING. GOD.” Ali screams as she starts kicking her legs.

“WHA……..” Ashlyn gets out just as she drops Ali on her leg. Now both of them are tumbling to floor. Ashlyn smacks her head on the wall on her way down.

“What’s the matter?” She asks while simultaneously rubbing both her head and left knee.
“My night stand. Oh God. Kelley packed my night stand.” Ali was almost hyperventilating.

“Relax Ali.” Ashlyn consoled as she rose to her feet and pulled Ali to hers. “I took care of that. Remember how I had to go back in before we left and I brought out a box and then dropped it off here. I said it was plans and samples for a project? It was really your drawer in your night stand.”

“Jesus.” Ali said as her hand went to chest. “We would never hear the end of that.”

“Yeah. Kind of figured Kelley would not let that go.” Ashlyn laughed as she followed Ali into their bedroom.

“So where’d you put it?” Ali smiled as she whipped off her shirt.

“Right over here.” Ashlyn smirked as she limped to her closet and retrieved the box.

“Right here safe and sound.” Ashlyn leered as she open the box. “Holy fuck.” Ashlyn screamed (it was nearly a shriek) as she threw the box whacking Ali in the chest with her arm.

As Ali fell she grabbed Ashlyn and pulled her down to the floor with her. Part of the contents of the box landed right in front of Ali’s eyes. Ali screamed as she viciously kicked her feet and was finally able to scramble out of the door.

Ashlyn is curled up in a ball on the floor. Her mid-section took all of the blows Ali’s feet had dealt out as she fought her way out the door. As Ashlyn laid there her eyes came to rest on it. She jerked at first but then noticed how it hadn’t moved. It was the mouse. The same mouse that Kelley had put in the cookie jar and then Hope had put in Kelley’s lunch box. “Fuck Kelley.” Ashlyn moaned as she held her side.
Late for me I know. Say the East Coasters. You Western chics are probably chowing down on dinner as you read the latest updates. Short chapter it is. It so moves the story along to where you demanded it go. Mouse fans were heard from.

Sorry. Left out the Brits and Aussies. And???

Double Sorry. Moose and Squirrel emails. Appreciate I do. No, we are not waging a war. Risk is good. No friendly fire.

Ashlyn and Ali were just pulling furiously into the drive of what was now Hope and Kelley’s house. “She is so dead.” Ashlyn fumed.

“What the hell? I can’t believe Hope got that done. We were supposed to do that next week.” Ashlyn exclaimed as they took in the exterior of the house forgetting she was livid.

“Wow. That bay window looks really good.” Ali said as she exited the car and walked towards the door. Her thoughts of 99 ways to kill Kelley melting away.

Hope threw open the door as they reached the walk. “Hey you two. Nice to see you back. Man, you two have missed everything.” They look a little pissed. Pretty sure Kelley did something.

“What’s going on? I see you got the bay window installed? I thought it wasn’t supposed to be in until next week?” Ashlyn questioned as they came over the threshold and into the living room.

“It came in early. Stan brought it over when came to help move Ali and us. He kept hanging around so we put it in. We found out why later.” Hope explained as she led them into the house.

“Is that Ali and Ash?” Kelley called out from the spare bedroom.

“Yes.” Hope replied as they walked back to where Kelley and Viv were painting. Ashlyn was still limping and holding her side.
“Wow a tree. Is that a little squirrel family in it? Hey, a kangaroo. That looks like a wallaby.” Ali said as she walked around the room. “Is that an orangutan? Cute. This looks like, like a nursery.” Ali’s head shot up. “Are you?”

“Show Ali and Ash what I gave you for our 1st wedding anniversary Hope.” Kelley grinned with a gleam in her eye.

Hope returned with a slender white box and held it out to Ali. Ali looked up at Hope. She had never seen Hope look so bashful. Ali lifted the lid. Inside was an EPT with a plus sign on it.

“Oh. You two. I knew you were trying, but wow.” Ali stuttered. “One week away and everything changes.”

“That’s not all that changed. Stan was hanging around because Joyce broke up with him. She said three years was long enough for him to make up his mind. Could not get rid of him so we installed the bay.” Hope seemed sad as she relayed this portion of the story.

“That’s too bad.” Ali said with sincerity. *I love Stan. He is kind of like the little brother of this group.*

“It’s not over yet.” Kelley informed. “I gave him a piece of my mind on the matter while they worked. He showed up back here the next day asking me to go to Walt’s with him. He bought a ring.”

“So they are engaged now?” Ali asked.

“Not yet. We are taking Joyce over to the steak house on Wednesday. Stan is going to show up and do the deed. They had their first date there.” Kelley was getting excited now. “I just hope he remembers what I told him to say.”

“Geez Kelley. Does anything happen around here without you getting involved?” Ashlyn joked.

“As a matter of fact it does. Viv here got Hank to pop the question last Friday didn’t you Viv?” Kelley was beside herself. Happenings galore.
“Yes. I saw him hanging around the front of Walt’s for an hour. Looked like he was fighting with himself so I went over. He bought a ring and then we went over to the print shop and printed up a fake page for the newspaper with his proposal on it. Never thought I would be writing a proposal where the main words were, “I want to fill your tank forever” it would be creepy to read if you didn’t know he owns the gas station. He slipped it into a section and gave it to Fran to read while they had their daily accidental lunch in the library.”

“We could hear Fran scream a block away.” Hope laughed. “I actually ran to the library because I thought there was trouble. There was Fran. She practically had Hank spread eagle on a library table sucking his face off.”

“This all happened in one week?” Ali marveled.

“Yes. Don’t tell anyone I’m pregnant though. We want to wait awhile.” Kelley asked.

“Kelley they know already.” Hope exasperatedly. “You bought the test at the town drug store. Why do you think every time you order coffee at the Diner Ellen gives you a glass of milk?”

“Well shit! You can’t keep anything a secret in a small town.” Kelley fumed.

“Don’t I know it.” Ali replied, but glad for once it wasn’t talk about her life that was being spread like wild fire across town.

Then Ashlyn remembered. “Kelley, found your surprise.” She growled.

“Yeah Kell. Really funny.” Ali narrowed her eyes at the woman.

Ashlyn and Ali both took a step towards Kelley.

“Whoa there.” Hope said as she inserted herself between the three. “What’s going on?” I am not going to like the answer.
Just then Viv let out a small cough.

“You should probably cover your ears Viv.” Ashlyn advised,

Viv made out like she was. *No way in hell I am gonna miss this*!

“Hope you remember the mouse lunch box you gifted Kelley with?” Ashlyn queried while taking a step forward.

“Yes.” Hope knew exactly what they were talking about. *Nope, not gonna like it*.

“Well your Lady Love planted it in our STUFF.” Ashlyn hissed with emphasis. *God no. I am going to have to say what is what.* “The STUFF I had taken out of the equation and hid in my closet. Kelley found it and put that mouse in it. Ali nearly kicked my spleen through my ribs when we found it.”

Viv tiptoed out of the room. She was already writing her column. “Boxed Goods” it would be called.

Chapter End Notes

Hope struggles.
Chapter Summary

Hope is in a quandary.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

To Hope the months raced by and Kelley’s belly literally grew over night. The couple changed also. Kelley grew calmer and Hope became a hovering basket case.

It was early November and Kelley was down in the church basement getting it ready for the reception following Fran and Hanks long awaited wedding. “Solo I swear to god if you are behind me I will kick you into the next county.” Kelley hissed.

“Kelley you shouldn’t be carrying that. You could trip or fall or………..”

“Or run off with this chair so I can get some peace. Hope, god I love you, but I am only pregnant. Not disabled, diseased, dying, or any other thing you have cooked up in your head. Now I have to get these chairs set up and you have work to do upstairs for the wedding tomorrow. Fran is going to be in here in a minute and if she catches you not taking care of your responsibilities I will let her tear you a new one while I take pictures.”

“………..”

“If Solo comes down those stairs one more time I am going to chuck a hammer at her.” Kelley fumed.

Ali caught that announcement but thought it best she not ask about it right then.

Hope trudged back up the stairs to the sanctuary. Hope knew she had been getting on Kelley’s nerves, but she couldn’t help herself. Hope at first had looked at Kelley with wonder and awe. As
Kelley’s condition advanced this wonder was slowly being replaced with concern. The fullness of what they were doing and what had yet to come consumed Hope. Kelley was everything to her and the baby she carried inside her body was all their hopes and dreams. Hope would never be able to forgive herself if something happened and she wasn’t there. Hope could see the increasing tiredness in Kelley’s eyes as the baby’s growth sapped more and more of her energy and she was beginning to have trouble getting comfortable enough to sleep. Kelley had begun pushing Hope away in the night saying she made her too hot when all of Hope’s senses screamed at her to wrap herself around Kelley to protect her.

“Looks like you got handed your head again.” Ashlyn consoled. “Hope, you need to give her some space.”

“What till it’s your turn Harris. We’ll see how you do.” Hope muttered as she slumped in a pew.

“She’s so small. By time that baby gets to term do you know that is going to be a 20% increase to her body mass in such a short period of time? Think of the strain. You just don’t know how it feels to stand by doing nothing. The only thing I can do it try to protect her and get everything done at the house so there’s nothing left for her to do but relax and rest.”

“How’s that working for you?”

“Not so good. I was running the vacuum cleaner last night and Kelley came flying out of the hallway and ripped the cord right out of the wall. That reminds me I need to pick up a replacement plug for it.” Hope made a metal note. “Apparently I had just run the vacuum the day before and had also committed the grievous error of cleaning the bathroom twice in four days.”

“She’s mad because you are over cleaning?” Ashlyn was floored.

“I only do it so Kelley doesn’t have too and I may have tried to make her sit in the back seat when we went to Fran’s bridal shower.”

Ashlyn raised an eyebrow at this.

“It’s a proven fact that it’s safer.” Hope said exasperated with her situation. “Kelley got mad. Screamed she wasn’t an invalid and stomped over to her own car and took off for the party. Just left me standing there in the driveway with a stupid look on my face.”

“I wondered what was going on. You chased her around that whole night and she kept dodging
“Yeah. Well things haven’t changed much since that night.”

“Hope, have you forgot Kelley is tough as nails physically?” Ashlyn softened. “Does Kelley ever talk to you about her fears about the baby?”

“No. She evidentially doesn’t have any.” Hope remarked like it was a recently discovered flaw in Kelley.

“Well maybe she feels she can’t seeing how you have enough fear for five people.” Ashlyn offered up quietly.

Fran came up the stairs dragging Hank behind her with Ali and Kelley in tow, each carrying a box. “Looks like were done here people.” Fran said as she looked around. “Everyone just go home and relax for a few hours. See you at 6:00 for the rehearsal and don’t forget dinner is at the steak house so bring your appetites.”

Hope eyed Kelley while fighting every urge she had to run over to her and take the box. Kelley walked over to Hope.

“Kelley why don’t I. Why don’t I take a look around to see if we missed anything and you can take that box out and come back in? We have a few more to carry out.” Hope successfully beat down her driving inclination to carry everything.

Kelley eyed Hope up and down. She had expected a fight over the box and instead she received orders to carry more. “Sounds like a plan Solo.” Kelley said as she walked to the door still giving Hope a look.

Ali had watched the whole exchange. Maybe Ash knows what’s going on.

Soon enough the cars were all loaded and everyone was pulling out of the parking lot waving at each other. “Ash is there something going on with Kelley and Hope.”
“What makes you ask that?” Ashlyn hedged as she wondered what Ali knew.

“Things were amiss at the bridal shower between those two. When I asked Kelley about it she said and I quote, ‘Solo thinks she is the linebacker of my life’ end quote. Then I heard her yell at Hope something about dying and letting Fran tear her a new one if she didn’t leave. This was followed by Kelley vowing to throw a hammer at Hope if she came back to the basement. Then there was that thing at the door. Hope looked like she was having an argument with herself and Kelley looked like she was about ready to join it. Is there a problem with the baby? God don’t tell there is a problem with the baby.” Ali moaned as she threw herself back in her seat and covered up her face with her hands.

“No, no. No problem with the baby. The baby is causing the problem.”

“I refuse to believe that Ashlyn. They wanted that baby. No way.” Ali was resolute.

“Not that way Ali. Hope has kind of been over protecting to the point of being overbearing and Kelley feels a little suffocated. Hope seems worried about everything which is leaving Kelley no room to be worried herself.”

“Can you talk to Hope? Get her to relax a little.”

“We already have. That was the scene at the door. I’m sure Hope didn’t want Kelley carrying any boxes but she stepped back and just let it go.”

Hope pulled into the drive. She had seen Kelley’s head nod a couple of times during the short drive. “Kell I don’t know about you, but I’m tired. Those boxes can sit in the trunk until tomorrow.”

“Sounds good Solo.”

Hope took the hanger Kelley passed her and then helped slide Kelley’s coat off. Still calling me Solo. “I think I am going to make myself a cup of tea and then sprawl on the couch while I watch that documentary I have been wanting to watch.”

“Which one is that?”
“The one about the iron age and the first smelting of steel. You never let me watch it.” Hope knew that was a low blow but she knew if she could just get Kelley down on the couch with something boring on the TV it would send her right to sleep.

“Looks like your lucky day Solo. Steel smelting it is. That tea sounds nice. Would you mind making me a cup while you’re at it?”

“Sure thing Kell. Why don’t you get situated on the couch and I’ll bring it in?” Hope smiled to herself as she walked away. Hope walked into the living room to find Kelley laying out on the couch with the documentary queued up. “Oh good. You got it ready.” Hope said as she set a mug in front of Kelley on the coffee table and then walked around to take her seat on the opposite side. Hope couldn’t stand it. She could tell Kelley’s ankles were slightly swollen. This is totally normal. Hope convinced herself as she lifted Kelley’s feet and slid under them. Within minutes Hope’s hands began massaging Kelley’s feet and ankles on their own accord.

“Hey.” Kelley growled.

Hope froze.

“That feels amazing. Your hands are warm from holding your tea.” Kelley sighed as she snuggled down into the couch. Hope fought the urge to pull the blanket off the back of the couch and throw it over her. No hovering.

Hope watched the show for another 15 minutes and noticed Kelley had not been sipping from her tea so she stole a look. Kelley was fast asleep. Hope watched for a while before she slowly got up and placed a pillow under Kelley’s legs to keep them elevated and then allowed herself to give into the urge to cover her with the blanket. Hope set her alarm for 4:00 so they would have plenty of time to get ready and then walked down the hall to their bedroom and began furiously dusting it and the guest room. Unfortunately there wasn’t anything in the nursery for her to attack yet. She successfully fought the urge to clean the bathroom again. Hope returned to the living room and sat in the recliner watching Kelley again. Just then loud banging sounds were emitted from the TV. Blacksmiths were hammering on steel in the show. Hope lurched for the remote and hurriedly turned it down.

Kelley’s eyes fluttered open. She looked around and found Hope in the recliner. “Hope. What are you doing over there?” Kelley sleepily asked.

“I had to get up so I thought I’d sit over here so I didn’t disturb you.” Looks like I am back to being Hope rather than Solo.
“Hell with that.” Kelley declared as she started flinging the cushions from the back of the couch onto the floor. Kelley then rolled to her side and patted the space behind her silently asking Hope to join her.

Hope didn’t need any more encouragement then that as she slithered up behind Kelley carefully.

“Hope, you smell like lemons.”

“New hand soap.” Hope lied on the fly.

Chapter End Notes

For you Fran fans (you know who you are) things are about to heat up.
Hope and Kelley were just walking into the church when Ali and Ashlyn pulled in so they waited up for them. All four carried their suit bags into the church with Ali and Kelley peeling off to the right and Hope and Ashly going to the left.

“There you are.” Fran squealed as they entered the room while running over to them and hugging the hell out of them. Ruby, Fran’s Maid of Honor, was standing in the corner swilling down a flute of Champaign while she shimmied to a Chi Lites tune. Both were in slips with their makeup done and hair in hot rollers. “Let’s get those dresses out of the bag and let them breathe.” Fran said as she commandeered the bags and ran off with them.

“Holy Mother of God, Fran has been in the hooch.” Kelley whispered to Ali.


“Gonna get her freak on.” Kelley snickered.

“Shut up. I am already about to lose it.” Ali said giving Kelley a shove. Then Ali sobered. “Are things ok? You and Hope seemed a bit tense today.”

“Better. She didn’t try to wrap me up in bubble wrap this afternoon.” Kelley sighed. “I cannot believe me being pregnant turns Hope Solo, of all people, into a soft oozing lump of concern and about to totally suffocate me.”

Ali reached out to Kelley. “If it helps any I know she and Ashlyn talked about it today.”

“Well maybe that was the change. You won’t believe this but she snuggled up to me reeking of lemon and I asked her about it and she said it was new hand soap. Total lie. I hit that bedroom and it smelled of lemon and all the furniture was gleaming. She was dusting.”

Ali had to laugh at this. “Sorry but getting a new ultra-maid doesn’t seem like a problem to me
“Yeah well try living with one. Every time I lift my glass she wipes the table.” Kelley snickered feeling a lot better. “But seriously, I coughed the other night and she spent 10 minutes trying to take my temperature. My body is in revolt and Hope has gone batshit crazy.”

“Kell she just feels concerned and probably guilty.”

“Guilty?”

“Yes, because it’s a big thing. You are giving over your body. It’s uncomfortable, you don’t feel well at times and she knows what’s coming. I am sure she is thinking about seeing you in pain. There’s not much she can do to help. Hope will just be a bystander. It’s not something she does well.” Ali’s hands were flailing in the air.

As Hope and Ashlyn get ready in the Best Woman’s room. “Can you believe it?” Ashlyn said as she fought with her tie. “Stan better not mess up as the Best Man. This is training for him.”

“Hell yes. Kelley was on it. No way could this have ended differently.” Hope said with a little pride in her voice. “Let’s go check out the guys.” Hope said as they left the room and walked next door. “Hank. Stan. You decent.” Hope called while not really waiting for an answer as they walked in.

“I can’t do it. I can’t do it.” Hank wailed as he and Stan were grappling with their ties.

Hope and Ashlyn calmly walked behind the two men. Hope took on Hank while Ashlyn got Stan. They tied both the ties in a picture perfect Windsor knot.

“So Stan.” Ashlyn venture. “When’s your big day? Have a date yet?”

“What? No. No date.” Stan stammered while Hanks, Hope’s, and Ashlyn’s eyebrows all raised simultaneously. “We dated for three years so I figure we will just be engaged for a few and then
“No way are the Gals letting that happen Stan.” Hank consoled the man while clapping him on the shoulder. “We better go take our places before Fran sends one of her foot soldiers in here.”

Kelley, Hope, Ali, and Ashlyn were sitting around a table in the basement. “I never thought of using a honeydew melon in a drink before. Sam has out done himself this time. Why is it called the HoneyDo?” Ashlyn questioned.

“How have you not seen Fran leading Hank around saying some version of “Honey do this” or “Honey, we’ll do that” while this whole thing was planned? Especially the honeymoon. Still cannot believe Fran talked Hank into going to Rome to reenact Roman Holiday.” Ali explained.

“Well it doesn’t beat an Ali Oops.” Ashlyn said as she pulled Ali closer.

“Which in no way beats a Hope Floats.” Kelley boasted. “Oh look. It’s time for the bouquet and garter toss. Hank and Fran know what to do.”

“Kelley are you meddling again.” Hope chastised.

“Not me this go around. It was Ruby’s idea. Stan and Joyce are the dupes this time.”

“They are already engaged Kelley.” Hope was confused.

“Stan has been ducking setting a date so when they catch the bouquet and garter Jeff will take their picture and Viv is going to badger them for a date.” Ali let on. She had heard about the plan while they had got dressed.

“And Joyce will just happen to have a date?” Ashlyn laughed.

Hope woke up at the sensation of the bed moving. Kelley was getting up for the second time that night to pee. Hope rolled on to her side and faced Kelley’s side of the bed. She feigned sleep as Kelley got back in. Kelley scooted across the bed, backing into Hope’s hip while reaching back for Hope’s hand which she wrapped around her belly.

“That’s nice.” Hope whispered as she placed a kiss on the back of Kelley’s head.

“Sorry. I didn’t mean to wake you.” Kelley apologized.

“Kelley don’t.” Hope said as she tried to snuggle in closer to Kelley’s back.

“Hope?”

“Yeah.”

“I’m worried about Wednesday. The test. That needle is going to be huge.”

Hope felt Kelley’s hand tighten up its grip on hers. “We don’t have to do that. We passed on it before. Kelley?” Hope was now worried out of her mind. *Stay calm.*

“I know. The more I thought about it. Just seemed like we should know if…………………”

“No problems here Kelley.” Hope said as she caressed Kelley’s belly. “Never been more sure of anything in my life. Well other than you Babe.”

“You’re wrong Hope.”

“No Kelley. No.” Hope said as she pressed herself into Kelley’s back.

“Nope Hope. You keep calling the baby Kelley 2.0 and you are wrong. I know that donor DNA is going to pull through for me and it will be a brunette with blue eyes.” Kelley said as she reached
back and grabbed Hope’s ass.

“We will just have to wait and see Kell.” Hope was sure she would be wrapped around the little finger of a freckled faced toddler in the future.

They were in the exam room. The amnio was done. Hope had sweat through her shirt. Kelley had withstood the procedure with flying colors. Hope was so proud of her. The door opened and the Med. Tech came in wheeling a cart. “Let’s take a look at the little one.” She said as she pulled back Kelley’s gown and slathered her belly with gel. “There she is.”

“She?” Hope said as she moved closer to the screen. Hope could not believe what she was seeing. They had done this before but it had just looked like a blob. This was a baby. Head, arms, body, legs. Hands in little fists. Then the baby threw a little punch it looked like. Hope felt weak.

“Looks pretty clear to me. Congratulations, it’s a girl.” The Tech said. “I’ll print a few of these out for you. You can pick them up at the desk when you check out.”

Hope just sat there while Kelley cleaned herself up and got dressed. “Hope a little help with my shoes would be good.”

“Huh? Wha…. Yes.” Hope said as she bent down to slip Kelley’s shoes on her feet.

“You ok there Solo?”

“Did you see it, her? She moved.” Hope murmured.

“Hope this kid has been punching and kicking me for months now. Little Amelia can be a ball of fury sometimes. You better give me the keys. You are in no shape to be driving.” Kelley said as she steered a stunned Hope Solo out of the door.
Next up, Fran and Honeymoon Hank because Fran earned it.
Honeymoon Hank

Chapter Summary

As promised. Fran gets her just dessert.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Hope walked into the Diner to meet up with Ashlyn.

“Hope? Are you ok?” Ashlyn asked as she took in the sight of a stunned Hope Solo.

Hope didn’t say anything. She just held out the ultra sound picture to Ashlyn. Ellen and Ashlyn looked at the picture. “Oh that’s so cool.” Ellen cooed.

“She moved. She actually moved while we were watching. Threw a little punch.”

“She? A girl? I gotta call Ali.” Ashlyn said just as her phone rang. It was Ali. “Ali guess what it’s a girl. A little girl.” Ashlyn gushed. “And they saw her move. You should see Solo. I could knock her over with a feather right now.”

“That’s great. I cannot wait to dress her up. We need to go shopping.”

“Hold on there Ali, we’ve got some time yet.” Ashlyn smiled.

“I called to tell you to look at Fran’s Instagram. You won’t believe it when you see it.”

“Why? Did something bad happen? I didn’t even know Fran had an Instagram.” Ashlyn puzzled.

“Just hang up and look ok?”
So they did. “Jesus. How did Fran get Hank to do that?” Ellen exclaimed. They were watching a video of Fran and Hank whizzing down the street on a Vespa scooter with Fran waving to the camera.

“Eating gelato on the Spanish steps.”

“Look at that one. It’s Trevi Fountain.”

“Oh. My. God. Fran has Hank dancing in front of the Fortress Castel. Go Fran. Shit she really is having a Roman Holiday.”

Fran was sitting across the table from Hank in a little café. They had the bartender whip them up some HoneyDo’s after visiting the Pantheon. At least Fran thought she was sitting there with Hank. She wasn’t so sure. Fran didn’t know who this man was. He was different. Fran liked Town Hank a lot. Loved him, but this guy sitting across from her wasn’t him. He was Honeymoon Hank. Fran was in love with this Hank. She hoped Honeymoon Hank came back to the States with her.

“Fran?”

Fran snapped out of her reverie. “Yes Honeymoon, I mean Hank.” I almost called him Honeymoon Hank.

What is up with Fran? Honeymoon? “I talked to Kelley before we left.”

“Kelley?” Not Kelley. Where is this going?

“Yes. Kelley is going to take over keeping my books for the gas station and she suggested that I hire Stan’s brother Ed to be an Assistant Manager at the station.”

“Why?” Fran was confused.
“So I can take more time off so we can travel. I know you have months of vacation saved up at the library. Maybe go to New York ala Breakfast at Tiffany’s. Pull off a Sabrina in Paris.”

Fran was stunned. *It’s really happening. Honeymoon Hank is coming home with me.* “Hank if we weren’t already married I’d marry right this instant.”

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“Shit Hope. All this for one baby?” Ashlyn exclaimed as the warehouse guys filled the truck bed with two cribs, two changing tables, two dressers, three car seats, and other gizmos that neither one of them knew what they were for.

“According to Kelley. This baby isn’t even here yet and it is costing a fortune.”

“Yeah, but look what you will be getting in return.” Ashlyn said wistfully.

“Did you get that room next to the office cleared out so we can set up one of the cribs and changing tables in there?”

“Got it done yesterday. All that is left in there is a book case full of construction books.”

Hope looked at her watch. “Let’s set that room up first and then do my house. Kelley will probably be napping right now or soon and I don’t want to wake her up.”

“Sounds like a plan.”

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Ashlyn and Hope unloaded the crib and changing table from the truck, setting them on the porch along with one of the car seats that would go in Ali’s car when they heard a bang and a scream. Ashlyn and Hope ran into the house and found Ali sprawled out in the door way to the “work nursery” with a book case on top of her.
“Ali.” Ashlyn yelled as she ran to lift the book case off of her. “What are you doing? Are you hurt?”

Ali struggled to her feet. “I’m fine. I just got to thinking about it and I didn’t want that in the baby’s room. It doesn’t belong.” Ali said not looking at Ashlyn. Just then the door opened and in walked Viv holding a box full of paints and brushes. “And I may have asked Viv to come over to paint pixies and elves on the walls.”

“Sounds good.” Ashlyn let out. “Sounds great actually. Ali said baby’s room. Hope and I will put the furniture together in the living room to stay out of your way.” With that the four women went about their tasks.

“Ash would you pass me that screw driver?” Hope said while she held out her hand. When no screwdriver arrived she looked over at Ashlyn. There she was again staring at the door way to the “work nursery” with a far off look on her face. Hope shifted over and picked up the screwdriver. Just let Ash dream a little. She smirked to herself.

Just listen to her. I haven’t heard Ali that excited since……since I don’t know. Lord every time we go in a store Ali makes a beeline to the baby department. And god help us if a woman walks by with a baby. Ali always has to stop and fuss over it. Shit Ali even bought a book about what to expect in your baby’s first year. She even has pages marked. “What Hope?”

“I said I think were done here. Ready for baby furniture battle number two over at my house?”

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Hope walked out of the house. “Kelley is asleep on the couch so we need to tiptoe around so we don’t wake her.”

“Should we wait?”

“No. This will be fine. Heck, if we can get this done before she wakes up she will be thrilled at the surprise. Let’s carry in the crib, changing table, and dresser first. Then I can start unboxing all the pieces and parts while you bring in the rest.” Hope instructed as she pulled the crib towards the tailgate of the truck.
“Sounds like a plan.” Ashlyn said while grabbing ahold of her end of the crib box.

Hope had unboxed all the furniture in to piles. *Lucky that dresser is ready to go. Ashlyn can assemble the changing table while I do the crib. This should go a lot faster now that we had practice over at the “work nursery” maybe I should start calling it the Harris Nursery?* Hope was carrying the empty boxes out of the room when she saw Ashlyn standing over Kelley just watching her sleep. Hope set the boxes down in the hall gently. *Just let Ashlyn have her moment.*

Chapter End Notes

Ash and Ali both going off the deep end. They had an agreed upon timeline. Looks like Ashlyn is conflicted. Maybe it is up for discussion.
True Confessions

Chapter Summary

Happy New Year’s everyone. Hope you all had a safe and enjoyable time. I took the holidays off. So happy to see we have had a flurry of new writers and continuations of old stories that have not had an update in some time. It’s all good.

Now back to our story……………………

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ashlyn was pulling into the driveway when she saw Ali walking from the outbuilding to the house carrying her Grandmothers old rocking chair. “Ali I could have gotten that for you.”

“Ash I think I can handle a rocking chair.” Ali said as Ashlyn held the door open for her. “This is the last thing I needed to finish off the nursery. I couldn’t wait.” Ali said as she set the rocker in the corner of the room and then stepped over to the dressing table where she began folding the baby clothes laying on it. “I got these all washed and ready.”

Ashlyn looked around the room. How had Ali managed to transform this room in just a few hours? There were pixies and elves everywhere. Ali had even made up the crib and hung a mobile above it. Where did that come from? “I just learned today that baby’s need their own bath tub. Hope and I talked about that. Seems each of our Mothers have pictures of us being bathed in the kitchen sink. That must be old school now.”

“Ashlyn you were with me last week when I bought a baby bath tub. It’s there in the closet.” Ali pointed.

Sure enough there was a yellow one in the closet. There were also rattles, a baby hair brush, and diapers sitting on the dresser. And lotions, and potions, and wipes. This is so real. Like……….. Ashlyn’s thoughts trailed off as she walked over to Ali putting her arms around her waist and resting her chin on Ali’s shoulder. “You have really put your heart into this Ali. I’m sure Hope and Kelley will really appreciate it.”

“I’m sure they will just as sure as I know that they will help us out when it’s our time to do the same thing. That baby is going to be here in a few weeks and then in a few more months our first year will be up and we can start thinking about it.”
“Thinking about it? I guess I thought we decided.” Ashlyn tried to not sound disappointed. “I don’t want to push you. Whenever you’re ready.”

“Push me?”

“Well yeah. It sounded like maybe you wanted to wait a little longer. That’s fine.”

“Longer Ashlyn? I don’t want to wait. I’m ready now.”

“Now!” Ashlyn squeaked. “Like right now, now?”

“Yes. Is that ok?”

“More than ok. I couldn’t be any more ok with anything than I am to that.”

“Then I’ll call on Monday and get us an appointment.”

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“Hope for the third and final time, please go fishing with Ashlyn.” Kelley begged.

“Kell I shouldn’t. You are in your last week and you know cell reception is not good out on the lake.”

“Solo I asked Ashlyn to ask you to go fishing today. You’re hovering again.” Kelley fumed as she waddled across the room holding her back with one hand and her belly with the other. “I can’t even pee without you following into the bathroom and I pee all the time. I need some space.” Kelley turned to look at Hope. Damn I just stabbed her in the heart. Kelley softened. “Hope I’m sorry. I’m just a little grumpy. You should go. You know once the baby gets here I’m not letting you out of the house until she graduates.”
“Ok. I’ll go, but you know I will be thinking of you the whole time. We’ll try and stay in the North end where reception is a little better.” Hope said as she pulled Kelley into her arms, rubbing her lower back.

“I have the call tree and I can have Ruby tell Bob to go out on the lake to fetch you if I need you ya know.”

Three hours later Kelley was just waking up from her nap. Then she felt it. A tightening across her belly and back. *Is that a contraction? Please don’t be. Hope will rub this in my face forever.* Just as Kelley sat up she felt warm water flow out of her onto the couch. *Did I just pee myself?* Kelley waddled into the bathroom. *Nope this is it. Jesus why did I send Hope out there?* Kelley questioned as she cleaned herself up and changed her clothes. *I need to call Ruby.*

Chapter End Notes

Looks like things are about to heat up in O'Solo household.
Captain Ali

Chapter Summary

Lots of action here. Crazy ass me in full force. If you have read my other stuff you would totally expect this.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Hope we have hit every cove and most of the shoreline down here and it is pretty much a bust. Let’s go hit my “Catch of the Day” cove. It’s always been lucky for me.”

“No can do Ash. We need to stay in the North end.”

“Why.” Ashlyn was confused. Hope would flog this water with her own body if that is what it took to bring on strikes.

“Cell reception.” Hope said while looking at her phone for the hundredth time.

“Oh. Didn’t think about that.” Ashlyn paused. “You know Kelley made me ask you.”

“Yes I do.” Hope said as she checked her phone for one hundred and first time. “Seemed like the least I could do was get out of her hair since she engineered the whole thing.”

“What the hell is that?” Ashlyn asked while standing up and pointing down lake.

Hopes heart stopped. She knew her own boat.

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The phone hadn’t even completed its first ring when Kelley heard Ruby’s voice. “Is it time? Oh god it’s time. Relax. I got the list. I’m calling the order.”
“Ruby wait.” Kelley got out as a second short contraction hit her. Kelley gutted it out and then continued. “There’s a few changes.”

“Changes? Changes?” Ruby shrieked. “This is not the time for changes.” Then Kelley heard Ruby bellow, “Put your mail on the counter and if you need to pick up you are going to have to fucking wait. Just go away.”

“Ruby calm the fuck down. I just need you to call Bob Adams first.”

“Why I am I calling Bob first?” Clearly Kelley was delirious.

“He needs to go out on the lake and find Hope. She is out there with Ashlyn. I already tried to reach her by phone and I couldn’t get a connection.”

“WTF, why the hell is Hope out on the lake when you are like this.” Ruby demanded.

“Ruby I made her go. Just call Bob first and tell him to go out on the lake and track her down. They are in Ash’s boat. Hope took her boat over to Ash’s dock before they went out so I would have both vehicles but I don’t………I shouldn’t drive. Call Stan to come and get me.”


“Ruby stop questioning my choices. Get Stan’s ass over here now.” Kelley commanded with every last shred of authority she could muster.

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Joyce pulled into the hardware store parking lot just in time to see her intended race across the blacktop screaming. “Me, Me, Me.” Stan looked every inch of the Ichabod Crane he was. Joyce did not follow him. Instead she got out of her truck and walked into the store. “Sal, you know anything about Stan screaming his head off in the parking lot?”
“No I don’t. He just answered his phone and started screaming me, me, me and ran out.”

Good God have I really invested three years in this man? Joyce questioned as she backed her truck up to the front loader that was about to dump a scoop of mulch into her truck bed.

Ruby was beside herself. She kept calling Bob with no answer. She dialed Ali next.

“Yep Rube. What’s going on?” Ali answered with her playful self.

“I can’t get Bob. Ash is out with Hope on the lake.”


“I can’t get Bob and Stan is going to get Kelley.”


“Yes.” Ruby squalled. “Can you get out there?”

“On it.” Ali screamed and raced out the door, slamming it behind her.

Ali ran down the hill towards their dock. There was Hope’s boat, backed into their dock. Ali scrambled in it. Keys were in the ignition because everyone lived without bars and locks here. Ali looked to the back of the boat. Ashlyn had taught what to do. Ali fumbled around and found the pin to release the motor back down into the water. Then she squeezed the black bulb until it got firm. Ali did all that she remembered and then rotated the key. The boat roared to life. Ali threw off the mooring line, scrambled into the cockpit, and then hit the shifter.

The boat screamed to life. The back end shot out and the whole boat surged forward then flew around sideways and strained for the shore line. Ali had been thrown forward into the wind screen
and then whipped around sideways. The boat was now flailing around as Ali tried to grasp the throttle and put it back into neutral. The boat settled as Ali rubbed her nose. *That is going to bruise for sure.*

Ali quickly figured out what the problem was. She had forgotten to release the mooring line from the bow of the boat. Ali released the rope and man handled the boat around so it was facing the open lake. Ali cautiously pushed the throttle forward. It was going the right direction. Ali was encouraged by this as she eased the throttle down. *Way to slow.* Ali pressed on the throttle. The boat was picking up speed. *I got this.* Then she threw the throttle all the way forward. All of 150 hps of the Merc Cruiser came to life and Ali was nearly thrown over the back of the seat while the nose of the boat nearly pointed to the sky. Ali, hanging on to the wheel, was barely was able to grasp the throttle and pull it back. Her body flew forward as her nose hit the windscreen for the second time.

Ali held her face for a minute, nearly in tears, and then began easing the throttle forward with more caution. The boat planed out as speed increase and then, emboldened Ali threw the throttle down. The bow shot up again but at least she had stayed in the seat. She noticed blood on her hand as she gingerly wiped her nose.

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“Fuck Ash. That’s my boat.” Hope spat out while she reeled in her line. *This can’t be good.* “Ash fire it up. Looks like we’ll be hit broad side.”

The boat had just started to plane out again and Ali could just now see the lake. She wished she couldn’t. She was headed straight at another boat. Ali stomped on the floor as if it had a brake pedal. At the last second she cranked the steering wheel to right. The boat carved deeply into the water almost swamping it.

Hope hadn’t even made it out of the casting chair yet. She swore the bottom of the v-hull passed so close to her she could have reached out and touched it. The force of the water hit Ashlyn’s boat rocking it violently. Hope tumbled over the side. Ashlyn didn’t know what to do. All she could hear was the roar of that boat as it raced away with Ali screaming her head off. Just about that time Hope threw her arm and leg over the side of the boat. Ashlyn threw the boat into gear as she reached over to help Hope over the side. “Follow that boat.” Hope wheezed.

Ashlyn’s boat is now streaking down the lake in hot pursuit of Hope’s runaway boat. They gained on it and Hope starts yelling at Ali to pull the throttle back. Ali panics and pulls the throttle all the way back. By passing neutral and going straight into full speed reverse. The boat lurches to a stop throwing Ali again into the wind screen. Gears are wailing and grinding in the Merc. Hope can hear this. “Ash she’s coming back.”
But, it's only a kinda, sorta cliffhanger. I could have stopped right before the near broadsiding of Ashlyn's boat. Give me your grumbles/wants. I will consider them. This story has gotten way out of hand. I thought it would be 10-13 chapters. Trying to wrap this up in a few more chapters.
Wouldn’t You Rather

Chapter Summary

Houston, we have a problem.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Kelley is sitting on the front porch with her suitcase by her side when she sees him. Him, as in Stan and his truck is flying right past the driveway entrance. Kelley hears the brakes lock up. Stan hangs a hard right and comes flying right down and then up over the culvert. Kelley guessed Stan’s truck took about a foot of air and came bouncing across the lawn. Stopping a foot before the porch.

By this time Kelley had taken to her feet fearing that she was going to need to make a run for it. Stan launched himself at the truck’s door totally forgetting to open it. His face made contact with the window. He finally flung the door open and lurched forward. Seatbelt. The door ricocheted backwards from the force catching Stan in the shin of the one leg he had managed to get out of the door. Ouch.

Kelley calmly stood, ignoring the sounds of Stan’s wailing. He eventually got himself out of the truck and ran up to the porch where he promptly tried to pick Kelley up. “Stan put me down!” Kelley hollered. “I can walk. Just get my suitcase.” Kelley ordered as she walked to the passenger side of Stan’s truck. Kelley flung the door open just to hear a thud. Stan had been right on her ass and took a direct shot to the face from the door frame. Kelley looked down at Stan writhing on the ground. “For fucks sake.” Kelley fumed as she hurled her suitcase into the bed of the truck and pulled Stan off the ground. Kelley shoved Stan into the passenger seat and stomped around to the driver’s side. Looks like she was driving after all.

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Ruby was out on the sidewalk in front of the post office making her 30th call on the call tree when she saw it. Stan’s truck wildly careening down the street. Ruby was on the phone with Ellen. “HOLY MOTHER OF GOD. Just pray Ellen.” Ruby got out as she pulled the phone away from her face.

“Aaarruuggghh.” Kelley moaned as another contraction hit her. She was making the turn on the town square. The back end of the truck swung around and clipped a trash can.
Ruby saw the can hurtling towards her and hit the cement. It sailed over her head and into the Post Office door cracking the glass. All she could hear was Stan wailing like a baby. Ruby struggled to her feet and ran down the street to the craft shop to get Viv. “Viv.” Ruby shrieked as she flew in the door.

Viv popped up from behind the counter. “Ruby? I thought we were waiting for a couple of hours before…….”

Ruby cut her off. “Where is Bob? He’s not answering. He needs to get on the lake and find Hope. Stan is driving out of control with Kelley in the truck. He just nearly decapitated me.” Ruby is furiously dialing again.

“Bob’s on the lake.”

“He still isn’t answering. I sent Ali down, but I don’t think she knows what she is doing.”

“You call Hank and tell him to get out on that lake and look for both boats. I’ll call the Ranger Station and Ed over at the lodge and tell them to get boats in the water and find them.” Viv ordered.

“Shit. I never even thought of that. I should have never sent Ali.” Ruby shrugged while furiously punching her phone while Viv worked hers.

Fran came blasting through the Craft Shop door. Fran took one look at Viv and Ruby, she didn’t want to tell them what she heard on the police scanner she kept discretely at her desk at the library. “Viv, Rube, they found Hope’s boat abandoned on the water with blood on it. They are talking about dragging the bottom. Bob and Hank were there.”

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Bob was just motoring out of the south end of the lake when he saw Hope’s boat off to the left. It was empty and clearly anchored off the bow and stern. It didn’t look good. He turned and started over to the boat. Cutting the engine he reached out and grabbed a hold on the gunwale of Hope’s boat and tied his to it. The boat was indeed empty and looked like it had been awash with water. There was blood on the wind screen and console. He heard the howl of an outboard and looked up. There was Hank in his skiff coming towards him.
Hank tied off on the other side of Hope’s boat. “I got a call from Ruby. Kelley went into labor. Hope and Ashlyn are supposed to be out here fishing and they couldn’t reach you so Ruby sent Ali out here to find them. Where are they?”

“I don’t know. I just found Hope’s boat here at anchor. Looks like it has been swamped to some degree and there’s blood all over the cockpit area. Something happened.” Bob was perplexed at what he was seeing. “Something isn’t right is all I know.”

“Look there’s the Ranger’s boat. Get Hope’s distress flag out and wave them down.”

The Rangers pulled over. “What seems to be the problem?” The smaller of the two Rangers asked. “We’re out here on an emergency call.”

“I think this an emergency.” Bob growled. “I just found Hope Solo’s boat empty with blood on it and it has taken on water at some point. Somethings happened.”

“Hope Solo? That is one of the three people we’ve been sent out to find.” The taller Ranger pulled out a small note pad. “Also looking for an Ashlyn and Ali Harris.”

The smaller Ranger was now boarding Hope’s boat. “Blood you say? Could be a crime scene? We better call it in.”

“Yes.” Agreed the taller Ranger. “Probably have to drag the bottom. This time a year, it could take a week before the bodies start to float.”

Hank and Bob and been released by the Rangers. They hadn’t seen anything. “Bob. Let’s head over to Ashlyn’s house.”

“Good idea.”

Bob and Hank arrived at Ashlyn’s dock and found her boat there. “This looks better.” Bob let out. “Let’s head up to the house.”
Hank and Bob arrived at the house to find the door hanging open and a screen punched out. “This doesn’t look good.”

“No, it doesn’t.” Agreed Hank.

“We should go in.” Bob decreed.

“Wait a minute.” Hank cautioned as he walked over to Ash’s shed. He went inside. Hank came back out carrying an axe.

“An axe?” Bob’s eyes blew open.

“Wouldn’t you rather have one and not need it than need one and not have it?” Hank asked.

“Good point Hank.” Bob said as he fell in behind Hank as he entered the house.

Chapter End Notes

Pirates! Who said anything about Pirates.
Your Johnson Sucks

Chapter Summary

Hey, like the title. Not what you think

Net, you called it. The whole Lone Ranger leap.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The first thing they saw was a large blood smear on the hallway leading from the kitchen. Hank went from lazily carrying the axe to bring the head of it up above his shoulders, ready to swing it if needed. They tip toed down the short hall. Then Hank saw it. A bloody hand print on the corner of the wall leading to the kitchen. Hank raised the axe higher over his head and leapt around the corner ready to smite the first thing he saw. What he saw made him drop the axe behind him. It fell to the floor cracking one of slate tiles in the floor that Ashlyn had just laid down at Ali’s request three weeks ago.

The two men could not believe what they were seeing. Water was still dripping from the ceiling. The punched out screen from the window above the sink lay crumpled on the floor. The busted off goose neck spigot from the sink lay on the counter and the cupboard doors below the sink stood open. Most telling was the pool of blood on the floor slowly mixing with the water that had seemed to have sprayed everywhere.

“Call 911 Bob.”


Hank felt his pockets. “Shit. I dropped mine on the counter at the station. Ruby was screaming her head off.” Hank picked up the axe. “Run down to your boat and get your phone. I think they are in trouble.”

Both men exited the house. Hank pulled up. “Ash’s truck is missing. Get that phone Bob. The blood is still red. Whatever happened wasn’t that long ago.”

Bob ran down the embankment and got his phone and started back up it. Damn. Am I having a heart attack? Viv was right. I do need to lose 20 pounds, ok, 30 and start exercising. Shit, can’t die
now. Viv is not a person to leave alone. She will. Will what? Fuck I already know who would be hitting her up. Viv has decades left in her. Not going to let that happen. “Here.” Bob gasped as he threw his phone to Hank and collapsed on the ground sucking air.

“Fuck Bob, your phone is dead.” Hank bellowed.

“Water.” Bob gasped.

Hank saw the hose hooked up to the outdoor spigot. He turned it on and stretched the hose to Bob. He let the man drink for a bit and then turned it off. “Ready to walk to your house?”

“We should stay here.” Bob said.

“For what?” Hank was beside himself. “They are not here. We have a dead boat in the water and something happened here. It’s Hope and Ashlyn. I can’t believe Pirates or whatever got them.”

“Pirates?” Bob squaled. “There aren’t any Pirates on the lake. You are just making crap up.”

“Who knows? Something has happened. We need a car.” Hank said as he pulled Bob up.

“We just need wheels and a phone.” Hank said as he shoved Bob down the road.

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Hope’s boat engine finally catches gear and starts traveling backwards at an alarming rate. Water is surging over the stern and filling the boat. Hope runs to side of the boat Ali will pass on. “Ash get me closer.”

“Hope don’t do it.” Ashlyn said even as she steered her boat towards the other.

“Fuck. Ali’s not even in the seat now.” Ashly got out just as Hope ran the four feet of open deck she had and hurled her body over the side. She landed with a sickening thud. The side of her face made contact with console. Hope struggled to reach the throttle and returned it to neutral and turned
the key shutting the boat down. Ashlyn worked at bringing her boat around.

“Ali, you ok?” Hope asked as she took in the sight of Ali rolling around in water at the back of the boat while clutching her nose.

“My nose.” Was all Ali could wail as Hope wrapped her arms around the crying woman.

“Let me see.” Hope gently pulled Ali’s hands away.

“Don’t touch it.” Ali blubbered.

Just then Ashlyn was able to bring her boat around to side. “She ok?” Ashlyn didn’t even want to look. The crying was enough.

“Well she has a pair of shiners that’s for sure. Nose might be broke. Might need a stich or two. Have any ice left in your cooler Ash?” Hope said as she pulled Ali up and set her down in a seat. She then turned the power back on and flipped the switch for the bilge pump. Water poured out of the side.

By this time Ashlyn has tied the boats together and is passing Ali ice wrapped in a rag. “Doesn’t look like we will be moving until you get that water cleared from your hull. Your boat is sitting low. You got a shiner yourself Hope.”

“Did I break your boat?” Ali sniffles.

“Boats are made to get wet Ali. Although that motor sure took a beating. Why are you out here in it anyways?”

Ali perked up. “It’s Kelley. She’s in labor. Ruby couldn’t get Bob so I came. Stan is picking up Kelley to take her to the hospital.”

“STAN! I knew it. I knew I shouldn’t have come. Ash we gotta go now. We’ll just take it slow.”
“Hope just shut it down, throw out your anchor, and let’s go. We can call someone to come out for it later.”

“Good idea Ash.” Hope said as she nearly tossed Ali over the side to Ash. “I’ll set one off the bow and the stern. That ought to hold it.”

Ashlyn looked back at Ali to make sure she was ok. Ali was somehow holding the ice pack to her nose while holding onto the boat for dear life. Ashlyn had the throttle down coaxing all 150 HP out of her old Johnson. She had hit the switch for the planning plates as soon as she could to even out the ride for Ali. Ashlyn looked over at Hope. Her face was set in an intense mask. “Just a few more minutes Hope.”

“Your Johnson sucks ass Ash. Should have hung a Merc. off the back. Least you got the boat right.”

Ashlyn tried not to take offense. Hope was right. Her Johnson was old but it was in top shape. Her Dad always mounted Johnson’s on their boats growing up. Ashlyn didn’t want to break the chain. “Getting you where you need to go Hope.” Full blown Johnsons were getting tough to find. I would never hang an Evinrude on my stern. Maybe at some point I need to consider a Merc. Why the hell am I thinking about boat engines now?

Chapter End Notes

Getting closer.
We Prefer You Be Clothed

Chapter Summary

On to the hospital.

It was a sad day today. Please support the Women’s March tomorrow.
Twitter at trailerparktrixie@trailparktrixie

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

Ashlyn’s dock came into view and she throttled back. She still came in a little hot. Hope shot out of her seat and made an unbelievable 12 foot leap onto the dock. Ran a few feet and turned, bent and caught the bow of the boat in her shoulder. Ashlyn could see the muscle and sinew in Hopes shoulders and arms strain. Ashlyn shut the boat down as Hope brought it to a stop and tied of the bow. Ashlyn ran to back and secured the stern and then helped Ali to her feet and ushered her to the dockside gunwale. Hope just reached down and lifted Ali to the dock and started half carrying her up the embankment, towards the house. Ashlyn followed behind. She was no match for Hopes adrenaline.

Hope, still pretty much carrying Ali, went to the company truck and flung the driver’s side door open and she shoved Ali in to the middle and climbed in. Her hand went to the ignition. No keys. “Where are the fucking keys?” Hope bellowed not believing she was in a car in a drive way in this town that did not have keys.

“In the house.” Ali got out with a cringe.

Hope leapt out of the truck and shouted to Ashlyn who was just parallel with the side door of her house. “Ash, keys are in the house.”

Ashlyn veered to the right and ran up the steps and grabbed the door knob. She didn’t even wait as she gave it a twist. The knob didn’t move and her hand. Her shoulder and face met with the steel door. She bounced off. Locked? What the fuck?

By this time Hope had run to the side porch. She reared back ready to kick the door in when Ali called out. “Kitchen window.”
Hope stopped in mid kick. Hope and Ashlyn ran to the back of the house and found the window open. The opening was even with Hopes shoulders, screen in place. With one slug Hope punched the screen out and then bent at her knees and formed her hands into a sling. Ashlyn didn’t hesitate. She planted her left foot in Hopes hands. Hopes thigh and shoulder muscles all bunched as she sent Ashlyn skyward. Ashlyn’s head hit the bottom sash as she tilted her body in. Then her shoulder did the same. Somehow her body followed and clipped off the no-touch goose neck faucet that Ali had raved over. Her body flew over the edge of the deep farmhouse sink and free fell for a ¼ of a second before her face made contact with the side of the frost free, sub-zero, deli sized shelf space refrigerator. Ali had talked endless about this model and Ash had never been one to deny Ali anything.

Water was shooting everywhere as Ashlyn felt her nose. Hope was hoisting her upper body in the window opening. “Hit the water turn off valve under the sink and grab the keys.” She directed. Ashlyn did just that. She grabbed a dish towel to hold to her nose to stanch the flow of blood as she stumbled thru the dining room and hallway, opening the door. Hope was waiting on the other side and wrenched the keys out of her hand.

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Hope brought the truck to a stop outside of the ER. ABS grinding under her foot. She turned the truck off and tossed Ashlyn the keys and was out the door. Ashlyn saw Stan’s truck in front of them being towed. Guess we’re all here. She thought as she helped Ali out.

Hope knew that hospital like the back of her hand. She’d been in and out of it all her life. She raced in the ER door and made her way to the birthing rooms just in time to hear Stan wailing.

“Kelley my hand. You’re breaking it.” Stan was on his knees beside the bed.

Hope was just about to fly through the door when Jeb Johnson came out. “You can’t go in there like that Hope.”

“Get out of my way Jeb.” Hope was nearly apoplectic.

“Hope, I can’t let you in.” Jeb set his legs. He was sure Hope was going to take him on.

Hope squinted her eyes at Jeb.
“No Hope. You’re filthy. The room needs to be sterile for Kelley and the baby.”

“What?” She looked down at herself.

“Hope, I know you used to beat the heck out of me on the playground, but that was 150 pounds and several years of football ago.” Jeb cautioned as he widened his stance further waiting for Hope’s attack. He really did not want to grapple in the hospital corridor with Hope. She’d probably fight dirty.

She could try a juke move on Jeb and maybe win. Or elbow him in the throat, but a win would not be the best for Kelley. Only one solution. She thought. Hope bent at her waist and started pulling off her shoes.

Jeb’s eyes got wide as Hope started to unbuckle her belt. “Hope, what are you doing?” Her bitch face stare really gave him the willies.

Hope hands moved to her waist. She let the buckle and tang of her belt hang while she pulled the zipper down. Never once taking her eyes off Jeb. She shucked her jeans down her legs in one smooth motion. Don’t know why all those women wear skin tight jeans. While she kicked off the puddle of denim at her feet she whipped off her shirt.

Jeb was frozen in place and slack jawed as Hope blithely walked past him into the delivery room. Everything came to a standstill as every member of the birthing team in that room gawked as a nearly naked Hope Solo walked in. Hope strode over to Stan and pulled him off the stool next to Kelley’s bed. “I’ll take over from here Stan.”

Oh good lord. Amy said to herself as she made a beeline to the supply closet to get a pair of scrubs.

“Hope, where the fuck are your clothes and what happened to you face?” Kelley knew she was half delirious but she was pretty sure Hope was nearly naked and sitting at the stool beside her with a fucked up face. “I thought I was going to have this baby without you.” She cried. “I’m sorry I made you go.”

“Shush. Everything’s okay.” Hope consoled. “I’m here now.” Hope said as she brushed back Kelley’s sweat soaked hair. Hope filed away an ‘I told you so’ in the back of her head.
“Here.” Amy said as she passed Hope a pair of scrubs. “We generally prefer you be clothed.” Amy chuckled. Amy then reached up to the phone in the birthing room. “Hey Heather, I know it is out of line, but you might want to call Viv, Ruth, or Fran and let them know Hope is here with Kelley.”

“Amy that is not even the half of it.” Heather continued. “I got em’ all here in the ER. Ali, Ash, and now Stan. He just stumbled in.”

Chapter End Notes

Next, the gang catches up with the baby brigade at the hospital.
My Lunch Box Weighs More

Chapter Summary

Well we already had a nearly naked Solo ready to go man to man with Jeb (just let it go).

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

“Finally.” Hank let out. “Give me your keys Bob.” Hank requested.


“Why the hell didn’t you grab all of that?” Hank bellowed.

Bob had no answer. “There is a quad runner in the barn. We could take that.” Bob offered.

Hank ran to the pole barn and raised the overhead door. He raced to the quad and reached down beside the tank and found the key. He turned it and it roared to life. He pulled in the clutch and stomped on the gear peg. Hank let out the clutch and when it caught he steered it towards Bob. “Hop on.” Hank commanded.

Bob’s ass had hardly hit the seat when Hank let the clutch out again and twisted the throttle. The quad nearly did a wheelie. Hank wasted no time jamming through the gears as they took to the road. “Hank slow down. This isn’t even road legal. We don’t have helmets.” Bob wheezed. “Where are we going?”

“We’ll swing by the Craft Shop first. If our gals aren’t there we’ll go to the library.” Hank decided on the fly.

“Well arruuggghh……” Bob got out as a bug, he would later describe as the size of a fist, hit the back of his throat.
Ruby heard the roar of an engine as it stopped outside the store. There was Bob and Hank on a quad. “Viv, Fran the guys are here.”

They ran out to the sidewalk. Hank was shutting the quad down. Bob was still clutching at Hank. Viv saw Bob hanging on the back of Hank. “God no.” She prayed.

Viv was all over him. “No Viv. I’m ok. Just ate a massive bug, but you are right, I need to get myself together.” Song playing on the breeze for Viv.

“Who has a car?” Hank called out. He knew Kelley was like a daughter to Fran, and to him if he was being honest and she would want to get to the hospital.

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Hope did not really know when Kelley was inevitable. She was pretty sure Kelley knew when. Probably had the day written down somewhere? The how’s or why’s did not matter to Hope. Kelley was her here, now, and forever.

“Can I push?” Kelley begged in her last contraction.

“Yes.” The Doctor agreed. “Your dilation is………..”

“Holy fuck.” Kelley screamed as she gripped Hope’s wrist and raised up off of the bed.

“I have a head. Shoulders are coming.”

Kelley gripped onto Hope’s wrist as she gave her last push along with a monster scream the likes of which Hope had never heard before.

“We have a baby.”
Kelly’s arms shot out and wrapped themselves around a stunned Hope Solo’s neck. Hope had come late to the party, but Kelley didn’t care. Kelley sucked at Hope’s lips. All she ever wanted.

“Here she is.” The Doctor announced as she placed the yowling baby on Kelley’s abdomen. “Cut the cord Solo?” As scissors were placed in her hand. Hope pressed on the handle. She felt and heard a snick. Forever severing Kelley from their child.

Hope thought she was going to pass out. She, this, Kelley. Her mind was spiraling. The tuft of wet hair on their babies head looked light brown to her. Hope thought she saw a little red peeking out. Where are her freckles? I want freckles.

Kelley was laughing and so full of joy. She pulled Hope’s limp hands around the baby as it laid on her. Then the Nurses stepped in and took the baby away to gauge her well-being. Test? APGAR. Hope’s mind went wild.

Kelley looked at Hope. Hope was in a daze. Not speaking or moving. Kelley had only seen Hope like this once, when they watched the sonogram as their baby threw a punch. “Solo, you here?”

She was so small. Too small? “Ya Kell. You did good. So fucking good.” Hope let out as her world reorganized itself in her mind. There was no longer an idea of a baby. There was a baby. She had been fully present. Feeling the baby move. Reading to her through Kelley’s belly. Listening to her heart rate.

“Did I tear?” Kelley asked.

Hope blanched at the thought. She knew it had been a possibility but she had forced it out of her mind for months.

“No. Your baby was small. You handled it. Just a little more to go Kelley.” The Doctor called out just as Kelley was contracting again.

Small. Small. Hope knew it. She felt it. Too small? Was that a problem?

“I guess those O’Hara genes won out.” Kelley grunted.
Kelley and Hope were ensconced in their hospital room. Kelley asked for no visitors. Hope was still struggling. “Hope talk to me?”

Hope didn’t want to say it. She felt that if she did she would be letting the monster out of the closet. A closet she wanted firmly to be kept closed.

“Hope, come here?” Kelley called out, reaching for Hope’s arm and pulling her onto the bed. “What’s going on in that head of yours?”

Hope’s eyes watered. She looked anywhere but at Kelley. She raised her hand up, and her mouth opened, but no sound came out.

“Hope yo…….” Kelley got out.

“Small, small. She’s so fucking small.” Hope blurted out.

“Hope the Doctor said that………..” Kelley was cut off again.

“I could hold her in one hand. She isn’t even as long as my forearm.” Hope cried as she covered her face.

“Hope.” Kelley said as she gently pried Hope’s hands away from her face. “She weighs 6.7 pounds which is well above that being a problem. And if you had been listening during our appointments you would know that is in the estimated range of what was expected. That’s pretty close to what I weighed when I was born. She came out yelling and flailing her little arms and legs around and she was never in distress. Her one minute APGAR was 8 and her five minute rose to 9. 10 is perfect and there are no perfect scores according the Doctor and many books I read. Amelia is fine. Besides that, you have freakishly large hands and long arms. Not that I’m complaining.” Kelley winked.

Just then the room door opened and a Nurse came in pushing a bassinette. “Here’s little baby Solo.” The Nurse said brightly as she settled the bassinette near Kelley’s bed. “Would you like me to hand her to you?” The Nurse asked.
“Please.” Kelley said as she held out her arms.

“You two have quite a crew down in the ER.” They Nurse said as she closed the door.

“Crew? ER?” Kelley questioned. “Does that have anything to do with your face Hope? You have one, might turn to two, black eyes and a cut down the side of your head.”

“Yeah. Long story. I’ll tell you later. Everyone is pretty much ok.”

The baby opened her eyes and looked up at Kelley and then let out a yawn. Little Amelia had had a full day and her emergency crew was a wreck. Not that she knew it now, but she would grow up hearing the story.

“With those bare gums she kinda looked like my Grandpa.” Kelley snickered.

‘She does not.” Hope huffed. “She’s beautiful. I think she has your nose.”

“You think?”

“Yes. There is a little upturn at the end already.” Hope was sure of it.

“Your turn.” Kelley announced as she held out the baby to Hope.

“Maybe I should wait?”

“Hope you won’t break her. Now hold your arms up.” Kelley commanded.

Hope raised her arms and Kelley laid the baby in them. “See.” Kelley smiled.

“I think my lunch box weighs more.” Hope lowered her head and was searching Amelia’s face. “What are you doing Kelley?” Hope was alarmed as Kelley reached around the baby.
“I want to see her hair.” Kelley said as she pushed Amelia’s little beanie back. “Blonde.”

“I was hoping for a penny head.” Hope admitted. “And some freckles.”

Kelley just laughed. “Well you probably aren’t going to get a redhead. The freckles you can probably count on but not for a year or two.” Kelley snaked her arm around Hope and the two laid back in the bed and just enjoyed their daughter.

Chapter End Notes

Gonna be a Hot Rod Lincoln. Johnny Cash fans will get it.
Hank pulled Fran’s Lincoln up to the curb outside of the ER. “You guys go in and I’ll park the car.” Hank directed.

“I think I’ll hang with Hank.” Bob announced as the three women in the back seat skedaddled out of car making a beeline for the ER door not really giving a flip what Hank and Bob did.

Heather heard the clattering on heels on the linoleum and looked up just in time to see Fran, Viv, and Ruby bearing down her.

All three of them began speaking at once shouting out questions.

Heather held up her hands to quiet them down. “Ladies, Hope and Kelley are doing just fine. I would tell you they just had a little girl 10 minutes ago but I’m not allowed to due to HIPA laws.”


“Well I can’t really tell you that. We might have had three people admitted to the ER under those names back in room number four?”

“Admitted?” Fran gasped.

“If I were to become distracted for a minute.” Heather theorized. “Say, turned away from the desk for a minute and then turned back and you were gone, I’d just have to assume that you three went back to the waiting room.” Heather said as she blatantly dropped a pen on the floor and bent down to pick it up taking her good ole sweet time about.

Viv wasted no time. She grabbed Ruby and Fran’s arms and hightailed it into the ER.
Heather rose back up, pen in hand. “Guess they went back to the waiting room.” She shrugged.

“Find room four.” Fran instructed.

“There it is.” Ruby let out as she dragged her friends with. The three women gasp as they enter the room. There they were, Ali and Ashlyn sitting on the gurney and Stan in a chair beside it. All three were holding ice packs on their faces.

At the sound of the women’s gasp all three patients dropped their ice packs. “My stars.” Exclaimed Fran.

“You look like a band of raggedy raccoons sitting there with all the black eyes.” Ruby decided.

“I think more like a trio of masked bandits.” Viv declared. “What happened to you three?”

“Hope and Kelley.” All three responded.

“I don’t see how Hope and Kelley could have done all of this.” Fran argued.

Ashlyn, who was sitting there will gauze shoved up her nose spoken first. “Hope tossed me in through my own kitchen window because Ali locked the keys inside. I hit the refrigerator with my face on the way down to the floor.”

Ali, who was sitting there sporting four stitches across the bridge of her nose along with her blackened eyes defended herself. “The door got locked on accident when I raced out it on my way to Hope’s boat. I hit my face on her boat a couple of times. I really need to learn how to drive one of those things. I may or may not have broken her boat.” She added sheepishly.

The last victim of the ordeal finally spoke up.

“Kelley hit me in the face with my truck door and then sprained my wrist in the delivery room.” Stan said as he raised his splinted forearm in the air.
Just then the ER Doctor entered the room. “You all are released now. Ali, be sure to go to you GP in 5 days to get those stitches out.”

The older three members of the baby brigade shepherded their three foot soldiers out of the room and checked in with Heather on the status of Hope, Kelley and the baby.

“They are in room 743 but are not taking visitors right now. You can go up to the waiting room on that floor if you’d like.”

Fran scooted everyone towards the elevator just as Hank and Bob walked in. The two guys fell into line behind the group and they rode the elevator up to the 7th floor.

The three Generals, Fran, Viv, and Ruby walked in circles in the middle of the waiting room while the rest of the brigade opted for chairs.

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“Hope, you should go get our so called crew. They are probably out badgering the hospital staff.”

“Yeah. I should probably try and find my clothes. Maybe Jeb picked them up.” Hope wondered but really didn’t care until she thought about her cell and wallet.

“Still can’t believe you took your clothes off. Jeb is probably still in shock.” Kelley snickered as she took the baby back from Hope.

Hope barely made it out of the room before the gang descended on her shouting out questions.

“Ok guys. Promise to keep it down and you can go in.”

The gang zipped their lips and race walked each other into Kelley’s room.
“Jesus Ash and Ali what happened to you faces? Bob and Hank your hair looks like it has been in tornado”

“Hope threw me in a window and Ali smacked her face on Hope’s boat a couple of times.”

“We had to ride the quad runner into town because Bob left his keys in his boat when we went to check Ash’s house for Pirates.” Hank got out.

“Pirates?” Kelley raised her eyebrows.

“Well it made sense at the time. Better than those Rangers dragging the lake for bodies.”

“Bodies?” Kelley got out as her eyebrows met her hair line. “I miss all the good stuff.” Kelley looked around. All eyes were on Amelia. “Who wants to hold her first?”

Ali charged the bed like a bull going after a red cape.

“Amelia, meet your Aunt Ali.” Kelley said as she handed the little bundle over.

Ali snatched Amelia up and kicked Stan out of the recliner. Ash joined her, kneeling on the floor beside her. Ali was cooing to the baby. “She looks a little like Elmer Fudd to me.” Ash joked.

“Ashlyn Harris you take that back.” Ali warned.

“Just kidding.” Ashe begged off. She took in the sight of Ali holding little Amelia. “I can just see you when it’s ours.”

Ali just looked at Ash and saw the longing. “Won’t be long now Ash.” Which was a lie. Ali now hated time. Months. It will be months. Like a year! Just then Amelia squirmed and let out a little mewling sounds grabbing Ali’s attention. This is my practice baby. She thought as she placed a kiss on her forehead.

Fran poked Viv in the side. “Someone has baby fever.”
“Got it bad.” Ruby agreed.

Amelia was soon enough passed around. She took it rather well.

Bob – “When she’s 10 she can have your old paper route Hope.”

Hank – “Like hell. Maybe after she’s done with her after school job down at the station. I’ll teach her how to put air in tires and check the oil.”

Fran – “No way in hell Hank. She is coming to story time every Saturday at the library and then learning the Dewey Decimal System so she re-shelve books after she gets her homework done at a little desk by me.”

Viv – “Like that is going to happen. She will make a beeline for the craft store where I will have crayons, paint, and an endless supply of paper for her.”

Ruby – “You’re all wrong. She will be at the Post Office helping me sort mail just like her Mommy did when Hope and Ash ditched her.”

Stan – “You are all wrong. She will be hanging with me in the hardware store. Probably wreck half of my displays. Lord what she gonna do to my greenhouses?”

Ruby was holding Amelia when Stan spoke up. “Is it my turn yet?”

Ruby looked at Kelley.

Kelley nodded her head. “Just make sure he is sitting down.”

Ali got out of her seat and mentioned Stan over to it. Stan settled and held out his arms, even the sprained one.
Ruby lowered the baby into his arms. “You be careful Stan.” She warned.

“Like the finest crystal.” Stan answered. “I wonder what the age limit is for driving a forklift.” Stan wondered out loud.

“Stan.” All present said.

“She’ll like it.” Stan protested as he cradled the baby of the woman who had been at his side all his life.
Ali and Ashlyn had just been dropped off back at their house. Ashlyn flopped on the couch and Ali walked into the kitchen. It was a mess and she did not feel like cleaning it up. She reached under the cupboard for the bottle and grabbed a couple of glasses and then joined Ashlyn on the couch.

“Bringing out the big guns I see.” Ashlyn said as she accepted the glasses of bourbon from Ali.

“Yeah. Kinda been one of those days.” Ali said while rolling her eyes.

“Got that right. Who knew one baby could cause so much trouble?” Ashly pondered.

“Well it was Kelley after all.”

“I tell you one thing Ali, no repeats when our time comes.”

“Amen.” Ali said as she clinked glasses with Ashlyn.

Later that night as they lay in bed. “Why so quiet Ali?”

Ali groaned. She didn’t want to say. “It seems so far off. We could be talking a year. Or more.”

“Our first appointment is next week.”

“I know, but it could take a while.” Ali huffed. “It took two tries for Hope and Kelley. Who
knows how many we might need? Kelley is younger than me.”

“I’m not worried about it. Those ferocious Krieger genes are gonna kick in and we will be off in a flash. I just know it. Better yet, I feel it.”

“Really Ash?”

“You know it.” Ashlyn assured.

*************************************************************************

Three weeks later. “I can’t believe were doing this today.” Ali exclaimed.

“I can. I told you those Krieger genes were going to kick in. See?”

“You did.”

An hour later Ali was laying on her back with her feet up in the stirrups. ‘How much longer?’ Ali asked again.

“One minute less than when you last asked.” Ashlyn teased.

“I’d like to see how you would like laying all exposed for 15 minutes Harris.” Ali fumed.

“Sorry baby. Four more minutes.” Ashlyn soothed. “Then we just wait two weeks to see how we did.”

“You mean how I did.” Ali said refusing to look at Ashlyn.

“Ali please don’t say that. I thought we were a team. Testing and charting together.” Ashlyn pleaded.
Ali turned to look at Ashlyn. She heard the hurt in her voice. “Ash I’m sorry. I didn’t mean to cut you ou...”

“Sshh. It’s ok.” Ashlyn said while taking her hand.

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There they stood, two weeks later in the bathroom. “I can’t look. You look.” Ali said as thrust the EPT towards Ashlyn. Just as Ashlyn touched it Ali jerked it back. “I’ll look.” A minute went by and she still hadn’t summoned the guts to even peek at it.

“Ali?” Ashlyn prodded.

“I can’t. As long as I don’t look I still could be.” Ali admitted with tears in her eyes.

“Ali.” Ashlyn stroked her. “Let’s do it together on three.” Ashlyn said as she took Ali’s hand holding the test into hers. “One, two, three.”

Ali turned and looked at the wall instead of the test. Next thing she knew Ashlyn was bending her backwards over her knee and planting a big one on her. “I told you those Krieger genes were gonna be badass.” Ashlyn said as she thrust the positive tester into Ali’s field of sight.

Hope and Kelley had just pulled to a stop in the Harris driveway. Hope helped Kelley and the baby out of the truck. Walking up to the door, Hopes hand had just reached the door knob when she heard it. “OH. MY. GOD. OH. MY. GOD. OH. MY. GOD.” It was Ali screaming.

“Take the baby and get in the truck.” Hope directed Kelley who wasted no time fleeing the door while hunched over Amelia protectively. Hope grasped the door knob and readied herself. She flung open the door and charged into the house. Hope was met with a still screaming Ali who charged her and leapt on her KO style. Wrapping her legs around Hope’s waist while she hugged the hell out of her neck. “Ali what is it?”

Ali hugged harder and then pulled away slightly while thrusting something in her face. Once Hope’s eyes readjusted she could see what it was. She knew what it was. Another baby was on the way.
Hope could spy an overjoyed Ashlyn just over Ali’s head and danced Ali over to her. “Congrats you two. I’m so happy for you.” Hope said as she pulled Ashlyn into the mix.


“Oh yeah. In the truck. I made her take the baby back to it when I heard the screaming. I couldn’t tell if it was good or bad screaming.” Hope blushed.

“Well go get her.” Ali ordered.

“Yes Ma’am.” Hope said as she lowered Ali back to the floor and made her way to the door. Hope stepped outside to find Kelley in the driver’s seat and the truck running with Amelia lashed into her car seat. Hope was floored. Two years ago Kell would have been chomping at the bit to get in that house. Now she’s ready to run for the boarder with the baby on a moment’s notice. Hope had seen many small, subtle changes in Kelley since she had become pregnant. Even more so since the baby had arrived, but this was major.

Kelley can see the smile on Hopes face as she emerges from the house so she shuts the truck off and climbs out the door while Hope gets Amelia out of her car seat. “What’s going on Hope?”

“All’s good. I’ll let them tell you.” Hope barely gets out as Kelley is whooping it up and running into the house. “Amelia, I guess your Mother hasn’t changed all that much.” Hope says as she gives the child a soft kiss on the forehead.

Chapter End Notes

Story will feature Ashlyn and Ali predominately for a bit. With sides of O'Solo of course. And yes Fran for you Fran fans.
Commando Surveillance

Chapter Summary

Because it's Valentine's day.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes.

Ali and Ash sat in the Doctor’s consult room making small talk when the Nurse entered and handed the Doctor a sheet of paper. The Doctor review the document and laid it on her desk. “Ali, Ashlyn the tests are pretty conclusive. You’re pregnant. Congratulations.” She said with a smile while standing up to shake their hands.


“Yes Ali, you are.” The Doctor assured her.

“Thank you so much.” Ali gushed.

“Don’t thank me. I had nothing to do with it.” The Doctor said as Ashlyn continued to absentmindedly shake her hand. “Ash, I think that will do.”

“Oh yeah. Sorry I just…….” Ashlyn blushed.

“Ok you two. Stop at the desk on your way out and make an appointment for next month.”

********************

Ali and Ashly sat in the truck not moving. Each caught up in their own little world. Finally Ali spoke. “It’s really true now.”

“Truer than true. In eight and half months it will even be realer than real. If that makes sense.”
“It does. I also think you are cribbing from Dr. Seuss. What do you want? A boy or a girl.”

“I’ll take healthy. I’m just going to hang my hat on that.”

“Healthy for sure.” Ali agreed.

“Ok. Truthfully I’d like a girl. Since Amelia is here. They could be buddies just like Hope and I were.”

“I knew you thought of that.”

“Well darn it Ali. I just remember. Me and Hope sneaking off in the row boat fishing. Filling mail boxes full of shaving cream. Shaking soda cans at picnics and waiting to see who got the loaded can. It’d be nice to see that play out with our own kids.”

“So you want our kid to be a juvenile delinquent?” Ali teased.

“That stuff was harmless.” Ashlyn protested.

“You just remember that when a soda can explodes in your face in a few years.”

Ashlyn giggled. “I’ll know who did it at least.”

“I can’t believe we need to keep this a secret for two more months.”

Ashlyn grabbed her hand. “You can tell if you want. Nothing is going to happen. Look, you are already holding your stomach protectively.”

Ali looked down. I am. “Let me think about it.”
Ruby: Ali is walking down the side walk holding her stomach again.

Viv: Dam I wish she’d just come out and tell us. It’s been weeks.

Fran: You both know the thing is to wait for first trimester.

Viv: What happened to the good old days when you blabbed right off? This waiting is killing me.

Ruby: Fran, it looks like she’s coming your way.

Fran: I’ll let you know if she says anything.

Ruby: Roger that.

Fran: Ruby get a grip. This isn’t some commando surveillance thing.

Viv: Whatever you need to tell yourself Fran.

****************************

Ali had just entered the library when Fran descended on her. It was like she knew she was coming. “Morning Fran.”

“Good morning to you Ali. What brings you here today?”

“Oh I just thought maybe I would pick up a decorating magazine or two.”
“Really? What are you thinking about redecorating?” Fran inquired.

“I was thinking about finally tackling the two spare bedrooms. We really haven’t done much with them over the last year.” Ali allowed.

“What were you thinking of doing with them? Like a guest room? Maybe repurpose one? Could one be for, let’s say a kid?” Fran said as she whirled and looked her in the eye.

_Geez. These women don’t let up. I swear I can feel them watching me. Do hormones make you paranoid? “I’m not really sure.” Ali dodged. “Thought I’d just pick up a few mags and take them with me.”_

“Right this way then.” Fran breezed as she linked arms with Ali and lead her to magazine racks. Fran scanned the shelves and pulled out issues that specifically mentioned nurseries on the covers. “Why don’t you sit at the table and thumb through them and I’ll bring you a nice cup of tea.” Fran lead Ali to a table not even waiting for a reply.

_Fran always gets me coffee now all the sudden it’s tea. They know. I can’t last another month with them. They are going to pull it out of me._ Then Ali got lost in the magazines with daydreams of nurseries.

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Fran: She is redecorating bedrooms.

Viv: Did she come out and say why?

Fran: No, but I loaded her up with ones featuring nurseries and she didn’t fight it.

Ruby: This is killing me. I’m just going to ask her.

Viv: You’ll do no such thing Ruby.
Fran:  We have to wait until she comes to us.

Ruby:  Maybe we can trick her into it?

Fran: No trickery.

Fran: What did you have in mind?

Ruby: Let me think on it.

Viv: I’m in.

Fran: I feel evil.

Ashlyn came home to find Ali sprawled out on the couch leafing through the magazines she had picked up at the library. “Whatcha doing?”

“What’s working on ideas for the nursery. I picked up these decorating magazines at the library today after school let out. Fran was acting weird.”

“How so.”

“She brought me tea instead of coffee.”

“Oh yeah. The gals have decided somethings up.”

“Pretty much. I almost feel like I’m lying by not telling them.”
“If you want to tell them, tell them. You know they would keep your secret locked up like Fort Knox does its gold.”

“I know, but it’s not just them. Emily ran out of the flower shop and gave me a bouquet of flowers “just because” as she put it. Sam gave me a bag of spinach because as he put it, “we all need all the iron we can get” or something like that. Then he asked me if there was anything special I might have a craving for that he doesn’t carry so he could order it for me. The whole damn town is talking about it. I swear I see them whispering.”

“Par for the course with us.” Ashlyn laughed. “At least they care and are showing you that.”

“Yep. If I didn’t feel like an official townie before I definitely do now.”

*****************************************************************************************

Two weeks later Ali was meeting Ruby, Fran, and Viv down at the café.

Fran and Ruby were waiting on Viv to collect her things so they could walk down together to meet up with Ali.

“I still don’t feel right about this.” Fran fretted.

“We tried everything else. Time to bring out the big guns. It’ll be fine.” Viv assured.

“She is going to cave in like a Florida sinkhole.” Ruby declared as they made out the door.

Chapter End Notes

Lord, what are they gonna do? Not that I think sinkholes are anything to be laughed at.
Operation Florida Sinkhole

Chapter Summary

Thank you all the readers that remember. Really trying. A blue stone distracts me. Man on the moon. Foot prints.

Chapter Notes

See the end of the chapter for notes

The four women were ensconced at a table on the patio and all had been served. Idle chit chat was ruling the conversation.

“Viv didn’t you just mention that you brought out your old silk screening equipment. How is that going?” Fran said officially kicking off Operation Florida Sinkhole.

“I actually have experimented and made a few things over the last week.”

“What did you make?” Ruby asked barely able to contain herself. She was thrilled to put her plan into action.

“Ellen over at the diner told me her cousin is pregnant again. I think it’s her fourth kid.” Viv puzzled.

“I didn’t hear that.” Fran muttered feeling guilty already. “She and Glen are having their first then?”

“Glen? That was the second husband and if you blinked you missed him. Must have lasted all of a month. Husband number three is named John. At any rate they are expecting so I thought I’d run off a few things for them. I brought them to drop off after were done here.” Viv delivered her line perfectly.

“What did you make? Can we see them?” Ruby saying it like she was casting a net.

The women had designed the items together. Each one fashioned to pull at Ali’s heart strings. They had decided on a particular order in which to unveil them. Each one designed to pluck at Ali’s heart
strings just a little harder.

“I made a couple of bibs and onesies. Keep in mind I haven’t done this for a while.” Viv reminded them as she pulled the first bib out and held it up. Emblazoned across it was “I’d rather be fishing” along with an image of the cutest little fish you every saw. All done up in blue, green, and yellow. “That bib has a onesie to go with it.” She added as she passed it to Fran.

The bib finally made to Ali. Ali broke out in a wide smile. “This is so cute Viv. You did a great job.” She then handed it back to Viv.

“This is the second bib. Ali I hope you don’t mind but I used some of the art work from the store flyer I made you for your wedding?” Viv said as she held up the second bib. This one read, Orange you glad I’m yours? The green text wrapped around and orange.

Ali started to reach for it but Viv passed it to Fran. Ali never took her eyes off of it. When it made it to her she wasn’t smiling any more. “Our orange.” She said quietly and rather than passing it to Viv she placed on the table near her.

Ruby shot a quick thumbs up to Fran and Viv across the table.

“Now this is the first onesie. It’s just text. You remember when she got that tattoo last year?” Viv asked.

Fran spoke her lines even though she didn’t want to. “I remember alright. Every time I saw her she pulled her shirt up and showed it to me again.”

Ruby recited her lines with barely contained glee. “Lord yes. I saw it so much I could give a positive body ID on that alone.”

“Since she was so proud of it I made this.” Viv explained as she unfurled the onesie.

Ali was no longer sitting back in her chair. She was leaning forward and craning her neck to read it. Printed across the little garment was, My Mommas tattoos are cooler than yours. Ali’s mouth dropped open. Viv passed it to Fran who then passed it to Ruby. Ruby barely had it a second before Ali yanked it out of her hands.
Ali laid it across her leg and just fingered the design. *6 to 9 months is a good size. The baby won’t grow out of it quickly. Ash would just love this. Some other baby is going to be wearing this based on ONE tattoo? That’s not right. Ash would probably frame this after the baby grew out of it.*

Ruby was smiling to beat the band. *The next one is going to be the tipping point. She is going to cave and spill the tea. I think that’s the phrase they use now a days?*

Viv watched Ali as she carefully folded the onesie. *I haven’t lost my touch. Wait till she sees the next one. I can’t wait to tell Bob.*

Fran on the other hand looked like she was sucking on a bitter lemon. *What have I done? Hank will read me the riot act if he ever finds out about this. Hank? If Ali ever figures out we planned this she’ll, she’ll? I don’t know what. Viv’s lucky. Bob even helped her with this and Ruby answers to no one. Although that Eugene has been hanging around. I should talk to Viv about that.*

“*Ashlyn actually inspired this one.*” Viv explained as Ali’s head shot up. “I had to find a way to bring John into the mix and he likes to fish although what he really does is cast a line out so he has a reason to sit there and drink beer. Ali you know how Ashlyn is always saying this?” Viv got out as she whipped the onesie up so Ali could see it. On it was the same fish that had adorned the bib with the text, Momma says I’m the catch of the day.

Ali made a guttural sort of sound and her eyes bulged out. *NO! That’s mine. No way in hell that other baby should be wearing these.* Ali reached over and snatched it out of Viv’s hands. “No. You can’t. That’s. I’m. We.” Ali choked out.

“Yes.” All three women said in unison as they scooted in towards Ali.

Ali’s eyes wildly scanned the three women before her. “I’m pregnant. These clothes, well I’m sorry but they don’t belong on that other baby. That’s our orange. Ash is the one with all the tattoos. And I’m the catch of the day or I will be until the baby comes.” Ali’s eyes welled up in tears as she clutched the clothes.

The women were all speaking at once. “That’s great news.” “We didn’t know.” “Of course you can have those.” “We’re so happy for you.” “I can make more.”

“Oh not these.” Viv assured her. “These are yours and yours only. I can even print the designs on other clothes as the baby grows if you want. I’ll whip up something else for Ellen’s cousin.”

“Honey please don’t cry.” Fran said as she patted Ali’s hand. *I’m going to hell for this. I should never have agreed to it.*

“Don’t mind me. I cry at the drop of a hat now. It’s my hormones running rampant. I came home the other day and found Ashlyn doing the ironing and I cried buckets. I’m fine. These are so wonderful. Almost like they were made for me. I can’t wait to show them to Ashlyn.” Ali said while drying her eyes with a napkin. “I wanted to tell all of you, but we were waiting until we passed the first trimester. It was really hard to keep it from you.”

“Don’t you worry about that honey.” Fran soothed feeling like a traitor.

**************************************************

Fran sat at her kitchen table sipping her vodka gimlet to steady her nerves. She was still kicking herself over Operation Florida Sinkhole. Yes, they had been successful but she didn’t feel good about it. She heard the door open. “Hank?”

“Hey Fran. How did you little coffee klatch go?” He eyed the bottle on the counter. “Why and what are you drinking?”

“Sam isn’t the only one that can concoct drinks. This is the Fran Is A Fraudulent Friend. Want one?”

“Frannie what happened?”

“Hank, you are going to be mad at me.” Fran began as she admitted to the ruse she pulled off with Ruby and Viv.

“I think I just might have one of those.” Hank smirked as he walked over to the counter and mixed one up and then returned to the table. “It sounds to me that in the end Ali was really happy. You three can really bring it when you get your minds set on something.”
“Hank it was awful.”

“Frannie come here.” Hank said while patting his lap. Fran moved to him. “She said she had been wanting to tell you and her tears were just from hormones. You need to believe her. What you three did you did out of love. You just wanted to be able to share with her. It’s alright. Hell, you three ought to work for the Interrogation Unit of the FBI. They’d be lucky to have you. You women would crack suspects like walnuts.”

Ash was sprawled out on the couch sipping a near beer while watching a bass fishing show. I hate these things. If Ali can’t have a glass of wine it’s the least I can do. Absolute least for sure. When Ali came in the door. Eyes red and toting a bag. “Babe what happen?” Ash got up concerned.

“Nothing bad. Sit down. It was an ambush.”

“Ambush?” Ashlyn got out while her mind was reeling at all the possibilities.

“Best kind really. Talk turned to Viv working with her screen printing equipment and then the trap was sprung. I was a sitting duck.”

TRAP! SITTING DUCK! Ashlyn felt herself getting mad.

“Relax.” Ali said as she reached in the bag and brought out the fishing bib which she passed to Ashlyn. “Viv said she made these things for Ellen’s pregnant cousin.

“Awe. Cute.” Ashlyn said.

“Yeah. I thought so far a while. Then she brought out this. It’s our orange.” Ali explained.

“Orange you glad. That’s like a knock knock joke. Our orange. Maybe she can make us one?”

“That is the last of the bibs. Now on to the onesies. Try not to get overly excited.” Ali cautioned as
she passed the miniature garment to Ashlyn.

_I…. It needs a warning?_ Ashlyn was a little confused over it being straight text. All the others had pictures. Then she read it (My Mommas tattoos are cooler) and shot up out of her seat. “No. I. Not her.” Ashlyn said as she clutched it.

“It’s ok. These are staying with us. It was all part of the ambush. I know how you feel. If you had been there I honestly don’t know what would have happened. There’s one more onesie. It goes with the fishing bib. It’s even more so…….. well us. Now sit down.”

_More us?_ Ashlyn was trying to figure out exactly what happened to Ali. _Those women are a curse. One I never want to get over._

“Here. Now try not to destroy anything.”

Chapter End Notes

To Snoop, Net, Mustang. Love you.

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