

**WHERE ZOMBIES WALK**

[Book 1 of Kendra's Journey]

by

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Note: This eBook has a sneak peek of another great book written by Eileen Sheehan at the end.

**Notice\*\*** Portions of this story may prove too graphic, sexually explicit, or violent for sensitive readers. This novel is intended for mature readers.

This book is dedicated to paranormal fans around the world who enjoy thrills with some romance tossed in the mix.

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## Prologue

It's the aftermath of an apocalypse of life on earth as we know it. The planet has suffered a devastating alteration to its surface composition. Although the earth has been resilient in the face of catastrophe over the millenniums and has already begun to rejuvenate in some way or another, there is speculation that it might never completely recover from the nuclear war that raged as a last resort for the powers that be to hang onto the control of the planet and not lose it to the few humans who were assisting with the invasion of a dominant alien race. There are only a select few areas that weren't affected. These areas were quickly seized by the invading aliens and the humans who'd worked with them during the takeover for habitation, leaving the rest of mankind to struggle for survival in a damaged world.

With many of the natural resources impaired, most of the conveniences that society enjoyed have been lost or deliberately removed by the new world order. The aliens brought in their own technology, but it isn't made available to the humans who they strive to keep suppressed. Transportation for man consists of walking or riding a domestic beast that he might be lucky enough to own and has the ability to maintain.

Electricity is solar generated.

Communication is limited to solar operated cell phones for the select few who the aliens find useful and who have a skill to provide as a means to purchase them. Their use is monitored by the reigning government. There is no such thing as private communication.

If you are lucky enough to own a television or a radio, the world information and entertainment is censored by the ruling regime.

Most of the human population that manages to survive untainted leads an isolated life. Their only contact with the regime is an occasional, undesired, visit by the cyborgs who patrol the area to enforce the new laws.

Drones routinely scan the earth's surface by air, searching for animals and humans who have had the misfortune of having their genetics forever altered by nuclear contamination. The drones are programmed to track and report to the Cyborgs the whereabouts of all creatures with altered genetics in an effort to eliminate the possibility of the earth's population being permanently changed through breeding or infection.

It was never the alien's intention to destroy earth's inhabitants, just dominate them and maintain them as a food and labor source. The leaders are eager to bring back the purity of both man and beast.

There exists a secret society amongst the wealthy who were able to foresee the loss of the planet to these cannibalistic aliens. They spread the word amongst the rest of their kind and the wealthier humans who weren't involved in conquering and running earth alongside the aliens escaped to inner earth. The cost of such a venture is considerable, leaving it an option for the wealthy, only. The remaining humans are left to struggle for survival under the thumb of an oligarchy regime.

It was never the intention of the aliens to completely destroy the human race since it is coveted for multiple purposes that range from slave labor to food sources. Furious over the unnecessary nuclear damage that was done to the planet and its

inhabitants, they set an example as to what would happen to anyone who considered such an act again by capturing those who were involved in the detonation of the nuclear warfare that caused so much destruction and damage by publicly executing them in an extremely primitive manner.

With mankind frightened and scattered over an unfamiliar and often non-supporting terrain, the regime does its best to do an inventory of who is left and untainted by radiation or disease and all births are recorded.

In an effort to assume control of the quality of the regenerating population, the regime has passed a law. Those born of perfect genetics are to be located and carefully monitored. All males and females, aged fourteen and older, are to be sought out and taken from their homes to a breeding facility. There, they will be analyzed and paired with a mate whose combined genetics promise to produce the best offspring. Those who are found damaged or mutated are to be immediately disposed of to prevent polluting the future human race.

Humans living in isolated areas have yet to learn of the new breeding law due to lack of communication with the rest of the world. With the exception of an occasional drone passing overhead, they aren't as closely monitored as those who live near the more populated and habitable areas since the regime assumes that no one of notable and desirable genetics would remain in such an uninhabitable land.

To complicate matters. Unbeknownst to the world leaders who set the nuclear warfare upon the planet, scientist involved in germ warfare had released a virus in concentrated enemy territory. It was the intention of the powers that be to subdue the enemy with a disease that ate at their brain to the point they were



literally walking corpses and then destroy the virus so that it didn't spread. Unfortunately, they were taken by surprise when nuclear devastation simultaneously consumed the planet and the scientists were either killed, or scattered for survival and the records containing the formula for the cure were lost.

Now, along with having to hide their existence from the new world regime while struggling to survive in a world that is barely equipped to support them, the people of earth who have managed to go undetected by the ever present drones and cyborgs must also protect themselves for becoming a zombie or being eaten by the invading aliens who considered human meat a delicacy.

The sun beat down on the scorched and barren land with such intensity that its rays glistened off the tiny particles of soil that was so dark that it almost looked black. Thick heat waves hovered in between Kendra and her target, making it difficult to focus for a clear shot. She knelt on one knee in hopes that the mountain's shadow would dull the sun's rays enough to improve her vision. She silently cursed as her stomach announced its need for sustenance with a loud rumble that softly echoed off the boulders on either side of her. Holding her breath, she hoped that it wasn't loud enough to alert the big cat of her presence as it languidly stretched its long body across the surface of a flat boulder while it bathed in the sun's intense rays. Beads of sweat trickled down her torso as she slowly pulled the bow string and released the arrow. The cat's wail of surprise echoed off the boulders that lined the barren valley as the arrow pierced its heart. Kendra wasted no time rushing to the oversized feline's side. She reached it just as the wail was replaced by a thick, reverent silence that hung heavy around the beautiful beast.

She closely inspected her kill. If it was too genetically altered, the meat would be dangerous to ingest. To her surprise and delight, this cat looked to be in a healthy and unaltered state. There would be no need to toss the mutated bits of its body away. The entire body was consumable.

Her hands trembled with both excitement and fear as she gutted the rare find. When she was finished, she rinsed the residue of blood and guts from her hands as best as she could with water from her canteen and then draped the heavy beast over

her shoulders. She didn't know which was the more difficult part of hunting; the search for the animal or the task of lugging it home.

It was illegal to kill any animal that was in the original, pre-nuclear genetic state without a permit that was granted only for a justifiable cause. Needless to say, she had no permit.

Not only was there no permit office nearby, but, although Kendra considered the hungry bellies at home a justifiable cause, she knew that the regime would not. If she was caught, it could mean imprisonment, servitude, or worse.

She searched the skies for signs of a drone while she crouched low and made her way back to camp. She wore dark clothes that blended with the landscape fairly well, but her burden's rich, buttery coloring was in stark contrast to the world around her. The more space she put between her and the kill spot and the closer she got to her home that was located on a hillside with trees to help camouflage her, the calmer she grew.

She'd made certain to mutilate the cat's face just enough to make it impossible to tell if it was an original or a mutant, should she come upon someone with curious eyes.

It was rare to encounter another person in those parts. She couldn't remember the last time that it happened. So, it wasn't running into someone while traveling home that really concerned her. It was the response to her kill once she got home. Her aunt Olga had done her best to keep their existence hidden from the authorities. She lived in perpetual fear and was a stickler for keeping a low profile. If she knew that Kendra had killed an original mountain lion and brought it home for her to cook, she would have surely had an attack of apoplexy.

Kendra did her best to be patient and understanding of her aunt's fears and phobias. She had no recollection of the traumatic event that took her parents from her and left her in the care of her aunt while still a toddler, but Olga remembered it well.

The authorities had caught wind of the fact that Kendra's mother and father had captured a few wild animals and were raising them as livestock. Although, it wasn't illegal to do this, it was the law that they report all livestock and crops to the regime and give one tenth of all yield to it. Kendra's clan was large with many hungry mouths to feed. Therefore, her father disobeyed the law and didn't register their entire yield with them.

To complicate matters, the adults in the clan were actively worshipping the gods and goddesses in hopes of the return of a better life. Her father and mother were the high priest and priestess. Since the regime demanded ultimate reverence, worship of any gods was considered a crime so severe that its punishment was death.

When they learned of her father's deceit, the regime sent Cyborg troops to seize their livestock and confiscate their yielded crops. The crops that weren't yet harvested were set ablaze. As were their modest homes.

The raid upon their homestead revealed their worship habits and Kendra's father and mother were taken to be put to death. It was unknown to her whether they were used as food or simply executed. She hadn't bothered to find out. She didn't want to know.

Her sister and brother, along with her aunts, uncles, and cousins, were seized for breeding and servitude to the aliens.

Since Felix, Rupert, and Kendra were mere babes in arms and were too young to be of use in servitude for quite some time

and there were no instructions given to the Cyborg troops -who lacked the capacity to think on their own- about what to do with babies, they were simply left to perish.

Fortunately, Olga was not at home when this all came down. She had learned of a berry patch at the foothills of the mountain and was off collecting what she could when the raid took place. It was with a saddened heart that she returned to find three toddlers sitting amongst the smoldering remains of their homestead.

After sitting beneath the shade of one of the few trees that managed to somehow flourish on their cursed land to absorb and come to grips with what happened, she gathered the three abandoned infants and made for the hills to think on what to do.

After praying for guidance to the gods, she let the winds lead her east until she came upon a small, hidden valley that had managed to regain enough life to be habitable. When she discovered the stream of fresh water running through it, she quickly turned a small cave into a suitable shelter from the harsh elements.

After a few days of foraging for edible wild plants, she felt that the destroyed crops of her homestead would have cooled down enough to allow her access. She considered tying the toddlers in the cave until she returned, but the fear of a wild beast finding them in her absence forced her to build a traverse and drag them back to the homestead with her. It proved a wise decision, since -after she turned it into a fun game- they helped collect all of the singed canned goods that they could find amongst the rubble and pulled a good deal of the plants that survived the fire from the loose soil so that their roots could be replanted in their new home.

The troops had missed a few eggs that weren't easily visible, so Olga quickly cooked them up and fed the children. They'd taken most of the day to accomplish their mission. Since she had no desire to travel through the night with three babies in tow, she picked through the rubble until she found some materials to make a small shelter for them. It was sooty, but it did the trick. By the morning, they were smudged and in need of a bath, but they were rested with satisfied bellies and a hope for the future.

Olga not only managed to create a garden for them with the plant roots that they'd pulled from the ground, but she'd successfully created a home for them to live in. It was in this home that Kendra grew into a strong, self-sufficient young woman. In fact, she proved to be far better at caring for their needs than did Felix or Rupert. Especially Rupert, who tended to be lazy and unreliable.

Olga was sitting on the stump that acted as a stool near the fire when Kendra entered their cave.

"I hung my kill up on the hook," she said as she made her way to the washing barrel and immersed her arms up to her elbows in the water.

"So, the gods were with you today," Olga said.

"Thanks be to Diana. We will eat well for a while," Kendra said as she pulled a coarse rag from the drying rack to dry her arms and hands with.

"Did you check it to make sure it was safe to eat?" Olga asked.

Kendra grew impatient. "You ask me that every time I hunt."

"It only takes one slip up and your life is changed forever," Olga replied.

Kendra pouted. "I don't see why we can't get a few domestics to raise. It would be nice not to have to hunt and hope that your kill is edible. The eggs from the few chickens we keep cooped up aren't enough to sustain us and hunting is getting scarcer by the day."

"Keeping the chickens is risky enough. I've told you to the point that I'm tired of telling you that larger animals would be detected by the drones," Olga grumbled. "We live in this damnable cave to keep from being noticed." She shrugged. "Is it really that difficult for you?"

"It would be nice if I got a little help from the men," Kendra said. "They're quick to fill their bellies but slow to join me on the hunt."

"Felix's club foot prevents him from keeping up with you," Olga mused. "He does his share of gardening. That's sufficient."

"And Rupert?" Kendra asked with a raised brow.

Olga slowly shook her head. "He's just damned lazy. Although, he's good for a repair of electronics whenever we manage to scavenge something up."

"Electronics are worthless if you don't have sufficient solar power," Kendra snapped.

Olga struggled to stand. "I suppose I can rustle up enough life into these bones to go out in your stead now and then."

Kendra scowled. "You'll do no such thing. What are you cooking in that pot?"

"Turnip and carrot soup," Olga said with a smile. "I'll add a nice bone to it now."

"With some meat, please," Kendra said as she headed out to skin the cat. "I'll get you a bone with some meat on it. Then, I'll cut the rest to dry out and store."

“I got the cooler working,” Olga said with pride.

Kendra stopped at the opening and looked at the battered and rusty refrigerator. “You’ve been struggling with that thing since you dragged it home last year. There’s not enough power to keep it going. It spoils more than it preserves. I don’t dare trust it with this meat. I say we dehydrate it.”

“It uses a lot of power. We need better solar panels,” Olga said with a sigh. “I’m going to take Rupert and Felix to scavenge for some in a few days.”

“Good luck with that,” Kendra said as she exited the cave with her knife in hand.



Where there was one mountain lion, there was generally a mate. This was her thinking as Kendra headed back out the following day with her bow slung over her shoulder. She wanted to take advantage of the possibility of the cat's mate still being in the area. It wasn't easy to come across big game that had escaped genetic mutation enough to be edible; never mind an original. Most of what she brought home was of the aviary family. Since her kill was a genetic original, she was fairly certain that its mate would be too. She just couldn't pass up the chance to build their stores of protein with quality meat.

She was so lost in thought about the soups and stews that her aunt would produce with the abundance of meat that she planned on supplying with this second kill that, when she came to the kill spot from the day before, she was surprised to have arrived so soon.

She heaved a sigh of disappointment when she spotted the animal's entrails in the place that she'd tossed them after her kill on the day before. Had they been eaten, she'd know that there was more hunting to be done. This made her even more determined to seek out the big cat's mate.

Shielding her eyes from the sun as it slowly climbed higher into the morning sky, she scanned the ridge of the hillside while deciding which direction to take her search to. Spotting a cluster of boulders that looked like they had a large, open center, she headed toward them.

With her mind firmly entranced in thought of the meals that the future held should she kill a second cat to the extent that

she was salivating, her focus on her footing was lacking. As a result, she slipped on a smooth rock and tumbled to the tier below.

A sharp pain shot through her foot as it lodged in a crevice between two large boulders. She repressed the scream that clambered up her throat. Her gut told her that the big cat's mate was nearby and it wouldn't do to alert it of her presence for several reasons. The main one being that she was in a vulnerable state. Just like the cat was prey for her, she was also prey for the cat. The world was a place for survival of the fittest. Now, more than ever before in history.

Not only did she have to repress the scream that her body longed to emit to help release the stress of the excruciating pain in her foot, but she was battling with an overwhelming panic with every second that passed as she tugged and pulled to free herself. She quickly realized that the weight of her body had shoved her foot deep into the crevice and the shape of her boot prevented her from pulling it out.

After taking a few deep breaths to calm and balance herself, she thought about her situation. Not only had she traveled much further from home than normal, but she'd entered an unfamiliar area. If memory served her correctly, she was on the edge of zombie territory. This area was so severely damaged that the regime had declared it uninhabitable. As a result, they didn't hunt for zombies or mutants there. Because of this, the number of mutated humans running for their lives and hiding in this land that were being infected and becoming zombies was steadily increasing.

Kendra had never encountered a zombie, but her aunt had schooled her on them enough for her to know that they were a

dangerous lot. There were zombies at various levels of deformities to their bodies; depending upon whether they were mutants when they turned or simply unfortunate humans. Since they were considered to be death walking, she had difficulty understanding how or why they would become cannibals. Why would they have a need to eat at all? It was a mystery that no one was able to explain to her. What they were careful to make sure that she understood was the fact that the virus affected their brain and, unless the brain was destroyed, the virus would remain active; no matter what happened to or how much of the body remained. She was literally made to practice shooting her arrow into the head of a dummy to condition her for the act should the need arise.

The land that she was now at the edge of while hunting the big cat's mate- was called *Zombie Land*. Realizing that she not only had to be wary of falling prey to the big cat, but to zombies as well, she put greater effort into freeing her foot. When she was finally able to get her mind to focus on the solution to her situation, she slid her agile and slender fingers into the crevice and loosened the laces of her boot. It took some maneuvering, but she was eventually able to free her foot from its entrapment.

She took a moment to inspect her throbbing appendage. The piercing pain had dulled to an ache and her flesh was discolored, but she was relieved to find that nothing was broken. She nodded her approval while smiling with satisfaction. A dull ache from bruising was something she could deal with on the long journey home. Even so, it would be tough going without proper covering on her foot.

She stretched out on her stomach as she carefully bent and twisted the well-worn leathered boot that was now flexible out of its entrapment. She'd just pulled it free when a low growling

sound echoed off the boulders that surrounded her. Displaying the speed and confidence of an adept hunter, she was on her knees with her bow loaded and ready within seconds. With careful determination, her eyes inspected the rocky ridge for the source of the growl. While she hoped that it belong to the mate of her kill, she'd be grateful for anything at this point.

A ferocious, deep throated feline roar permeated the air as an enormous mountain lion leapt from the boulders above. It looked identical to her kill from the day before. She quickly and precisely shot her arrow into its heart as it soared through the air toward her. Curling her body into a defensive ball, she quickly rolled out of the way in order to avoid being crushed as the heavy cat's bulk thunderously landed on the boulder only inches from her.

Although she'd been hunting since she was a young girl, she'd never been this close to her kill as it fell prey to her arrows. She'd shoot from a distance and the beast would die while she made her way toward it.

She could feel the rock shudder below her feet as the cat's body slammed against it. The low moan that escaped it's lips and the look in the cat's eyes as its life force slipped away was overwhelmingly tragic. An instant regret consumed her; as well as a bout of nausea to the extent that she was forced to allow her stomach to purge.

"Is that your first kill?" came a cheery and young sounding female voice from somewhere in the myriad of boulders. "By the way you took it down, I thought that you were a seasoned hunter, but then you puked. Seasoned hunters don't puke after a kill."

Kendra looked around with surprise as she wiped her mouth with the back of her hand. Her voice carried a threatening tone as she spoke.

“Where are you?”

“I’m here,” echoed the voice through the boulders.

Kendra positioned her body in a defensive stance and readied an arrow in her bow. “Where?”

“I won’t harm you,” the voice said.

“Show yourself,” Kendra demanded while she continued to suspiciously scan the rocks above her for the girl’s location.

“I’ll show myself if you promise not to shoot me,” the girl said with such a musical cadence that it resembled a giggle.

After a considerable silence while she debated on what to do, Kendra lowered her bow and put her hands in the air for emphasis. Her eyes grew wide with disbelief as the petite, slender figure of a beautiful young woman with spiked flaxen hair slowly emerged from the shadows of the rock wall. Her large green eyes drew Kendra to her like bees to honey as they reflected the sunlight in a way that resembled a twinkle. It took a moment for her to regain control over her faculties enough to pull away from their grip and see that the stranger wore a crisp white shirt and jeans of the deepest blue. They looked far too fresh and untainted by such a dust riddled landscape.

“You were there all along?” Kendra mused; more to herself than to the girl. “Your voice sounded like it was coming from high up.”

“It’s the acoustics,” the girl said as she flashed a friendly smile. Her teeth were so white and perfect, Kendra questioned if they were real. “My name is Ari DeMarco. What’s yours?”

“Are you a human or an alien?” Kendra asked with reservation.

“Do I look like an alien?” Ari indignantly asked.

Kendra shrugged. “I’ve never seen one of them.”

“Surely you’ve seen other humans,” Ari continued. When Kendra nodded, she said, “Well?”

“I’m Kendra,” she replied.

Ari cocked her head and scowled. “Is that your family name?”

Kendra shrugged as she carefully pulled her boot onto her tender foot. “It’s my name.”

“No second name?” Ari asked with surprise. “Ari is my name for me and DeMarco is my family name. Have you no family name?”

“I’m sure that I do, but I don’t know it,” Kendra admitted. “It was never told to me.”

“How very odd,” Ari said in a wistful tone. Then with a shake of her head and an even broader smile, she said, “Kendra’s a good name. It’s strong and sturdy, like you.”

Kendra’s attention returned to the cat. She was in the habit of cleaning her kills right away to avoid spoilage from any entrails leakage. “I have to tend to it or the hunt will have been a waste.”

“Do you want my help?” Ari asked as she timidly approached the big cat. Although she’d made the offer, her body language gave Kendra the sense that it was an offer of politeness and not sincerity.

Still wary of her unexpected visitor, Kendra asked, “Do you have a knife?” When Ari shook her head, she continued with, “I can do it, but you’d better stand back to avoid getting anything on

you.” Then, with a tone that was a mixture of suspicion and admiration she added, “Those clothes look fresh and new.”

Ari said nothing in response to the remark about her attire as she stepped back and watched with an expression that was difficult to read while Kendra skillfully gutted the cat and disposed of its entrails.

When Kendra pulled the water canteen from her backpack and rinsed the blood from her hands as best as she could while making sure that she had water to drink on the arduous walk home in intense heat, Ari spoke up. “There’s running water close by. Wouldn’t you rather wash with that? You could fill your canteen as well. The water’s potable.”

Kendra’s eyes shot her a look of both surprise and pleasure as she licked her sun chapped lips. “Where?”

Ari pointed to the ridge above them. “It’s not far. Just over there.”

Kendra took a moment to evaluate the situation. She estimated the cat to weigh about one-hundred pounds. There were a lot of boulders to climb before she reached the ridge that Ari had pointed to. Between her injured foot and the weight of the cat, she wasn’t sure it was such a good idea to tackle the climb; especially since she still had a distance to travel to get home.

There was also the fact that the hike would take her deeper into the dangerous and unfamiliar zombie territory. Even if she was up to braving a trip deeper into dead man’s land, if she left the cat, she could probably make the trip to the fresh water and back without mishap, but she wasn’t about to risk another beast stealing away with her kill in her absence.

She shook her canteen to gauge the amount of water left in it before shaking her head and frowning. “I’d like to, but I have a

long journey back and I've twisted my foot. I can't risk not being able to make it home."

"Is your home far?" Ari asked.

"Far enough with one-hundred pounds of dead weight over my shoulders and a bruised foot," Kendra replied

"Would you like a ride?"

The flaxen haired beauty's tone was such that Kendra couldn't decide whether she was trying to relay friendship or amusement. She looked around for signs of a beast that could be used for transport, but saw nothing. "On what?"

Ari pointed to the ridge. "My ride is just over the ridge. It's ready and waiting."

Kendra scowled with suspicion as she looked at her drab and barren surroundings. "If the water and your ride are both over that ridge, what are you doing here?"

The strange beauty wore a look of contemplation as silence permeated the air between them. "If you don't want a ride to ease your burden or to clean up in some cool, clear water, no one's going to force you."

Kendra looked at the position of the sun. It would be at its hottest soon. She didn't relish hiking on an injured foot through the impending, intense heat that the sun provided through the earth's altered ozone. In a different world, during different times, she might have accepted Ari's offer. Sadly, times were such that even an offer from a friendly looking wisp of a thing like Ari could prove fatal. She just didn't dare accept.

The time for small talk was over.

She bent down and heaved the cat over her shoulders. "It was nice to meet you, but I have to go."



Ari shrugged. Her smooth, porcelain face that was just a shade darker than her hair wrinkled as she folded her arms across her chest and scowled her displeasure. "Suit yourself."

Kendra nodded and carefully picked her way down the ridge with her burden snug about her shoulders. She could feel Ari's mesmerizing green eyes boring into her back, but she didn't turn and look. There was something very strange about that girl and it wasn't just the fact that her clothes were far too fresh and new and her teeth were remarkably unmarred and perfect for someone struggling for survival. Was she struggling for survival? That was the million dollar question. What was she doing so far away from civilization? Surely she wasn't pleasure riding; especially on land where she risked running into a zombie.

Kendra's mind milled these over as she endured the tortuous hike home. Sweat soaked her tee shirt and assaulted her nose as it combined with the blood that oozed from the opened cavity of her kill. She thought of the absolute perfect picture that Ari made and sighed.

Perhaps it was because the majority of her years were isolated from the masses and she had spent minimal – if any- time in the company of another female other than Olga, but standing before Ari made Kendra feel plain and intimidated by her pristine beauty to the point that she wanted to find a place to hide herself.

Kendra was by no means an ugly girl. Her long, dark hair had a silken feel when freshly washed and combed. She was Caucasian, but her skin tone had a coppery hue to it from years of exposure to the sun. Even so, not a wrinkle could be found on her smooth flesh. This was partly because she was still young- having just had her seventeenth birthday- and partly because Olga was adept at mixing lotions to protect against sun damage.

Her teeth were straight, all there, and cavity free, but her smile couldn't match up to the brilliant and alluring one that Ari had flashed her way. She'd always considered her chocolate colored, almond shaped eyes to be exotic and alluring until she was almost consumed by the wide, emerald-green eyes of the beauty she'd just met. Ari was not only petite, but she had an air of femininity about her that made Kendra feel like a tomboy.

All in all, Kendra felt clumsy and frumpy for the first time in her life.