



**I Love  
My Life**

**AJ Adaire**

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# **I Love My Life**

**By**

**AJ Adaire**

  
*Desert Palm Press*

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## **Blurb**

Stephanie Kincaid and her friends, Tina and Terry, enjoy sailing Maine's waters. They meet Chris Baxter in a navigation refresher class and quickly become friends.

Chris, in need of a place to stay, soon moves in with Stef and friendship gradually grows into romance.

Unexpected news about her sister interrupts their sailing vacation along the coast and forces Chris to return and face her past, while Stef remains onboard to help her friends sail back to their home port.

What surprises will Chris learn from her ex, her sister, and her family, and how will they change her life?

## **Dedication**

Thank you to my partner who allows me to be selfish and take time from us, so I can write and do all the things associated with that. In addition to being my love, she is my best friend, my partner in crime, my biggest supporter, and most constructive critic.

Thanks to my friend BJ. She read the first half of this book about ten times. I hope I have it right at last. I've learned so much from your homework, (grin).

Hey Pat, I finally finished it! Thanks for the encouragement.

To my beta readers, editor, publisher, and friends, thank you for your ongoing support. Working with you on these books keeps it fun.

The final thank you goes to my readers. I appreciate your reviews, letters of support, and interest in my books.

Love me without fear  
Trust me without questioning  
Need me without demanding  
Want me without restrictions  
Accept me without change  
Desire me without inhibitions  
For a love so free...  
Will never fly away.

[Dick Sutphen](#)

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## Chapter One — I Have A New Project For Us

"I HAVE A NEW project for us. I think in light of the trip we'll be taking in the new boat, end of next summer, we ought to take a couple of courses at the sailing academy." Terry Taft, a former police officer turned lawyer, stood tall and toned, exuding an air of authority. "I'm enrolling in a navigation class at the sailing school. I want to refresh my skills." I think it would be fun if we all did it together."

Terry took a seat at the table, looked her standing partner, Tina, in the eyes, and handed one of the brochures to her. She slid the other over to her friend Stephanie.

Tina Terlecki was the direct opposite of her partner. Round where Terry was angular, she barely came up to Terry's nipples when they stood next to each other. Notoriously organized, Tina reached for her notepad and package of stick-on tabs. "Why on earth do you need a class? You've been sailing since you were in diapers."

Terry leaned back in her chair and met her partner's challenge. "We're getting the new boat and will be sailing her back here. Besides, things change and I would feel more comfortable after brushing up on some of the newer technology. I'm sure there's an app."

Stephanie chuckled and refrained from joining the exchange, knowing they would work it out.

Tina studied the brochure, making notes in the margins and sticking the colored dots here and there. "This course looks good, although not only for the purpose of sailing the new boat home. If we're planning to partially retire in a few years and want to start taking some longer cruises on our boat, we could all use a refresher."

"I'm in!" Stephanie Kincaid closed the brochure and folded her hands on top.

"Which class? When does it start?" Tina asked, as she scanned the brochure she was holding.

"Here." Terry pointed to the class she was interested in. "This one."

Tina immediately slapped a bright green tab next to the course that Terry indicated.

Terry smiled and reached for her partner's hand. "I love you."

"I know you do. Despite myself." Tina's quick laugh prompted the others to join her. Over their years as friends, the three women had taken several sailing courses together.

Terry folded up her brochure and laid it on the table. "I don't want to force you to take the same one. It might be more functional if we split up, but lots less fun."

"I think I should take navigation too," said Tina. "What if something happens to you while we're out sailing? I'd need to know how to get us into port, so we could get help." Tina was sometimes a white-knuckle sailor. Although she enjoyed the activity, she feared making a mistake, especially if the weather was rough. Terry's confident manner had a way of calming Tina much as Dramamine might.

"My navigation skills could use polishing," Stef admitted. "What the hell...let's all do the same course."

With plans confirmed, the three women lapsed into casual conversation.

"Have you decided when you'll sell the T<sup>2</sup> yet?" Stef asked. "I'm really going to miss her."

Tina and Terry owned a thirty-foot sailboat that was suitable for blue water sailing, although they mostly used it for day sailing.

"No, not yet. I know you'll miss her. I told you we'd make you a great deal on her." Terry gave her friend a kind smile. "As soon as I know the date the new one will be delivered, we'll be making a decision. We won't hear anything until maybe early summer."

Tina looked across the table at Stef. "I'll miss her too. The new one is so big. I'm used to handling this one."

Terry pursed her lips. "Tina, we've been through this and agreed to get her. The new boat is bigger and more beautifully appointed. Besides, she's easy to sail, and offers all the comfort and space we need below deck. Stef will have her own cabin and won't have to bunk in the galley berth anymore."

"I know. She's beautiful and I'm happy we're getting her."

"Me too. She's a work of art and will be better for longer sails." Terry winked at Tina. "Besides, she's so well equipped that she can be sailed by one person."

"Not this one person," Tina said in a pout that caused Stef and Terry to laugh.

"You'll be sailing her like Popeye the Sailor in no time, Tina, and you know it." Stef said teasing her friend. "I don't know of more capable women than you and Terry, either as lawyers or sailors. You both can do anything you put your minds to."

Tina took the ribbing in stride. "You know I just like to hear you say that." She pointed at Stef. "Okay, hand me the phone and I'll sign us up for the class."

## Chapter Two — Chris

CHRIS LAY ON HER back, observing the spider tidying up her web located in the corner above the bed. The spider had been her only companion for the nearly five weeks of her self-imposed exile, so she valued the companionship at this point. *God! I must be losing my mind.* Chris sighed, rolled over, and adjusted the pillow that had absorbed way too many tears shed for Jenna. *How the hell did I end up here in a cabin on the coast of Maine?*

Rolling to a standing position, she walked the twenty feet to the front porch, a path she'd often traveled during her stay in the tiny cabin. She glanced around the great room. That's certainly an ostentatious misnomer for a space this size. *Beggars can't be choosers though, so I should be grateful to Betsy that I had this place to run to.*

The black, thumb-press and lever style lock on the cabin door clicked as it snapped open, and Chris stepped outside to inhale the fresh scent of evergreens and water. Her footsteps sounded on the worn wooden decking as she crossed to the railing, where she leaned on the weathered top board and took in the scene below. The generous deck and the view of the ocean below more than compensated for the tiny living space inside. Spring would be along shortly, and she was glad for the warmth of the sun as she stood there. She sat down on the porch swing, closed her eyes, and pushed against the rough deck with her boot. The rhythmic creaking of the swing lulled Chris into unguarded reflection, allowing her mind to wander back to the beginning of her relationship with Jenna, nearly twenty years ago, when they were both in college.

Fresh from her shower, Jenna emerged from the bathroom. "Oh, you're back. How was class?" Jenna asked casually, not surprised to see Chris sitting on her own college-supplied single bed.

*How can she be so nonchalant? You'd think she was dressed in a three-piece business suit instead of only her smile.* Chris, not knowing exactly where to look, tried looking everywhere but at the parts of Jenna's body that she longed to touch. That pretty much started with her soft brown hair and traveled the length of her gorgeous body straight down to the tips of her toes. The heat between Chris' legs was beginning to demand her attention. What she wanted to touch most, after Jenna's body of course, was a specific part of her own body that was currently throbbing with need.

Jenna casually walked over to the dresser, mere feet away from Chris due to the limited size of their shared room, and pulled out an oversized tee shirt. Instead of putting it on, she sat down on her bed, across the small room from Chris. Jenna had a fantastic body, and she knew it—full breasts, flat stomach and a neatly trimmed strip of light brown hair where her legs met her torso.

Chris wiped her palm across the back of her neck and felt a trickle of sweat course its way down her back. *So put the damned shirt on already. I can't stand too much more of this.* From across the room, Chris could smell the fresh aroma of the almond scented soap on Jenna's still damp and glowing skin. Chris dragged her eyes from Jenna's ample breasts, trying to focus her attention elsewhere. She couldn't meet Jenna's direct gaze, so she focused on her lips instead.

Jenna's tongue darted out and slowly circled her mouth, leaving it glistening and moist.

*Well that didn't work. All I can imagine is touching them with my finger, tracing the outline of their fullness. I know they'd feel soft against my skin.* Chris reluctantly dragged her attention away from the lips she wanted very badly to kiss and raised them to meet Jenna's beautiful brown eyes. They reminded her of molten chocolate, generously sprinkled with flecks of gold.

“No class?” Jenna asked again, an innocent appearing smile curling her lips. Jenna stood up and walked across the room. She picked up some pictures from the desk on her way, before she settled on the bed, next to Chris. “Look, these just came, the pictures of us at the lake last week.” Jenna reached across her body and with her left hand she passed the pictures to Chris. As she did so, she casually brushed her right breast across the exposed skin of Chris’ upper arm.

Chris catapulted off the bed, grabbed the tee shirt Jenna had left on her bed, and tossed it into Jenna’s lap. “Put this on,” she demanded. “You can’t keep parading around here naked all the time.”

Jenna stood up and, with two steps, closed the gap between them in the small room. “Why not?” She licked her lips, slowly following the path with her tongue that Chris had imagined tracing with her finger, barely a minute before.

Chris’ eyes again followed the progression of Jenna’s tongue as it circled those soft red lips. Almost as if she had lost control of her own body, she found herself drawn there. Slowly, she moved to cover the wet surface of Jenna’s mouth with her own. The kiss ignited a passion that had been brewing after weeks of Jenna’s sweet torture. Jenna’s arms came up to circle Chris’ neck and pull the compliant woman against her naked body.

Chris’ hands, having a mind of their own, slid up Jenna’s back. Her skin felt like satin, and Chris couldn’t stop stroking it. Jenna allowed her to freely explore the contours of her back until Chris’ hands finally came to rest on Jenna’s waist. Stepping back, she placed her hands on top of Chris’ to guide them to her breasts.

Chris sighed and melted against her, submitting to her desire. Jenna made quick work of stripping off Chris’ clothes so they could finally come together, skin to skin. Jenna’s hands and mouth were everywhere, sliding, licking, gently biting, and sucking every sensitive spot on Chris’ body. The scent of their mutual arousal filled the tiny room. Jenna slid her hand between Chris’ legs and barely touched her slick opening. Chris came calling Jenna’s name.

Sprawled in the bed, as she slowly regained her breath, Chris’ brow furrowed. “Jenna? Do you think we’ll end up together, or are we just having a thing?”

“A thing?” Jenna rolled to face Chris. “I don’t know. We seem to get along, I surely like you, and I’ve been lusting after you most of the semester. There’s some time yet to decide where this will go. Why?”

“I was wondering. I mean...you’re so much more worldly and adventurous than me. Maybe I’ll bore you.”

“I think you keep me centered and not running off in all directions. How many times have you saved me from doing something that would put me in danger or get me suspended?” Jenna smiled. “Besides, don’t people always say that opposites attract?”

“I guess. I hope. I want to be with you, you know, forever.”

“Forever starts now.” Jenna adjusted her position so their bodies were touching full length. “I want you so much. You have a will of iron. I’ve been wanting you, torturing you every day for weeks, and until today, you never did anything but look. Touch me. I’m so hot for you.”

Chris didn’t respond. Jenna pulled her head back and looked into Chris’ eyes. “What’s the matter?”

Chris’ face was bright red, but not from passion as much as from embarrassment. “I don’t...”

“You don’t what?” Jenna demanded. “I don’t believe you don’t want me.”

“No, it’s not that.” Chris swallowed. “It’s just...well...I don’t know what to do.”

“My God,” Jenna said with amazement. “You’re a virgin?” She smiled and dipped her head to pull Chris’ breast into her mouth, teasing the nipple to immediate erection, and drawing a murmur of pleasure from Chris’ lips. “This is going to be even more fun than I thought.”

Chris shook herself from her memories. She’d relived those moments in her mind many times and couldn’t seem to go beyond, still unwilling to recall the rest. “Enough of this!” she spat out. “Enough

self-pity.” Heaving a sigh, she nodded. *It’s time. Time to be doing something besides dwelling on the betrayal. Time to pick myself up and think of other things. Time to move forward.*

Turning away from the peaceful view, Chris got into her car and made the fifty-minute trip down narrow, winding roads to town. The two rear windows, cracked two inches each, allowed the fresh aroma of the evergreen trees to circulate throughout the car. Chris inhaled deeply, filling her lungs with the fresh smelling air.

Chris turned the corner, stopping at the post office where she rented a PO Box, and mailed the letter to Jenna. It was short and sweet. *‘I’m settled and will be staying in Maine for an unknown amount of time. I won’t be coming back, so do what you will with everything. I trust you’ll be fair. You owe me that much. Anything personal, please put into storage for me and send me the address, key, and the bill.’* She added her post office box address to the envelope and signed the letter simply with a C. She’d considered writing to her sister, Mo, but figured that Jenna would share the information with her.

Chris navigated her car into a parking spot and stuck a quarter in the meter as her phone rang. Pulling it from her pocket, she glanced at the caller ID. *Nope...still not interested in talking to you.* She stuck the phone in her pocket and headed for the coffee shop. Over the past month, Jenna and Mo had each tried repeatedly to reach her on her cell phone. Her response had always been the same, to ignore the call. She did keep her promise to stay in touch with her friend and boss, Betsy, owner of the cabin. The previous day, she’d made the trip to town to visit the local florist, to send Betsy a huge thank you bouquet for her friendship and the use of the cabin. Afterward, she’d interviewed and been hired as an independent contractor for a physical therapy job.

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Thus began her life in Maine. Work, eat, sleep, and then get up and do it again. Weekends were the worst. Time weighed on her hands. On one such Saturday, she made the now familiar trip to town. She inhaled the aroma as she entered her favorite coffee shop. Her preference was actually tea; however, the cappuccino in the cute little establishment was superior. “Hi Gus. I’ll have my regular...a paper and a cappuccino.”

“Sure thing, Chris.” He handed her the change from a twenty. She made a generous deposit in the tip jar and took a seat at a booth in the corner. Sipping the frothy brew as she read the paper, she muttered to herself. “Ah ha!” She tapped her finger on the advertisement that caught her attention...a navigation course offered by the local marina. *Yes, that’ll do nicely.*

## Chapter Three — She Looks Like What's Her Name...

STEF WAS NEARLY JUMPING up and down as they arrived for class a couple of weeks later. "This is such fun. I'm so excited to be doing something fun related to sailing, together with you guys, I can hardly stand it."

Terry put her arm around Stef and hugged her to her side. "We feel exactly the same way." The huge grin on her face attested to the truth of her words. The class must have equally excited others, because when they arrived most of the seats were already filled. Tina and Terry found a table with seats next to each other. Stef sat next to a sportily dressed woman about her own age. Light streaks, bleached by the sun, highlighted the woman's natural honey-blond hair, giving it a frosted look. Stef judged that she was probably two or two and a half inches taller than her own height of five-three. She was reading something from the paper in front of her. Stef resisted her odd urge to reach over and brush aside the hair hanging in front of the woman's eyes. As Stef pulled out the chair and sat down, the woman looked up. *Pretty. Looks a bit like that actress—what's her name? The one with three names...Meredith something or other.* The woman's face was tanned, her body toned, and her smile, that included double dimples deep enough to swim in, was welcoming. She smelled fresh, of salt and sea breezes. Stef found it difficult to turn her glance away.

"Hi. I'm Christina Baxter." Her dimples deepened. "My friends call me Chris."

Stef smiled at the friendly woman. *Hmmm...lucky me.* "I'm Stephanie, or Stef. I'm here with my friends, Tina and Terry." She gestured toward her friends a few seats away.

That was all the time they had to chat. The instructor entered and wasted no time in getting the class organized. "I'm Rick. I'll be your instructor for this class. Raise your hand, with one finger up, if you've never had a class in navigation before. For those of you with some classwork or other experience, please raise two fingers. Three fingers for those of you who are here just for a review and to sharpen existing skills." It was obvious from the responses that the people attending the class were at very different levels. The instructor paired people based on their experience. Chris and Stef both raised two fingers, so they remained together, as did Terry and Tina.

Rick moved people around based upon their level of expertise. "Okay folks. Settle down. Let's start with chapter one, shall we?" Beginning with the basics, the instructor worked quickly through the early chapters of the book summarizing the content for the students. He instructed them to raise their hand when he touched on something they needed for him to explain. About one-third of the class began to have questions when they started chapter four. At the end of every chapter, there was a practical problem that each team had to complete. Rick circulated among the members of the class, offering suggestions to the teams. Everyone completed the exercise successfully.

"Okay group," Rick said, "time for lunch. Let's meet back here in an hour and fifteen minutes, and we'll push on."

Stef's mind was wandering during the last few minutes of class before lunch. She and Chris had been grouped with Tina and Terry for the discussion activity. *Should I ask Chris to join our group for lunch? After all, it's the friendly thing to do.*

Terry spoke up first. "Want to come with us, Chris? I know a small sandwich shop, not too far away from here, that shouldn't be too crowded."

Terry drove and they settled around a corner table. Once they'd ordered, the conversation naturally turned to boats.

"So, Chris," Tina asked, "do you have a boat, or are you taking the class just for fun?"

"I don't have one right now. I lost it in the settlement when my relationship ended. What about you, Tina? What do you have?"

Everyone spoke at once expressing sympathy for her loss of both the relationship and the boat before Tina responded to Chris' question. "Right now we have a thirty foot sailboat. She's made of fiberglass, built in 1970, in Louisiana. A small company manufactured the boats and each was handcrafted, so there weren't too many of them made. I bought mine from a couple in New Jersey when they got divorced. It's a beautiful, quick boat...sleeps five comfortably, or six really close friends. She was essentially bare bones when we got her, but we've spruced her up so that she's comfortable now and really easy to sail."

Terry picked up where Tina left off. "We just ordered a bigger boat that we plan to pick up this coming summer, up north of here. She's beautiful, has a center cockpit and a fore and aft cabin, two heads, and all the electronic navigation gear, and all the bells and whistles known to man, to make her easy to sail. We get a three-day training on board, before we sail her home. She's really laid out for cruising. We're thinking of downsizing our house and getting a condo, and then spending time split between land and shore. Our plan is to cut back our workload five or six years from now, so we'll be able to take some longer cruises locally. If I get my way, once we retire fully, I'd like to spend a couple of years cruising full time. I'm not sure I'll be able to convince Tina." Terry looked at her partner, waiting to hear whether she agreed that was a great idea.

Tina smiled back. "We'll see. Maybe you'll make it worth my while," she said with a wink.

Terry wiggled her eyebrows in response eliciting a chuckle from everyone.

"What about you, Stef? Do you have a boat?" Chris asked.

"Just theirs," Stef laughed pointing at her friends. "Sadly, they plan to sell it on me. I can manage this one on my own if I have to. Despite all the fancy rigging, I don't think I'll be able to sail the other one solo."

Chris grinned. "Here's the perfect solution. Maybe you should consider buying their boat from them, if they're putting it up for sale."

"I'd love to, but owning a boat as a single person can be expensive and, anyway, I mostly sail with them," she said, nodding in Terry and Tina's direction. "I'm still considering it. I haven't decided to take the plunge yet."

The waitress interrupted the conversation to deliver their order. Over the meal, they talked about the class and the instructor's teaching method.

Terry sprinkled salt on her French fries. "Honestly, I don't know what else he could do with the diverse levels he's dealing with. Everyone has different degrees of knowledge and experience. I'm just as happy reviewing some of the basic concepts first. That way, when we get to the more complex problems, we'll all be on the same page. I don't feel like he's wasting my time. He gives the more advanced in the class little hints about things that maintain their interest. Personally, I like him."

"I agree, Terry," said Stef. The other two women nodded their agreement.

Tina asked, "Chris, you mentioned you lost your boat when your relationship ended. Do you want another?"

Chris laughed. "Boat or relationship?"

"I was asking about the boat, but feel free to answer about either."

Chris took a second to consider her response. "I'd like another boat, but I'm not sure where I'll settle yet. So, I might wait until I figure out what I want to do with the rest of my life."

Stef's alarm bells were going off. *Oh no, another woman without a job...run don't walk.*

Terry noticed Stef's change in demeanor. Sensing Stef's discomfort, Terry asked Chris, "What type of work do you do?"

"I'm a physical therapist. Currently, I'm working on contract, for an hourly rate. I can get work almost anywhere right now. There seems to be a shortage of qualified people in my field. It's wonderful to be in demand." Chris grinned, "What about all of you? What do you do?"

Tina swiveled her thumb between herself and Terry. "Lawyers...I know, probably not your favorite profession if you've just ended a relationship." She pointed her index finger at Stef. "Financial planner."

"No, I have no animosity for members of your profession. My ex and I didn't fight over our possessions. In our case, I simply got a check in the mail. Everything is gone. I guess it was easier that way than struggling over which of us got our favorite things. This way we both lost." Chris shrugged her shoulders and looked down briefly before glancing up at Stef. "I could use some financial advice. I've got some cash I need to invest. Maybe we can talk? Do you have a card?"

Stef reached into her pocket for her wallet and produced her business card. She flipped it over and wrote her cell number on the back. "Call me on my cell. We can do a free preliminary consultation to see if I can provide the services you need."

Chris held her hand out in the direction of Tina and Terry. "Might as well give me yours too. I need a new will. This is great, one stop shopping." She chuckled at her own joke. "How did all of you meet?"

Stef, interest renewed and eyes twinkling said, "They put an advertisement in the local gay newspaper, and I answered it."

Chris looked at first confused and then embarrassed. "Oh. Oh, I see."

The trio laughed and Tina took charge of the explanation. "Okay you two...stop. No Chris, not that kind of ad. We were offering a free seminar on wills and trusts for the LGBT community."

Stef picked up the story. "The venue was at a local gay bar and restaurant known for its beautiful ambiance and delicious food. Not wanting to go alone, I called a friend, Jean, and invited her to attend the seminar. I'd have to say it was one of the luckiest days of my life."

While the others listened, Stef shared with Chris the gist of how they'd all met at the seminar and forged a group to help gay and lesbian individuals and couples.

"We were lucky," Terry said. "That initial meeting not only began a great working relationship for us, doing joint seminars, it was the beginning of our friendship as well. Business meetings ended up extending into dinners and drinks after, and the friendship grew. Now we're all best friends."

"They are more than that really—they're family to me," Stef said.

Tina and Terry nodded. Tina looked down to check her watch. "I hate to break up the party. We'd better head back, though. Don't want to be late for class."

The rest of the afternoon in class sped by. The instructor concluded the afternoon session with an assignment to read several chapters. He provided a handout to the class and instructed them to work with their partners to complete the assignments. "I'll see you back here next week."

Tina looked over the assignment and rolled her eyes. "This seems complicated. Maybe all four of us should get together and work on these problems as a group. We can host at our house."

Everyone agreed, finalized the arrangements, and headed for their cars.



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