
MOVING TARGET

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Moving Target
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Man, I love this city.

Having grown up in Bass River, Nova Scotia—AKA buttfuck nowhere—I can't get enough of Halifax and all it has to offer, no matter the time of day or night. As I cruise down Water Street on my Larkspur commuter bicycle, I steal a glance over my shoulder to make sure the road is clear before I cross in the middle of the street, disobeying the signs in the bike lane, of course.

Hey, it's okay. It's Sunday night and the streets are mostly quiet, with everyone home getting ready for a busy Monday morning. Trust me, the commute is way harder, and traffic much heavier, during the Monday to Friday rush hour.

Busy or not, I don't care either way. I love it here in the city, and I love being outdoors, which is why I use my bike as much as I can, even though my older brother left me his car when he went off to play professional hockey for the Boston Bucks. I'll probably use my bike until the snow falls, and maybe even after that since it's off-road detour ready. But it's

late September, which means I still have a month or so of good riding ahead of me. Not that I have a lot of free time during hockey season—which is why I’m cruising in the dark on a Sunday night.

I turn back to the street and swerve to the left, long before the lights at the corner, only to come to a dead stop when I run into something or someone. I curse as I tumble off my bike and slide across the hard, unforgiving pavement. Thankfully I’m wearing a long-sleeved shirt, or the pavement would have peeled the skin from my arms, and while I might disobey rules and can at times be reckless—okay, most times—I always wear a helmet.

Breathing rapidly, I finally come to a skidding stop and lay perfectly still as I take a fast second to check for broken bones. A busted-up body is all I need right now. Not only would a broken bone lay me up for this year’s hockey season, but it could also put an end to my NHL career path.

Aww, wouldn’t that be a fucking shame, Dane.

I quickly shut down my sarcastic inner voice, because yeah, I *have* to make it into the NHL like my older brother and my best friend Jesse, who was drafted when we were in juniors together. I was on the cusp, not quite good enough, much to everyone’s disappointment. When I say everyone, I mean my family. I’m expected to make it and can’t let them down, whether it’s what I really want or not. But if I want my parents’ approval and respect...

A garbled noise echoes in the empty street behind me, shutting down my dark thoughts. I turn and wince as my neck muscles rebel. Okay, what the hell did I hit? I scan the dark pavement, unable to see anything. I zero in on the sound of someone moaning, and push to my feet. I

scramble toward the sound as a black lump becomes distinguishable.

Shit.

“Hey, are you okay?” I ask the guy huddled in the middle of the street. Why the hell would someone dressed in all black and cross in the middle of a dark street? They should have gone to the lights and used the crosswalk. Rules are made for a reason.

Yeah, and you're one to talk about rules, Dane.

Okay, fine.

As worry erupts inside me, I crouch down and search the black lump, trying to figure out how to help. He's curled into a ball and it's hard to tell which end is up in the dark and I'm afraid to touch him and make things worse.

“Do you need me to call an ambulance?” We're not far from the hospital, but I can't get him there on my bike, and I'm seriously worried he's badly hurt.

“No, I...I think I'm okay.”

Shit, it's not a guy, it's a girl, and that voice...why is it so familiar?

“Can you move?”

“I think so.” A moan, followed by a crackling sound of joints rebelling, curls around me as she gets into a seated position.

As her small frame comes into view—no wonder I didn't see her—I lightly touch her arm. “Let me help you.”

She reaches for me, and I gently take her hand and slowly bring her to her feet. In the distance, I see headlights. “We need to get off the road before we get run over.”

“Too late for that.”

My gut knots and I wince at the comment, but her words are followed by a soft chuckle. My stomach loosens. “I’m really sorry. I didn’t see you.”

“Really? You’re saying you didn’t run into me on purpose?” She waves one hand. “With this long, empty street in front of you, with all kinds of places for you to cross, you pick the one spot where I’m walking and collide with me?”

She doesn’t sound angry, so I joke, “Maybe you jumped in front of me. I mean, you could have crossed anywhere, too.” I hold her tight as she gingerly walks, grateful that she’s not seriously hurt. I guide her to the sidewalk, out of harm’s way. “You did say it was a long, empty street,” I add playfully, even though my heart is still thundering.

She lowers herself to the curb, and takes a moment to gather herself. “Yes, yes I did.” She plants her elbows on her knees. “So what do you think, coincidence or serendipity?”

I take off my helmet and scratch my head. “Aren’t they the same thing?”

Her phone buzzes and she pulls it from her pocket. She slides her finger across the screen and the second the light falls over her face, my heart jumps into my chest. Kendra Jaynes. No freaking way. My helmet slips from my hand and lands on the grassy curb. Okay, maybe this unexpected collision wasn’t a coincidence or serendipity.

Maybe it was...*fate*.

To me, fate means a person’s destiny, the path one is supposed to walk—which doesn’t always end pleasantly. That tracks for me, because my future does not include Kendra Jaynes. When it comes to women, I don’t commit. Trust me

on this, it won't end favorably for me. I've walked in my brother's shadow my whole life. No matter what I do, I'll never be good enough. If I make the NHL, however, maybe I'll finally be worthy of love and respect. Maybe then I'll stop being compared to my big brother Rhys and women will see me as more. Maybe Kendra will...

Nope, not going there...not with her.

"No. They're not the same thing." Her head lifts, and she angles her phone my way. The light falls over me and her jaw drops open. "Dane."

"Hi Kendra." I take in her shocked face. I haven't set eyes on her in nine long months. Not since Jesse and I visited the campus with my brother back at Christmas and I found myself in Kendra's bed. It was a one-time thing—a holiday hook-up. After that, I went back to Bass River, both of us going our own ways. That didn't mean I didn't think about her. I'd yet to run into her on campus and was beginning to wonder if she still went to Scotia Academy. She's our team captain's younger sister, and while I wanted to ask him or one of the other guys about her, I knew better. She's off limits. She was off limits last Christmas, too—even though that didn't stop us that one night.

Her mouth opens and closes as she shakes her head. "What...what..."

As car headlights come closer, I run back to get my bike off the street. I'll check for tire and frame damage later, once I know Kendra is okay. My heart beats a little faster as I drop down next to her. My gaze moves over her face, and something warm ignites inside me. Wow, does she feel the little bolt of electricity between us too? Not that we can do anything about it. I'm a full-time player now, and a hook-up

with her is out of the question. I can't risk getting kicked off the team. But there is chemistry here, every bit as much tonight as there was nine months ago.

"What...what..." she stammers again after I sit.

My gaze narrows in on her, and I try to see her pupils in the dark as she repeats herself. It's impossible. "Did you bang your head? I think you might have a concussion." Her hand goes to the back of her head and a pained sound gurgles in her throat.

"Can I touch?" She takes my hand and puts it on the small lump. "I think we should take you to the hospital. I know a concussion when I see it."

"So do I. I'm a nursing student, remember?" I nod. I remember everything about her, even all the little herb plants she likes to grow on her windowsill. Nine months ago, lavender filled my senses when I went to get us a drink of water after a round of sex. As I lean into her, I can still smell it. Does she make perfume out of it? "It's just a small bump. I feel fine otherwise. I'd really like to just go home." I glance up and down the street. She's about ten blocks from home and I'm just around the corner. What was she doing out on the streets this late at night? I'm out here because a hard ride and fresh air always helps me sleep better. I don't suspect it's the same for her though.

I gesture with a nod. "I'm just around the corner. Why don't we go there? I don't want you walking if you have a concussion." Plus, it's dark out, and bad things happen after dark in any city. "Why didn't you call campus security?" I don't want to make her feel bad or stupid. Maybe she doesn't know about the service provided to students. "You have the app, right?"

“I do, I just...it wasn’t a far walk.”

I glance up and down the dark street. I have no idea where she was coming from, but even a few blocks at night is far enough. “Come on. Let’s get inside.”

She hesitates for a second and runs her hands up and down her arms. I notice her thin sweater. The night is warm and her shiver is probably from an adrenaline dump. I wish I had a jacket to put around her.

“I...maybe I should call my brother.”

A wave of disappointment goes through me. I kind of like the idea of caring for her. She’s close to her brother though, and I think that’s nice. I guess you could say Rhys and I are tight too, considering how closely I walk in his shadow. “Sure. If that’s what you want.”

She frowns and glances down, and I sense an internal struggle. “He’s probably at study group.”

I wouldn’t say I was great at reading people. I’m not, so I don’t know why I get the sense she’s fibbing about study group, and there’s a deeper reason that’s preventing her from calling her brother.

“Kendra, where were you?” It’s not my business and she doesn’t have to answer if she doesn’t want too.

“I was...” she points to a random spot over her shoulder. “...at my boyfriend’s place. Do you know Lance Williams?”

“Yes.” I don’t know him personally. His family owns the biggest law firm here in the city and their commercials are all over the TV and radio. Personally, I think they’re all a bunch of arrogant assholes who think they’re better than everyone

else. Wait, did she just say Lance was her boyfriend? What the fuck is she doing with that douche?

“Lance is your boyfriend?”

She nods and glances away, like she’s embarrassed by that. Or trying to hide something. Maybe she thinks he’s a douche too. Christ, the guy walks around campus like he owns the place and I guess in a way he does. His family name is on the law school building. Old family, with old money, and deep-rooted ties to the community.

I’m pretty sure it was just last week, I spotted Lance late one evening, near the track where I was running, having a deep conversation with a girl—using his tongue. Then again, it was dark, and it might not have been him.

“He didn’t walk you home?” I work to keep the disdain from my voice. I don’t think I’m doing that great a job. She wouldn’t be biting back a wince if I was.

“He’s very busy. I was helping him study for his LSAT’s.” Her gaze searches my face. “That’s the law school—

“Admissions test. I know.”

She wrings her hands together. “Sorry, I didn’t mean to suggest you didn’t.”

I’m sure she didn’t. I don’t think Kendra is like other girls I know, who think hockey players are dumb jocks who don’t know much about anything else. Probably because her brother is a player, and she can see beneath the jersey. Right now, though, all I can think about is Lance Williams and how I’d like to punch him in the face for letting her walk home in the dark. Fucking idiot.

“He writes the test next weekend. He’s been very stressed. He has a lot to live up to. His family has huge expectations of him.”

I know all about family expectation.

“Come on,” I mutter, tired of hearing her defend him. The truth is a lot of people have expectations on them. That doesn’t mean the world revolves around them and they get to be an asshole. “You’re cold. Let’s get you inside and into some warmer clothes. I have something you can borrow. Once you’re warm and I’m sure you don’t have a concussion, I’ll drive you home.”

“Okay.”

I snatch up my helmet and we start walking. As soon as I put my arm around her waist to make sure she stays upright, her feet come to a resounding halt. Yeah, I get it. She thinks this is a bad idea. Last Christmas during a party at Storm House, her brother pulled her away from me. All the guys on the team have been warned to stay away from her, and her brother, undoubtedly, told her we were all man-whores and to steer clear. Then again, she’s probably worried what douche bag would think.

She points to a spot on the sidewalk behind us. “Your bike.”

Okeydokey, I guess I called that one wrong. “I’ll come back for it.”

“No, get it now.” She shakes her head and stands her ground. I don’t know Kendra very well, but I like that she cares about my bike. “I can walk and I don’t want anyone to steal it.”

While I love this city, bikes do tend to go missing frequently, even when they’re locked up. If I leave mine unattended on the street, it likely won’t be there in five minutes. But I can’t

risk her falling. It's possible she has a concussion. "Are you sure?"

"Yes, get it." I hurry back and pick up my bike, walking it beside me. I reach Kendra and we cross the road. "Is it ruined?"

"I don't think so." I lightly nudge her. "I hit something soft."

"At least one of us did."

She's smiling, but I still feel like an ass. "I really am sorry."

"I know. Strange though," she says. "I haven't seen you around and then we bang into each other, literally."

"Does that mean you've been looking for me?"

She laughs. "I was curious. It's a small city and a small campus. I thought I might run into you."

"And you did...or rather, I ran into you."

We both laugh and I gesture to Storm House. At least her brother moved out, like most players in their last year do, and won't catch me sneaking her to my room. I guess the noise and parties get old after a while.

She grins and I say, "I was wondering if you were still on campus. I guess I've been looking for you too."

She nods and her smile falls away as she glances down. Shit, was it something I said? I pull open the big heavy door to Storm House and the place is quiet. I guess most of the guys are tired from a busy weekend training and of course we did have a big party last night.

"I'm on the second floor." I lift my bike and we go up the big set of stairs slowly and I keep a close eye on her, not wanting her to fall backward. I push open my door when I reach it

and gesture for her to enter. She steps in and I follow behind, securing my bike on the wall rack as she glances around. “Looks familiar.”

I go still. Is she saying she’s been in a lot of the rooms at Storm House? Honestly, she doesn’t seem like a puck bunny at all, from what I know of her, that is. Her brother Nate didn’t seem to be impressed that she was at the Christmas party last year either. He keeps close tabs on her. When she took me back to her place, he texted a few times. She didn’t tell him I was with her, which leads me to believe she has to sneak around. “Same as Nate’s room his first year.”

“Right,” I say and slide open my drawer and pull out a heavy sweatshirt. “This will be big, but it should keep you warm.”

“Thanks.” She turns her back to me, and lifts her arms to pull it on. The small black sweater she’s wearing rises with the movement, and my throat tightens at the dark bruises on her back. Bruises that have yellowed, which means they weren’t from tonight’s fall.

I take a small step closer, and her body tenses at my sudden closeness. “Kendra, are you okay?”

My heart jumps into my throat as Dane's big hand lands on my arm, a light, comforting touch that threatens to flood my eyes with tears. I quickly blink them away and bite down on my cheek to pull myself together. Yes, I'm currently on an emotional roller coaster ride with my boyfriend, and I'm so dizzy I don't know which way is up or down, let alone in or out.

Out.

Yeah, that's what I want. Out. Out of my relationship with Lance. Although I'm afraid of disappointing my brother, and of Lance's temper. But none of this is Dane's concern and I'm sure it's his gentleness and kindness that's doing the weirdest things to my heart.

"Oh," I say quickly and tug the shirt on, pulling on it hard until I stretch it to my knees, wanting to cover all my bruises. "I fell off the bed studying the other day." It's not a lie. I did fall off the bed the other day. I wasn't studying though. I was helping Lance study for his LSAT's, like I

have been for a while now. He got annoyed that I stumbled over one of the questions and ripped the book from my hand. His elbow ‘accidentally’ hit me and I fell to the floor with an undignified thud. Much like I hit the ground tonight. I secretly suspect only one of those falls was an accident.

Lance apologized, like he always does after one of his outbursts ends with me getting hurt. Despite the apology, after every incident, I leave feeling like I was the one who’d done something wrong. Back in the beginning of our relationship, he wasn’t always so quick tempered, and he assures me that once he finishes his entrance exams, he wouldn’t be so stressed or on edge.

My brother set us up at the end of last year. Lance is pretty much the only guy my brother ever approved of. They became friends when they took a business class together, and maybe it’s the fact that Lance is studying to be a lawyer that sets him apart in my brother’s eyes. It doesn’t hurt that he comes from a well-known family of lawyers, who own the biggest firm on the east coast.

Dane turns me, and he puts his palm on the side of my face and this time I can’t stop the tears. Dammit. “Hey,” he murmurs quietly and tugs me to him. I put my cheek against his pounding heart, and breathe in his warm familiar scent.

I’ve missed his smell...his touch.

It’s true, we were only together that one night and what a wild, reckless night it was. I’d never done anything like that, never hooked up with a guy, let alone a hockey player. My brother would have lost his mind. Most don’t understand why I let Nate make choices for me. Most don’t understand what we’ve been through, or how much he’s done for me. I trust

him and I'm pretty sure his choices have always been the right ones, until...Lance.

The problem is that Nate is stoked about our relationship, and I don't want to disappoint him. Maybe I'm wrong about Lance hurting me. Maybe I'm just accident prone. I'm sure that's what Lance would tell Nate if I ever whispered it to him.

A fresh wave of tears prick my eyes, and I let Dane hold me for an extra minute as exhaustion overtakes my body. My legs weaken, and I sag against him. The next thing I know, he's sitting on the edge of his bed, tucking his warm blankets around me.

"I'm sorry," I manage to push out past a tight throat. "I...I..."

"Adrenaline," he explains, and I can't help but think—probably because of the way his brow is bunched—that he's actually asking me a question.

"Yes," I agree. "I've been studying hard, and helping Lance with his LSATs. Late nights and then the shock of running into you."

"Literally," he says with a soft smile, like he's trying to lighten things up. His finger sweeps my cheek, brushing away a lone tear.

"Wait, no. You ran into me," I counter, a small, chuckle bubbling up inside me. I lean into his hand, absorbing his warmth.

He lets out an exaggerated breath. "If that's what you have to tell yourself to help you sleep at night, then so be it." The bluest of blue eyes lock on mine. I hadn't forgotten how gorgeous they were, or how they looked at me with such hunger nine months ago. My entire body warms at the

memory, and I reach out and put my hand on his leg. He glances down, and when his shoulders stiffen—a reminder that I have a boyfriend—I ease it away.

“Sorry.”

“It’s okay,” he responds, his voice a bit deeper. He turns his attention to the blankets, and tucks them around me again. “Are you warm now?”

“Getting there.”

“Are you hungry, or thirsty?” He points to a small fridge. “I have water and soda, and I can run to the kitchen for some food.”

“I don’t want to put you out.”

“You’re not. I’m always hungry after a ride.”

“You bike ride for...fun?”

He angles his head and glances at me like I might have a handlebar sticking out of my nose. “Yeah, why?”

“That’s what you were doing out there? Recklessly racing up and down the streets because you enjoy it?”

This brings on a laugh. “I don’t know if I’d use the word reckless.” I purse my lips and his protest dies. “Okay, fine. I thought the streets were empty and why do you say that like it’s the most ludicrous thing you’ve ever heard?”

“I don’t know.”

“You’ve ridden a bike before, haven’t you?”

I nod. “Of course, I used to have this pink one with these colorful pink and purple ribbons, but I stopped riding it when...” I glance down quickly as old memories rip to the

surface and steal the air from my lungs. I take in Dane's watchful eyes, and I shake my head and struggle not to sound breathless as I continue. "It's been a long time since I've been on a bike."

He looks like he wants to ask more questions, and I'm grateful when he turns it back to him. "I used to love my BMX when I was a kid. Had a skate park near my house and used to love to do tricks."

"Sounds risky."

"You don't like risks?" he asks, even though I'm sure he already knows the answer.

"Not really."

He nudges me. "You need to live a little. Have some fun."

I laugh. "Maybe you need to have a little less, before you kill yourself, or someone else," I tease. He might be right though. I do kind of go through the motions in life. I don't take risks, and I don't have a lot of fun—except for that one reckless night nine months ago. God, that was so out of character for me. I want to blame it on the alcohol, but I didn't have that much to drink.

"What do you do for fun?" he asks.

"I give needles at the clinic," I joke playfully, not wanting to admit I don't do anything for fun.

"Ooh, sadist. I like that."

I take in his cute smile. "Did you see the skate park at the commons?"

"Yeah. It's for kids."

"It's not just for kids," I correct. "I've seen adults there too."

“Do it with me,” he jokes. “I’ll show you how much fun it can be.”

“Yeah, sure,” I blurt out without thinking. Biking isn’t my thing, I don’t think. The idea of watching him perform tricks does sound kind of fun. He grins, and gives me a look that says I’m full of...something. “As long as you don’t try to run me over again.”

He stands and laughs. “On that note. Peanut butter sandwich?”

I put my hand over my stomach. I’d spent the better part of the day helping Lance and he was so grumpy, I could barely eat the pizza he ordered hours ago. “Sounds pretty gourmet right about now.”

“Starving?”

“Yeah.”

He looks at me for a long second. Does he not want to leave? Is he still afraid I’m concussing and might do something foolish like flee Storm House and get hit by something worse than a bike on the way home?

“Hurry back,” I say, and he gives a curt nod. “Wait.” I reach out and take his hand. “Are you okay? I wasn’t the only one who hit the ground hard.”

His face softens as he raps on his head. “Had a helmet on.”

“Yeah, but...” I glance at his body, note the way his long sleeve T-shirt hugs his chest and biceps. He looks good. Really good. For the briefest of seconds my fingers twitch, remembering what his body felt like beneath my palms. I let him go and tuck my hand under the blankets before I do something I shouldn’t. “You have a small rip in your shirt.”

He lifts his arm. "Ah, so I do. Good thing I was wearing long sleeves."

"Maybe not so reckless after all."

He winks. "Maybe not." He fixes the blankets around me again. "Be right back." His gaze holds my attention as he crosses the room, and I glance around, taking in the bare walls. He's been here long enough to make the place his own, but it totally lacks personality. What's that all about?

I snuggle down and roll in his bed, and the smell of him on the sheets fill my senses. I take a few, deep relaxing breaths, and briefly shut my eyes as warmth, comfort and safety, things I haven't felt in a while overcome me.

The next thing I know, my eyes are opening, and I take in the dark room. I shift and lift to check the clock. I groan as my back protests and memories of last night come back in a whoosh. I'm in Dane's bed. I roll over quickly and find the other side empty. I jackknife up and spot Dane sound asleep in one of his chairs. His head is to the side and his feet are up on a duffle bag. Could he be any more uncomfortable?

I push the blankets off and throw my feet over the side of the bed, guilt swamping me. My heart skips a beat at the sight of a peanut butter sandwich sitting on a plate beside the bed, wrapped in plastic to keep it fresh.

"Aww," I say under my breath.

A groan, and then, "Did I wake you?"

I turn and find Dane straining to sit up straight. I'm sure his muscles are achy from the fall and seized from his horrible sleeping position. A groan slips from his lips as he puts his feet on the floor and sits upright.

“No, I think I woke you.” I gesture to his nightstand. “I saw the sandwich...”

“It’s okay.” He rubs his eyes as I stand there. “Are you okay?”

I nod, even though I’m not certain I am. “I should probably get going, and give you back your bed.” I point to the chair. “That does not look comfortable.”

His gaze moves to the clock and to the dark sky outside his window. “You don’t have to go, but if you want to, I’ll drive you.”

“No, I don’t want you going out this time of night.”

I make a move to take off his sweater, and a second later his hand is on mine, stopping me. “You can keep this on and I’m not letting you walk home alone in the dark, Kendra.”

Okay then. I stand there, secretly liking this protective side of him. “I’ll be fine,” I assure him, my voice lacking any sort of confidence. “I guess I could use my app and get campus security to walk me.” Maybe I should have done that last night. It’s always an option here on campus. If I had called it, I wouldn’t have run into Dane and I’m kind of glad I did.

He dips his head, his mouth close to mine. “How is your head?”

“Fine, how is yours?”

Did he just roll his eyes at my flippant response? I guess I can’t be sure, considering I was staring at his kissable lips. “You think you’re okay to walk? You were starving and didn’t eat.”

Maybe it’s my hesitation, or the way I continue to linger as he hovers over me, that lets him know I’m in no hurry to leave.

“You should at least eat something first,” he suggests.

“Right. No sense in letting the sandwich go to waste and the sun is going to rise soon, which means it will be light out and you don’t have to worry about me walking home in the dark.”

I plop back down on the bed, instantly missing his closeness, and pick up the plate. Before I open it, I tap the bed. “At least get comfortable, Dane.” He stands still and runs his hands through his hair. “It’s not like we haven’t...” My words fall off as my gaze drops and takes in his boxer shorts, which is all he’s wearing.

“...seen each other naked,” he teases, finishing my sentence for me.

I gulp. “Yeah.”

He looks at his bed with longing. “Are you sure, Kens?”

I grin at the nickname. No one really calls me that and I kind of like that he does. “Positive.” I pick up the water bottle beside me, open it and take a drink. I hold it out to him.

“Thanks.” He takes a long pull as I remove the plastic from the plate. I bite into the sandwich and moan with pleasure. I truly am starving. Dane shifts beside me, looking somewhat uncomfortable as he pulls the blankets up over his waist. Wait, did my moan...is he hiding...?

Oh, crap.

I bite into my sandwich again, and before I can stop myself, I moan again. “Oh, sorry,” I say around a big bite.

“For what?” My gaze drops quickly, and I don’t miss the way he follows it. Now it’s his turn to groan. “I guess I’m the one who should be apologizing.”

“You’ve apologized enough tonight.” I hold my sandwich out to him and he shakes his head. I take the water bottle, and his gaze remains on my mouth as I drink. I set the bottle down and work on my sandwich. Needing my mind on something other than his body, I ask, “Why did they call your brother Cheddar?” I angle my head and take in his cute grin.

“You don’t know?”

“If I knew, I wouldn’t have asked.”

“Wow, smartass.” He laughs. “My parents are artisan cheese makers in Bass River. Have you heard of the gouda guy?”

My jaw drops. “That’s your dad?” He nods. “I love that cheese.”

“Chances are you probably ate some I made. I loved making cheese with my folks.”

I always knew Dane was interesting, but this is really something. “I can’t believe you make cheese.”

“Used to.” His eyes dull as he looks at the wall, staring at nothing.

“You miss it,” I state.

“Hockey,” he explains. “There was just no time.”

My throat tightens as I swallow. “Do you like hockey?”

“Sure.” Wow, he didn’t even try to inject enthusiasm into his voice. He pretends to take a shot with a stick. “My goal is the NHL. Do you go to the games?”

I shake my head and admit, “I don’t really follow it, and I don’t think Nate wants me at the rink.” I crinkle up my nose. “He’s worried about—”

“One of the guys liking you.”

“Yeah, something like that.” I push out an exaggerated laugh. “As if they would, I’m not really the kind of girl they go after.”

“Yeah, you are,” he says, and a ridiculous thrill goes through me. “I’m a hockey player, and do I have to remind you what happened between us?”

My body heats. “No, I remember.” Shoot, I didn’t mean for that to come out so breathless. I stare at him for a second, and I’m about to ask if the NHL is what he really wants when he turns the conversation back to cheese. “My brother has red hair, and my parents are artisan cheese makers, so naturally he got the nickname Cheddar.”

I laugh. “What about you? What’s your nickname?” I reach out and lightly touch his hair, which is blond with some darker streaks. “Your hair is dirty blond.”

He feigns offense. “My hair is not dirty, and we don’t all have nicknames.”

“You know what I mean.” I tug on a strand, and he playfully does the same to me. “Since you’re on the lighter side, do they call you Mozza?”

“No, they don’t call me mozza and if they did, I’d be happy to set them straight, with my fist.” I laugh at that. “I don’t have a nickname.”

“What’s your favorite cheese?”

“I like all cheeses.”

“Me too,” I add. “It’s my love language.”

He laughs at that. “I guess if I had to pick a favorite, it might be brie.”

I nod and look him over. “I think that’s fitting. A firm layer on the outside...” I poke his stomach. “Soft on the inside.”

“I am not soft.”

As soon as the words leave his mouth, my gaze drops lower, to the bulge in his boxers. Nope, not soft at all. I quickly turn my attention back to my sandwich and take big bites to finish it. “It should be light out soon.”

“How’s the head?”

I lightly touch the back of my head, and the lump is down. “Much better.” I take his hand and put it on my head, and as he touches me, sensations rip through my body and settle in a spot it has no right to settle.

“We should have iced it. I don’t know why I didn’t think of that.”

Ice, yeah. Ice is exactly what I need...between my legs. “I can sit in the—” I make a move to get up.

He touches my arm and pulls me back. “You’re fine.” A long beat of silence passes between us and then he says quietly, “We’re fine. We’re both adults, we can share a mattress, Kens.”

“Okay,” I croak out, and sink back down. He lifts the blankets and tucks them around me and I roll to my side, my back to him. He rolls and offers me his back and we both go perfectly still and silent, while I stare at the dark night. As I calculate how long I’ll have to lay next to him—and no, math is not my strong suit, oh and did I mention I don’t hate anything about this—I try to quiet my heartbeat. What we’re doing isn’t wrong. We’re not touching, or doing anything inappropriate, so I shouldn’t be feeling any sort of guilt. Well, okay, my thoughts

might be a wee bit shameless, but I'm not going to act on them.

My lids fall shut, and the next thing I know, I wake up, completely wrapped in Dane's arms. *Holy crap, Kendra!* Okay, now everything about this is wrong, and the logical part of my brain is yelling at me to leave. Unfortunately, every other part of my brain and body disagrees and there isn't a bone in my body that will allow me to move.