

# SEBASTIAN

ALONG CAME JONES, BOOK ONE



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BLUSHING BOOKS

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ABCD Graphics and Design  
977 Seminole Trail #233  
Charlottesville, VA 22901  
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Sebastian

EBook ISBN: 978-1-61258-527-7  
Print ISBN: 978-1-61258-570-3

Cover Art by ABCD Graphics & Design

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## CHAPTER 1



“**R**eady, Ryan?” Maggie asked, pulling her ball cap a little lower over the sun in her eyes.

“Ready!” Her eight-year-old nephew waved his bat at her, waiting for the pitch. She pitched it, low and easy, and he swung and missed again.

“No worries, buddy, here comes the next one.” She had a small bucket of balls at her feet. Her bucket saved chasing every single one all over the yard every time he hit one, presuming he eventually would, and her fat, little, red dachshund, Simon, wagging his tail under the tree, refused to learn fetch.

“I’m ready!” He waved the bat again. “I’ll do it this time!” His confidence despite missing ten in a row was unflagging and contagious.

“Okay! Here it comes!” She threw again, and this time he connected. Foul ball, but he cheered as if he’d hit a homerun.

“I did it!” he yelled. “Look, Aunt Maggie, I did it! I hit the ball!” He shoved his glasses back up his nose and jumped around like a wild child.

Maggie jumped up and down, too, and ran the few feet between them, giving him a high five. “You did it! I knew you could!” Poor

little kid had his mom's coordination, much to his dad's chagrin. Maggie and her brother, Ben, were both athletes, still playing on sports teams, and he even did triathlons. She played baseball in the summer and volleyball in the winter. Cambry, Ben's wife, not so much. She said a bike ride around the neighborhood with her kid was as much as she wanted to do. Ben had decided it was time for Ryan to work on his abilities, and Maggie offered to help, knowing she was much more patient than her brother. After all, she taught kids for a living. He was a surgeon who barked orders for a living.

"Let's do it again," he pushed a lock of too long hair out of his eyes.

"Okay," she said. "I'm ready. This time aim for the fence, okay?" She pointed to a big round target she'd painted on the back of her fence.

"I'm going to hit it over the fence," he boasted and swung the bat in preparation.

"Let's do it!" She threw the ball, and to her utter surprise he connected again. The ball didn't go straight, but instead arced up and to the left. They both watched wide eyed while it went over the fence and then crashed through her neighbor's window. Her new neighbor whom she hadn't even met yet. Naturally. Couldn't have been sweet Mrs. Miller on the other side. Oh no. Had to be the new guy she'd only gotten a glimpse of.

"Oh, no," her sweet little nephew moaned. "Dad's going to be so mad!"

"Dad is not going to be mad," she told him. "We are going to handle this." She took his hand and smiled at him. "But man, that was the best hit ever, wasn't it?"

"It went way over the fence," Ryan said, awed. "I've never hit one that far, ever."

"But you will do it again," she said, trying not to let him know her heart was pounding. What a way to meet a new neighbor. "And, right now, we have to go tell him we are sorry for breaking his window."

Ryan looked at her, with almost fear in his eyes. "I don't want to," he said.

"I know, right?" She knelt down to his level, "But that is what you do when you make a mistake. You say you are sorry and ask how you can help make it right."

"My first home run and I have to say I'm sorry," he looked at her sadly.

"When we tell your dad about it, we will leave that part out," she said, ruffling his hair. "Come on, let's get this done."

They held hands as they walked through the gate and over to the neighbor's house, and Maggie knocked on the door. She'd only seen this guy a few times in passing, and wished now that she'd come over and brought him a pie or something as a welcome to the neighborhood gesture. This wasn't a fun way to meet the new neighbor.

She knocked again. No answer, and it felt like no movement from inside. Ryan looked up at her through his glasses, "Now what?"

"We go write a note and leave it on his door," she said decisively. See, she knew all about how to do things, apparently. "Come on."

They walked back to her house, with Ryan obviously upset, so she tried to cheer him up. "Don't worry. You know what adults call this kind of thing?"

"What?" he asked looking so pathetic her heart lurched.

"We call it a funny story later," she said. "You are going to have a lot of things that happen in life that will be a funny story later."

"Oh." He didn't seem impressed.

Before they got up the steps to her house, he brightened considerably. "Mom!" Maggie looked as Cambry's car pulled into the driveway. Her sister-in-law jumped out of the car in her nurse's scrubs, "Hey, Ryan, I got off early and thought we could have some mommy and kid time!"

"Yes!" he said. "Bye, Aunt Maggie, see you soon!" He waved,

apparently all thoughts of the window forgotten, and she decided to just let it go.

“Want your back pack?” she called, but he didn’t seem to notice. His folks both worked long hours, and he deserved what time he could get with them. She could get him his backpack later.

Besides, she could write a note for the neighbor all by herself.

“Thanks for watching him today, Maggie.” Cambry waved at her as they both got in the car.

“Anytime!” She waved back, could see Ryan chattering happily to his mom, and sighed. She was glad he got some mom time. She waved again as they pulled out into the street and after watching them turn the corner, headed back to the house to get some paper and tape.

As she was opening her front door, out of the corner of her eye, she saw a car pull in next door. Oh, good, he was home. She tried to fake enthusiasm. Just go do it, she told herself. No time like now. Turning around, she went back down the porch stairs and headed next door as he got out of his car. Of course, he’d be in a suit and tie, while she was dressed in cut off denim shorts, a too short T-shirt and sneakers. Her hair was pulled back in a high ponytail and out her ball cap, but on the upside, she consoled herself, he probably wasn’t wearing any makeup either. He was tall, very tall, and lean. He moved casually as she forced herself to wave at him. “Hi!” she called out and walked toward him, taking a deep breath.

“I’m your next-door neighbor, Maggie Carpenter.” She took his outstretched hand and shook it.

“Sebastian Jones,” he said. His voice deeper than she would have thought. He had dark brown hair, deep brown eyes and a very firm handshake. “Nice to meet you, Maggie,” he said. “This seems like a great neighborhood.”

“Well, you won’t think that for long.” She looked way up at him. Dang, she was five four, how tall was he? At least a foot taller than she was, she guesstimated.

"I won't?" he asked. "And it's been such a good day so far." That didn't seem sincere, she thought as he added. "What's going on?"

"My nephew and I were playing ball in the back yard." She took a deep breath and smiled crookedly at him. "Good news, he hit his first home run. Bad news, the ball is inside your house."

"My window?" he guessed, with only a slight frown. Well, at least he wasn't a screamer.

"Yeah, I'm sorry. I'll obviously pay to have it replaced," she said trying to be as pitiful as possible.

He looked her up and down, then after a long pause said, "I guess you need your ball back."

"If it isn't too much trouble," she said. "Then I can help you clean it up, put cardboard or plastic up on it tonight and I'll get the glass guy out in the morning to fix it."

"I have lots of boxes from moving," he said. "We can use those, come on in."

Well, that was terse. "I'm sorry," she said. "Probably not what you wanted to do after a long day at work and in a new house with boxes to unpack."

"It's okay," he said.

She rolled her eyes behind his back. Fine. If he wanted to be a jerk, she'd kill him with kindness. "I teach junior high math," she said. "What do you do?"

He didn't even turn around after unlocking the front door. "You look like a teenager."

"Thanks," she didn't bother to hide her sarcasm that time. Sure in a few years she might be happy to be told she looked eighteen, but not yet. It was the ball cap, she consoled herself. "But I'm really a college graduate with a teaching job."

"Hmph," he said.

Wow. His conversational skills were just amazing, weren't they? She followed him into his house. Very sparse, but he'd only been in a week, and there were still boxes around.

"I assume it's back here," he said, walking down a short hall and opened a door. "Yeah."

It was an empty room with hardwood floors. That was good, at least she wouldn't have to pick up glass from the carpet. "Do you have a trash can?" She asked bending over to pick up a few of the larger pieces. Standing up, she noticed him staring at her butt, and blushed. She had only thought of comfort when she put the shorts on, not expecting anyone but Ryan to see her. His face was impassive as he left the room, to come back shortly with a box and some cardboard and packing tape. She put her glass pieces in the box debating to play the quiet game with him or try to make civil conversation. Her glass pieces clinked as they hit the bottom of the box.

"I'm really sorry," she offered.

"His first home run, huh?" he said, picking up a few smaller pieces.

"Yeah, his first real hit, actually. He's a bit uncoordinated," she explained as she smiled. "Smart as a whip like his folks, but his dad wants him more well-rounded and decided to put him on a baseball team this summer. He's warming that bench really well."

"So, you're coaching him?" His brown eyes raked her over again and she wished she were wearing more clothes.

"Yeah, I play on a team," she said. "First base."

He nodded. "I'm going to get a broom." he said and left the room.

Cryptic, wasn't he? Oh well, he was just her neighbor, it wasn't like she had to do anything but wave at him over the fence and try to not break his windows anymore. Next time, she and Ryan would go to the park to hit balls. Who knew the kid had such a swing? Who knew her neighbor was such a hunk? Usually, she liked some meat on her guys, but this one moved with such quiet confidence, she felt some sort of weird attraction to him, Which, she told herself firmly, she was planning to ignore.

She was just happy he didn't scream at her for breaking the



window, she thought as she kept searching for anymore pieces of glass she might have missed, then picking up a piece of cardboard to tape it to the window.

He came up behind and put his arms around her to grab the cardboard and move it higher on the window. "Must be nice to be tall," she quipped, feeling a little startled.

"Can you get the tape?" he asked, and she ducked under his arms to get it from the floor. That was strange. Ripping off a long piece of tape, she taped while he held. Soon, they had it done, in silence. Did the man never talk?

"I'll call the window guy in the morning," she said. "I know a good one here in town. What time do you go to work?" He never did tell her where he worked, she thought, like it was a government secret or something.

"I leave early, by seven," he said. No wonder she rarely saw him. In the summer, she slept in a bit longer than during the school year when she often had to be at work by seven. It was lovely. He looked at her, slowly and said decisively, as if he'd made a decision. "I'll give you a key."

"Okay," she said. He must trust his teenaged looking, window breaking, next door neighbor after all. He wasn't the friendliest of guys, but at least he had been calm throughout the exchange and she appreciated that. Maybe she'd bring him a pie or something tomorrow, to express her chagrin and say sorry. Why not? Sometimes she got tired of cooking just for herself, or for herself and Ryan. He was a good kid and she adored him, but his idea of a good meal was chicken nuggets and fries.

"Can I have your number?" she asked, pulling her cell phone out of her pocket. "In case I need to ask you anything while they're here?"

He pulled his phone out of his pocket and handed it to her while she gave him hers, and they both programmed their numbers in. Why had she talked all her life? Apparently, you rarely needed to. Solemnly she handed him his phone back and stuck hers in her

pocket. "I'm sorry," she said again. "Not the best way to meet a new neighbor."

"Not a problem. It will get fixed and life will go on." He looked at her and she got the distinct impression he wanted her to leave.

"Good way to look at it." She smiled at him, and shifted her ball cap, willing him to smile back.

He didn't. "Any chance your homeowner's insurance will pay for it?"

"Actions have consequences," he manipulated his keys and took one off, and handed her his house key.

"I'll text you when it's fixed tomorrow," she said, heading to the door. Well, so much for that.

"Thank you," he said.

She shook her head as she left the house. Cold fish. That's what he was, although it didn't matter. What mattered was she did the right thing.

Her phone rang as she was walking in the door and she fished it from her pocket, weirdly hoping it was Sebastian Jones. It wasn't of course. If he didn't talk in person, he wasn't going to call her. "Hey, Ben," she said.

"Thanks for watching Ryan today," he said. "He's going camping with the scouts tomorrow, so won't be back for a few days."

"You're welcome. You going on the trip too?"

"No, I have patients, but he's going to hang out with Karl and his kid, so he'll be watched over," Ben explained.

"Well, that's good, I guess. You aren't much of a camper anyway," she teased.

"Yeah. But I hope he has a good time," Ben said.

"Me too. Did he tell you he hit a homerun today?" she asked.

"I'm not home, so haven't talked to him. Cambry told me he hit a ball into a window, though. What happened?"

"He connected, twice in a row," Maggie said proudly. "After missing over ten. He just kept swinging, trying and listening to my suggestions. I was so proud."

“Window breaking shouldn’t be the goal,” Ben said.

“Seriously? Get off your high horse. It was an accident, and we handled it.” She was annoyed. Everything was so black and white with Ben. Probably made him a good surgeon but he could be an asshole brother and was often an impatient father. Good thing Cambry put up with him. Who else would?

“My high horse is offering to pay for the window,” he said dryly. “Let me know how much.”

With that he hung up before she could answer. Would he take it out of Ryan’s allowance? If so, she’d just pay for it, unless it was really a lot. Even then, she guessed. She didn’t want her nephew punished for his first home run in any way, shape or form.

Looking at the clock, she knew it was too late for her to call the glass people tonight, but she got on the computer to look up some numbers. She felt the warm key in her short’s pocket. Tomorrow, she would right the wrong and then go back to waving over the fence if she saw the hot guy next door.

Dang, he was cute though, in a cold, barely speaking way. She put him out of her head and looked at the clock. She didn’t have practice today, so there was nothing going on tonight. She’d make that pie, because she felt like baking, and then watch some TV, unless Keith wanted to go out somewhere. She’d been casually dating him for a few months now, but she felt as if he were backing away and that sort of sucked. There had been no men in her life since college a few years back, and he was the first one she had tolerated after more than a few dates. No, she wasn’t that excited about him and no, he wasn’t the one, but he was fun to go shoot pool with or see a movie with.

Texting him, and leaving her phone on the counter to see when he texted back, she got out her flour and shortening to make the pie crust. Was she going to be heartbroken when he broke up with her, as she suspected he was going to do? Unless he just did a fade away, guys did that, she knew. No, she probably wouldn’t be. Annoyed, yes, and irritated because it was handy to have a guy to do stuff

with and go places with, but she wasn't going to sob into her pillow, she knew. That wasn't a good thing. When was the last time she'd cried over a guy? Thirteen? Who knew? Not her. A few came and went, but no one seriously, and her mom was starting to worry. Her brother had been married at her age, she'd told her repeatedly on her last birthday. Well, she wasn't Perfect Doctor Ben and never had been. It had been hard growing up in the shadow of her brilliant brother. Her parents and the teachers all expected the same thing from her. She did well in high school, but not Ben well, and as she knew, that was all that mattered! Now, there were still some of the same teachers who expected the same thing from Ryan, and it hadn't been fair to either one of them. Perfect Ben also got married at the proper time, to a surgical nurse who was just as smart as he was, and then they produced, as her mom pointed out often, her only grandson. Poor Ryan. High expectations all around, and now he had to play ball too.

Her text went off as she popped open the jar of apple pie filling she and her mom had put up last summer. The last one, but apples would be ready in a few weeks or so. She looked over at it. Not Keith but her friend, Corrine.

"Hey, want to go out tonight? Bunch of us, at the Oasis?"

"Not tonight, thanks, had Ryan all day, am beat. Have fun!" She texted back, wondering if she was staying home on the chance Keith would call. No, she was actually not excited about hanging out in a bar tonight. She'd rather stay home and chill out with the smell of pie and her TV on to a silly reality show.

"Will miss you. If you get a second wind, come on down."

"Will do." Maggie finished her pie crust and stood back and admired it. Perfect. Brushing it with egg whites, she popped it in the preheated oven, set the timer, and started cleaning up her bowls and utensils.

Nothing from Keith still. Fine, if he wanted to be that way, he just could be. She didn't care. Idly she wondered if she should get on one of those dating apps they were always showing on TV. She

had several friends who had either married or met a special someone that way. With her full and busy life, would she have time for all that? Sure. You made time for things you want to do. Looking up at the clock, she saw it was almost time for her favorite show, where twenty pretty, skinny girls competed for one guy. It was so realistic. Like any of them ever had any trouble finding men. You could tell by looking at them, that wasn't the case. But it was good escapist TV, she shoved a bag of popcorn in her microwave and grabbed a bottle of water from the refrigerator.

Settling in, a few minutes later, she flipped the TV on and found her channel. Yeah, there they were.

As soon as the first tears happened, however, the doorbell rang. Tempted to ignore it, she sighed, got up and peeked out the peephole. She saw chest. Male chest. Tall, lean male chest. Okay. Neighbor. What did he want? Only one way to find out.

Opening the door, she said, "Hi, Sebastian." See how friendly she was? Would he speak to her and let her know what he wanted or pantomime in some kind of sign language? Ha. She knew ASL so that would get him nowhere in stumping her by silence.

"Hello, Maggie," he said, and she wondered why she felt surprised because he remembered her name. Who wouldn't remember the woman who put a ball through his window? "I was wondering if you had a screwdriver I could borrow? My tool box hasn't arrived yet."

"Phillips or regular, electric or manual? What size?" she asked, opening the door and motioning him in. "Wait, I have a set," she said. "What are you putting together?"

"Furniture," he said.

Well, what did she expect? That he'd speak to her and explain?

"Come on in," she walked to the kitchen, and under the sink was the electric screwdriver with the couple dozen bits her dad had given her a few years ago. It came in its own cute case, and should fix any furniture he was putting together. She'd used it dozens of

times. "Battery is fully charged." She handed it to him, ignoring the tingle as their hands brushed.

"Smells good in here," he said.

Yes, it did, the pie wasn't near done, but it was filling the kitchen with the smell of cinnamon and spices. "I'll save you some when it's done," she said, smiling at him and willing him to smile back. Come on, boy, smile. She zapped him as hard as she could with happy thoughts, but it didn't work.

"Thank you," he said, and she didn't know if he meant for the screwdriver loan or the promise of pie later on.

Her phone buzzed just then. Her dad she saw, glancing at it. He never called. What was going on? "Sorry," she mumbled, and snatched it up. "Dad? What's wrong?"

"Your mom fell off the ladder," he said, obviously panicked which panicked her. "I called the ambulance. Meet us at the hospital!"

"Dad? Did she hit her head? What happened?"

"Ambulance here," he said and hung up.

"Dad!" she yelled into the phone, staring at him. What happened to her mom?

"I have to get to the hospital, my mom's hurt," she told Sebastian, staring at him, horrified.

"Go put some clothes on. I'll drive." he said.

Maggie looked at him as if he were crazy. "Clothes?"

"Sweatpants, jeans, and grab a jacket. Hospitals are cold," he said calmly. "We'll take my car."

His car? Her ears were ringing and all she could do was stand and stare at him. He reached over to her, turned her around and smacked her bottom hard enough to make her yell. "Go."

That seemed to break her trance, she rushed to the bedroom to do as she was told. Not even bothering to shut the door, dropping her shorts on the floor while pulling her favorite pair of soft jeans on, and then slipping back into her sneakers. Her oversized blue hoodie was on the doorknob and she grabbed it. He was driving

her? He didn't even know her. Simon had followed her to the bedroom, and as she shut the door behind her, she said, "I'll be back, night, buddy."

Hurrying out to the kitchen she saw him at the stove and blurted out, "I can drive."

"No, you can't." He handed her the phone she'd dropped, and grabbed her by the elbow. "Let's go."

She let him lead her to the car, feeling numb. Her mom fell off a ladder? Why was she on a ladder? Her mom wasn't prone to clumsiness like Cambry and Ryan. She was as athletic as Ben, and she still ran 5Ks, had a huge garden and worked part time at the hospital as a nurse in a family practice office. Accidents happened she knew, but her mom didn't have accidents.

He led her to some kind of dark car, opened the door and put her in. She stared out the window, her mind racing. Her dad was scared. She'd never known her dad to be scared. Sebastian spoke, "Name of the hospital?"

"Memorial on Maine Street," she answered.

He repeated it to the car, which apparently understood words because the map with directions popped up on a small screen. Her car was only six years old but didn't do that.

He reached over and patted her knee. "It will be okay."

Yeah, easy for him to say. "Your brother called while you were changing. Do you want to call him back?"

"He's already at the hospital," she said. "He works there. Probably just making sure I knew."

They pulled into the ER parking lot and went inside, she rushed to the desk saying, "My mom came here by ambulance her name is Ellen Carpenter."

The woman flipped her computer screen and said, "Someone will be with you in just a minute. You can take a seat over there."

"Maggie!" She turned and saw Cambry and Ryan coming in the door. "What's going on? Ben just called and said your mom was hurt."

"That's all I know, too. Someone said that the nurse will be out in a minute. Oh, this is Sebastian," Maggie said.

"I'll be right back, watch Ryan," Cambry said and disappeared through a side door.

"It pays to have pull," Maggie said, and pulled Ryan close to her. "Cambry works here," she explained to Sebastian.

"Is Grammy going to be okay?" Ryan asked.

"We hope so," she said. Sebastian just stood there, as if he belonged. Which was just fine with her, for some reason it gave her comfort. Maggie shot him a half smile, and he simply looked at her. No speaking, no smile. They sat down on the uncomfortable chairs next to the door Cambry had gone through. She opened her mouth to say something when she saw Cambry come back out through the door, followed by her father. She rushed over to hug him.

"What happened?"

"Your mom decided to clean the gutters, and the ladder slipped. She hit her head and landed on her wrist," he said. "I was in my workshop and have no idea how long she was there before I came out."

Maggie stepped back as Cambry touched her shoulder.

"She's down having a CAT scan, right now," Cambry said. "But she's conscious, and coherent. We'll see what it says, but she's doing okay."

Maggie sagged in relief, and weirdly felt Sebastian at her arm, giving her support. He led her back to the chair and turned to her dad. "Mr. Carpenter, I presume? I'm Sebastian Jones. I drove Maggie here, I live next door."

"Thank you for that," her dad said, as Maggie looked on. Huh. He did say words. Maybe he just couldn't talk to women?

"Why did you let Mom up on the ladder?" she asked when they all sat back down to wait.

"When have I ever stopped your mom from doing whatever she wanted?" he replied. "She thinks for herself."



Maggie shook her head as Ryan sat next to his mom and clutched her hand, his eyes wide under his thick glasses.

Just then another person burst through the ER doors shouting for help, they all watched as the staff leapt into action and a few minutes later a heavily pregnant and panting woman was wheeled through the door and whisked away. “New baby, soon,” Maggie said softly.

“Is this where I was born?” Ryan asked.

“The very same place,” his mom said. “And where Daddy, me and Aunt Maggie were born too. This is a place where good things often happen.”

“I hope a good thing happens, today,” he said. “I want Grammy to be okay.”

“We have the best doctors and nurses here,” Maggie told him. “Including your mom and dad.”

He nodded solemnly and pulled out some electronic thing he’d told her the name of six times, but she kept forgetting and focused on it. They all sat in silence while her mind raced. Weirdly enough she liked the feel of Sebastian’s leg touching hers. It felt intimate and strong. She leaned her shoulder against his too, and tried to think of life without her mom. It just couldn’t be. She would be fine. She just bumped her head, hurt her wrist. She’d be fine. How many times did she have to say that to herself before it was so?

Half an hour later, Ben came out the door Cambry had come out of earlier. “She’s fine,” he said, and Maggie burst into tears as he continued, “a concussion and a broken wrist they will splint in the morning. We’re going to keep her overnight, as soon as she gets settled in a room, you can go see her. Dad, you can spend the night if you want. Someone will come let you know where she is.” He walked back out of the room. That was his doctor persona, Maggie reminded herself, futilely fighting back relieved tears.

Sebastian’s hand snaked over to hers and held it as Maggie tried to stop crying. She clutched his hard, warm hand tightly.

"I'm here," he said softly. She squeezed his hand in appreciation, but couldn't say anything.

"Hi, Sierra," Cambry said a few minutes later. "Can we go up now?" Maggie looked up through tear filled eyes as a nurse made her way to them.

"Yup. She's in 412. I'll walk up with you. The surgeon for her hand won't be in until morning, but we're going to get your mom settled in a room until then."

Maggie liked that her family was known here and had friends. That would mean her mom would get the best of care. She deserved it. Trying to stop the tears was harder. She just wanted to break down and sob. Her mom was amazing, and this shook her to her core. She'd never thought about her mom being mortal.

She clutched Sebastian's hand as they walked down the hall. It never even occurred to her to leave him behind. Strange. She'd just met him a few hours earlier.

They rode up the elevator in silence. Cambry holding Ryan's hand. She was holding Sebastian's and her dad's. As they arrived on four, Sierra said cheerfully, "Cambry, Laine is the nurse in charge, she'll meet you in the room in a few minutes."

"Thanks," Cambry said and tripped over the elevator door. Sebastian caught her with his other hand, and she threw him a grateful look. "We like this one, Maggie," she said as she led the way to the room.

"This one?" he said softly, but she didn't bother to answer. Cambry had met Keith. Odd, she hadn't even thought to call him. He simply wasn't worth it. Her mom was all she cared about. There she was. Still sniffling, she let go of Sebastian's and her dad's hand and rushed to her.

"A ladder, Mom, seriously?" She grabbed her hand that wasn't strapped to a board, and held it up to her cheek while her mom smiled.

"I've been climbing ladders since before you were born, and I'll keep climbing them. One little accident won't stop me. Bryant?"

She looked for her husband and Maggie stepped back. A nurse came in and they all looked at her expectantly.

“Hi, Cambry, hi, Ellen. I’m Laine.” She looked at everyone else and gave a small wave. “We’re keeping you for a while, Ellen. They want the swelling to go down on your hand some before surgery, so you will stay here tonight. You had a bad concussion and we want to make sure things are fine. Dr. Carpenter said Mr. Carpenter wanted to stay here tonight, so we will fix him up a spot here next to you.”

“Is she going to be okay?” Maggie asked, needing to be sure.

“With some rest. The rest of you can clear out, visiting hours start about nine in the morning, you don’t need to be here for the surgery, but we will call you after. Depending, on how she handles the surgery, which is minor, she will probably be going home before noon tomorrow. We’ll see what the doctor says in the morning. I’ll be on duty all night, so call if you get concerned. I’ll be doing some tests here in a bit and we’re going to let her get some rest, so say goodnight.” She left the room.

“Well, that was subtle,” Maggie said wanting to stay with her mom, too, but knowing she was only a few blocks away and rest for her mom was the most important thing.

“Sure was,” agreed Cambry. “Mom, Laine knows my number and Ben will check on you before he leaves for home tonight. Ben will call me after you get your wrist set and I’ll call Maggie. You and Dad sleep good, I love you.”

“Glad you’re okay, Grammy,” Ryan kissed her cheek.

“I love you, Mom, glad you are okay. I’ll call you in the morning, okay?” Maggie said. Then looked at Sebastian. “Mom, this is my next-door neighbor, Sebastian, he drove me here.”

“Thank you, Sebastian,” she said softly, then turned to her family. “Love you all. Will talk tomorrow. My head is pounding though.”

“We’re leaving,” Maggie said. “Let me know if you need me.”

“I will.” She shut her eyes and Maggie felt a bit of the helplessness

ness slide back over her. Sebastian took her by the arm and they left the room. She threw a glance back over her shoulder at her dad sitting next to her mom and holding her hand. Everyone needed a hand to hold tonight, apparently.

Cambry hugged her in the hall. "Ryan and I are going to have dinner with Ben in the cafeteria, do you want to come?"

Maggie shook her head. "I've kept Sebastian long enough. We'll just go home, but thanks. Will you call me as soon as you hear anything?"

Cambry nodded and Ryan waved at her as they went down the hall the other way, and she and Sebastian headed to the elevator.

"You okay?" he asked on the way down.

"Yeah, a little shaky, though. My mom is tough. She runs marathons. It was so weird to see her in the hospital bed or thinking she was hurt. I don't even remember her ever being sick," she said, and followed him out into the parking lot.

He opened the door for her when they reached the car, and she slid in, still chattering away, from nerves and relief. "She grows her own garden and she and I do some canning every year together, but she does a lot more on her own. She still works in the doctor's office where she's worked all my life, and she's been taking online French classes for a few years." Her mom was wonderful and would be okay.

They pulled out of the parking lot and he said, "Home," to the car. The map instantly changed as they headed toward their neighborhood. She'd all but forgotten he had just moved in and didn't know his way around yet.

She turned to him, in her seat and looked at his calm demeanor, and classically handsome features. Muscles flexed in his arms as he turned the steering wheel, and Maggie wondered again what he did for a living. Well, she'd find out sooner or later.

Gasping in horror, she saw the time. They had been there over three hours. "My pie!" she wailed. "The house is probably burned down! Simon!"

"I shut the oven off," he said, glancing at her. "Your dog is fine."

She stared at him again, meeting his eyes briefly, and then said, "You hit me!"

"I smacked your bottom to get your attention. It worked." She didn't know what to say to that. At least he hadn't slapped her across the face like people did in movies, she guessed. "Are you always this dramatic?" he continued.

Now, she was the one without words. He hadn't seen her at her best at all today, had he? First the window, then her mom, and then she accused him of hitting her, not to mention leaving the pie on. Hopefully it would be decent anyway but felt she owed him more than a pie now. He pulled into her driveway instead of his.

"Still got those screwdrivers?" he asked.

Oh, yeah. That was why he came over in the first place, and he was still unpacking. She'd taken most of his evening with her crisis. "Sure do, come on in." She took a deep breath and tried to calm herself.

"Hang on," she said, as she rushed to the kitchen to check her pie. Still barely warm and looking perfect. She cut two big slices, topped them with a scoop of ice cream and carried them back into the living room.

"Here you are, a small thank you." She handed him his plate and motioned to the couch.

"This looks worth an extra ten minutes," he said, accepting it from her. Well, she knew where she stood. Second in line to apple pie, apparently. They ate in silence for a few minutes and she noticed he ate quickly and appreciatively. Poor guy probably hadn't had any supper, she realized.

"Thank you for taking me," she blurted out, licking a bit of gooey apple from her spoon. Yum. "I'm not sure I could have managed."

"If you had to, you could have," he said calmly.

"Probably true," Maggie admitted. "But I wouldn't have thought to turn the oven off."

“That would have been a waste,” he said. “If I can borrow those screwdrivers, I’ll leave you alone.”

She grabbed his plate and put them both in the sink, then took the case of screwdrivers into the living room where he stood by the door. “I’ll return them soon,” he said, then, “Call me if you need me, Maggie.”

“I will, thank you, Sebastian.” She shut and locked the door behind him, watching his long, lean body walk down the sidewalk.

Tonight, could have been a disaster. But then, along came Sebastian Jones and it wasn’t.