

CHAPTER 1

PEOPLE SAY THAT WHEN YOU HAVE A LIFE-ALTERING experience, your brain takes a picture, and that snapshot stays forever in your memory to retrieve again, and again, and again. I call them snapshot days.

When I was seven I almost drowned in a boat accident. If that memory is triggered, I replay it like scenes from an old movie, over and over, upside down, blackness and then light.

Today was going to be another snapshot day.

My friend Jenn and I were at the Old Port Festival. The waterfront in Portland, Maine, had closed down to traffic and opened up to musicians, artists, shopkeepers, and cooks. It was the perfect place to mark the beginning of summer and the end of my junior year.

“Kendra!” Jenn said in a low voice. “That’s your dad, isn’t it?”

“My dad?” I took a sip of lemonade. “No, can’t be. He’s in Boston.” We moved closer to the stage, where the headline group was coming back for the second half of the show. I shooed a couple of quarreling seagulls out of our way and stood behind a French fry stand.

“Look at the guy next to the amplifier.”

A tall man in a Hawaiian shirt was getting beer from a vendor. He was also wearing a baseball cap and sunglasses.

“That’s your father,” she said, turning her back to him.

“No, it’s not. I’ll prove it.” I pulled out my phone and called him. “Watch.”

Behind the beer stand, the man handed a cup to a woman in a matching cap and looked at his phone. Then he put it to his ear.

“Hi, Kennie,” he said. “What’s up?”

I looked at Jenn. “Where are you, Dad?”

“Hi to you, too. Still in Boston. I’ll be home for dinner. I had that conference, remember?”

“Dad?” I gripped my cup hard, and lemonade drizzled over the sides.

“Hang on, honey, I can’t hear you.” He covered his other ear and took a few steps away from the crowd, leaving the woman holding the two beers.

“What are you doing?” My stomach clenched and my heart began its familiar panicking rise. I swallowed, determined to keep myself from having an anxiety attack. It had been a few weeks since my last one, and I was feeling good. I handed Jenn my drink and felt for my camera around my neck. I lifted it to my eye and pointed the zoom lens at the man in the Hawaiian shirt and cap. My dad.

“I’m about to give a lecture,” he said.

I opened my mouth to speak, but all that came out was a weak “Oh.” I squinted through the viewfinder and clicked. Still watching, I said it again. “Oh.” I must have looked funny, cell phone to my ear, camera to my eye.

The band members took their places, and the guitarist strummed a chord and yelled, “Let’s go!”

The crowd cheered. Dad whirled around, looked at his phone in surprise, and backed away. “Look, honey, I’ve got to go. I’ll see you tonight.”

“Dad?”

“Gotta go. We’ll talk later,” he said, and hung up.

“Jenn, did you see that? He heard the guitar. He knows I’m here.”

She nodded. “So what. He doesn’t know you saw him.” She got closer. “And besides, Kendra, he’s the one who should be worried.”

“Right.” I watched as Dad and the woman made a

beeline for the street. Now I could see it clearly: his long-legged walk, the way his head bobbed above the crowd, the sandy hair peeking out from the hat. “So, let’s follow him.”

We stayed behind a safe distance, letting a crowd build between us. At the lights, they crossed the street, got into his Saab, and turned up the side road.

Jenn’s car was parked farther down Commercial Street, so we broke into a run, my steps now matching my racing heart.

“What’s he doing here?” I asked.

Unable to keep up, Jenn slowed to a jog. “We might as well take our time. We’ll never find them now, and besides, I hate running.”

I repeated my question. “What’s he doing here? I don’t get it. He’s supposed to be at a conference.”

She grabbed my arm, bringing us to a stop. “You’re kidding, right?”

“Well,” I said, “he told us he was giving a talk in Boston. Why would he lie?”

“Kendra, I hate to break it to you, but your dad may not be perfect.”

I went back to walking, slowly this time, and let her keep pace with me. When we reached the car, my breath was as rapid as my heartbeat. The anxiety attacks I’d had since the boat accident were fewer, but when I had them, it was Dad who talked me down. It was our thing.

Jenn unlocked my door. “Hey, you have your freaking-out face on. I thought your panic was under control.”

“It was. I mean, I haven’t had an anxiety attack since the car thing,” I said, remembering how Dad helped me through the fender bender I’d had three weeks ago. He acted as if dealing with cops and insurance companies was as easy as deciding what to have for breakfast.

I shook the memory from my mind and put on my seat belt. Dad couldn’t help me with this one, because he had brought it on.

We drove around to find the side road they’d taken, but it only led us to more small streets. Finally, the neighborhood duplexes and mom-and-pop stores gave way to brownstones and specialty shops. From the bottom of Post Road, a street separated by a lush parklike median, we saw Dad’s car midway up the street. We drove past and turned down the other side of the grassy median, parking in a tiny alley across from his car. As if on cue, Dad and the woman came out the door of a brownstone and walked down the front steps, and now he had a suit on. I reclined my seat and crawled to the rear window, positioning my camera against the glass.

“Look,” Jenn said, “they’re hugging.”

I watched, hypnotized, and snapped a photo just as Dad gave the woman a kiss. They hugged one more time; then he got in his car and drove off.

ALL THE WAY BACK TO KINGSPORT, I WHEEZED through an anxiety attack while Jenn assured me that affairs were common and that my family was in the minority because we hadn't already gone through a marriage crisis.

The speedometer crept to seventy miles per hour.

"Speed," I said as she merged onto 295 south.

"Got it," she said, maneuvering her Volvo in front of an oil truck. "Your dad's been the good guy his whole life. He made a mistake, but he'll fix it."

Sure he would. He was good-looking, rich, smart, sophisticated. And cool. Everyone thought so. A car horn blared and I jumped in my seat.

"My bad," Jenn said, swerving back to her lane.

"Watch it," I said, trying to get my breath.

"Think of it this way: Things that look too good to be true usually are."

"What's that supposed to mean?" I lowered the window, letting my hair whip around my face. "God, Jenn, are you trying to make me feel worse? Just because your parents got divorced doesn't mean mine will."

"I just don't want you to be surprised by the truth."

"I've never noticed anything bad between my parents." But I had noticed her parents fighting. It was hard not to.

“Exactly. Too good to be true.”

The image of Dad and the woman hugging and kissing in front of the brownstone flashed in my mind. “I can’t believe it.”

Click. Today was a snapshot day.

CHAPTER 2

I LINGERED AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRS AND listened as Dad greeted Mom in the usual way: a kiss on the cheek, a clink as his keys dropped onto the counter, and the shuffle of mail. Mom answered with her normal chatter about the house, garden, dinner, all the while fixing Dad's rum and Coke. I was both relieved and angry at the comforting routine.

I wanted to ream him out right in front of Mom. I wanted to preserve her honor or whatever, but there she was fixing cheese and crackers and putting little cocktail napkins on a tray for him. And there he was looking relaxed in his suit and twirling the ice cubes in his drink, the way he always does.

If I pretended, I could be happy to see him, too. He could be the same guy if I let him.

I used to see my life as divided into two parts: *before the boat accident* and *after the boat accident*. Before it happened, I was a little girl in motion: climbing trees, playing in tide pools, and building forts with Jenn and Bo Costello, who lived next door. Most of all, I was always laughing. If I had a snapshot of *before*, it would be me running through the waves, head back and mouth open in a happy squeal.

The *after* snapshot is me with my head down and scared of everything, as if nearly drowning swept most of me out to sea and returned only the shell.

I was a kid when it happened. We were on a weekend cruise with Hal and Gail, friends of Mom and Dad's. At first the grown-ups joked about the sprinkles of rain and the darkening sky. I didn't mind, because the claps of thunder were an excuse for me to stay up late and be with the grown-ups. But when Dad and Mom exchanged a look of fear, I panicked and jumped from the bench seat onto Dad's lap. "It's just a squall, Kennie—it'll be over in a minute." I stayed tight under the crook of his arm, and I didn't move while the wind picked up and the rain began to hit us sideways.

When Dad stood up and handed me over to Mom, I clung like a monkey. "Take her, Colette. I've got to get the sails down." Hal and Dad moved forward, and Gail took the wheel. I could hear the whizzing and flapping of the sails and Hal and Dad yelling directions back and forth. Mom and I were

partway down below when we heard the boom thudding and rattling and Dad yelling for Hal. Then everything went crazy as both Mom and Gail went to the side of the boat where Hal had been.

I started back up the ladder, and Dad yelled, “Get back down, Kennie!” He was crawling across the bow with a life ring in his hand, yelling over the rail. “Grab this!” He tossed it and went back to the flailing boom. I don’t remember the rest, but later Dad explained how the waves filled the rocking boat with water and turned it over.

I remember the turning part. I was below and held tightly to the ladder. I heard Mom’s cries for me as the ocean filled the cabin and swept me back into the bunks. Then everything was upside down. I was drowning. I’d been tumbled by beach waves before but had always been thrown back onto the shore and only mildly shaken up. This time it wasn’t just a wave—it was a whole ocean—and I couldn’t tell which way to go. I held my breath and tried not to let any water get in my mouth. I had to find the surface, find Mom and Dad before I exploded. The pressure in my chest squeezed and squeezed and pressed on me, and then there was a release. I opened my mouth, like an open jar underwater, and I filled up. Suddenly it didn’t hurt to hold my breath anymore. It was quiet, and I knew I’d find Mom and Dad behind the light. I floated toward it on a warm current, smiling because it was going to be okay now.

My newfound peace was short-lived, though, because suddenly I was in a rubber boat blinking through sheets of rain and coughing up water as Mom lay bleeding from a leg wound, moaning “No, no, no” over and over, and Gail was curled in a ball crying.

There was no Hal.

Dad held me tight and told me that everything would be okay. And it was all right for years. Even with Mom’s multiple surgeries and my paralyzing anxiety attacks, Dad was there for us.

Until now.

So now my life was divided into three parts: *before*, *after*, and *now*. And I couldn’t decide how to handle the *now*.

The slap of the screen door brought me back, and I knew Mom and Dad had taken their drinks onto the screened porch. I took a deep breath and released it, letting the memory go with it, and then joined them.

“Hey, Kennie,” Dad said. He put out his arms, and I fell into the familiar embrace, but it made me go stiff and I turned away. He pulled me back. “Hey, wait,” he said. “Come on, tell me everything.” It was his usual end-of-day question. Other days, other years I would have gone on for a half hour telling him every detail of my day, and then I’d ask about his day.

“Today was—” I began, and then stopped. “Hard. Today was hard.” It was the truth. I noticed Mom was wearing pants

even though it was late June. She'd wear pants whenever she could to avoid showing the scars, and having to explain what the long jagged marks were "for the umpteenth time," as she put it.

"Sounds like my day. You first," Dad said. He motioned me to sit next to him. I did, but still wasn't able to speak, so I shrugged and stared at a scratch on a flagstone.

"No, you," I said. This should be interesting.

"You called me, remember?" he said. I looked at the side of his face while he took a sip of his drink. The aroma wafted up. I used to like the smell of rum and Coke, but now the sweetness was too heavy. Everything was too much. I felt like a little girl who just learned that there was no Santa Claus.

"It's too complicated, Dad."

Mom was writing a list of names for the next night's dinner party. "John, we still have to invite the Hubers. It's not Carla's fault Kevin's so arrogant."

He mumbled something and then said, "It's your call, but I can't promise to be on my best behavior."

My mind made itself up. Now wasn't the time to talk to Dad about today. I got up and popped a smoked oyster into my mouth and headed for the door. "I'll grab something to eat with Jenn, and then we're going to the island." Before they could bring up my using the car, I said, "She's picking me up."

“Wait. Your mother and I have been talking.”

I stayed put in the doorway. “Dinner party tomorrow, I know. You probably want Jenn and me to help.”

“Yes,” Mom said. “And we’ve been thinking. It’s been a few weeks since the fender bender.”

My stomach flipped as I remembered the way I’d panicked in the middle of Market Square, turning right and then second-guessing myself and then triple-guessing and then braking and getting rear-ended by a tourist.

“We really think you need to get back out there before you make it harder for yourself,” she said.

Her eyes were soft with compassion, and I knew she understood how hard it was for me, but she didn’t waver.

“Kendra, not driving isn’t helping you in the long run,” she said.

“I haven’t panicked since—” I cut myself off, and then shook my head. “No, that’s not true. Today I had a little anxiety.”

Mom looked concerned and Dad kept his eyes on his drink.

“Was it the crowd at the festival? It can be too much for me, too,” she said.

Dad took a sip without looking up. I tried to imagine what he was thinking. Was he talking himself into acting calm?

“Mom and I discussed it, and we think you need your own car, Kennie.”

“What?” *Way to get the focus off the festival, Dad.*

Mom nodded. “We were going to wait until you went off to college, but—”

“I have just the car in mind,” Dad said.

My mind exploded with different thoughts. The first one was *Why now?* Then *Did he see me? Should I confront him?* The answer to all my questions was yes. But then I saw Mom. She wants me to be able to move on, to get over things easily.

“Kendra?” Mom was talking to me. “What do you say? Are you ready?”

I nodded. “Thanks,” I said. *My own car*, I thought. *Freedom.* I looked at Dad, and said. “Wow. I didn’t expect this.”

Back upstairs I texted Jenn about the dinner party. From my bedroom window I could see the Hannon’s manicured lawn and the Costello’s rambling house and watched Jenn explode out her front door and back her beat-to-shit Volvo out of the driveway past her brother, Bo, who was tinkering with something under his truck. I was still watching him work when I heard Jenn pounding up my stairs.

I whirled around and held up two shirts. “This one,” I said, “or this one?”

“The purple. It’s more Will’s type.” She came over to the

window and looked out. “Yup,” Jenn said, shaking her head. “He won’t give up on it.”

“He’s coming, isn’t he?” I asked.

“Yeah, but he wants to take his truck.”

When the Costellos moved next door in the middle of second grade, Jenn and Bo joined my class. Mrs. C. decided it was best to keep her two youngest together in the primary school.

It used to be the three of us doing everything together, but Bo had kept his distance since the time Jenn dated his best friend, Matt. It got complicated with their breakups and make-ups, so Bo just stayed away. Now her love interest was Doug Jacoby. Bo didn’t like Doug—and that seemed to make Jenn like him more.

Doug was a summer guy who most girls had crushed on at one time, but now I considered him unavailable. He was way older than us—in his early twenties—which used to be part of the attraction, but now it bordered on creepy. He didn’t really have a goal, which *was* his goal, he said. After three universities, he couldn’t find the right fit. He wanted to go to “the school of life” because it provided more of a challenge. This wouldn’t bother me except for his cocky attitude.

Jenn said her skin tingled whenever he was around. He was *it*.

I sighed loudly as we pulled away from the house.

“How’d it go?” she asked.

“I chickened out. It was too awkward.”

“Good. It’s really their thing.” She roughly shifted gears, and I grabbed the dashboard.

“Dad’s getting me a car,” I said.

“What?”

“And Mom’s good with it.”

“See, they want you to have a Breakout Summer, too.” She slowed down and looked at me. “Or shit, Kendra, maybe he did see us.”

Maybe, I thought. *Maybe*.

CHAPTER 3

THE IDEA OF A BREAKOUT SUMMER WAS A PLAN Jenn and I had thought up to move us beyond our comfort zones. For Jenn, it was going after a guy she was into, and for me it was stepping out of my routine of anxiety whenever I was the least bit afraid. It had recently been triggered by the car incident, and I wanted to get over it. For good.

We were taking action on this plan by heading out to a party on Beach Rose Island, which was at the head of Kingsport Cove. There were no strawberries, and it wasn't actually an island, but it had been called Beach Rose Island for as long as I could remember. It was really a one-acre elbow that jutted into the cove and protected the shore from the ocean waves, but when the tide came in, it was completely surrounded by water on all sides.

Wild beach peas and prickly-stemmed roses clung to the sand and rocks and held the land together and kept Beach Rose Island from washing away. It had long been the local hangout for kids, and it was finally our time to claim it. I'd been waiting for this summer since I'd heard about the parties from Bo and Jenn's sister, Glory.

It was dead low tide when we pulled in next to Will's car in the parking lot. My stomach fluttered as I looked inside and noticed Nicole's jacket on the front seat. I had it bad for him, and he was going out with Nicole, my least favorite person.

"Why does he like her?" I asked, getting out of the car.

"Because you turned him down when he asked you out."

"I should've said yes, but—"

"You did what you always do. You wait until it's too late."

"Ouch," I said, trying to sound hurt. But she was right. I had to admit I did that with just about everything. I could change, though. It wasn't written in stone that I had to weigh all sides and evaluate every possible scenario to make a decision. My teachers called me methodical, my parents called me annoyingly indecisive, and I knew Jenn thought I should stop taking everything so seriously.

So this is the plan. Nothing is going to ruin it, not even Dad's affair.

Jenn scrambled down the path to the causeway. I stayed a few feet behind her, slowing when I smelled the damp seaweed. I loved the beach, the ocean, and all that went with it, but I loved it cautiously. The anxiety I had dealt with since the accident could be activated anytime I was stressed, so I used my usual self-talk technique when I felt it coming on. Dad and I used to make up little rhymes and games to get me to do things when I was anxious, but thinking about him made it worse.

Instead, I kept my focus on Will and the number of times he'd smiled at me, stopped his car to talk to me, and how I was going to let him know I liked him tonight. *Will and Kendra Will and Kendra Will and Kendra*, I said quietly with each step. Before I knew it, I was close enough to see him standing in the crowd on the island, the late-afternoon sun turning his skin a warm golden brown.

When we reached the island, everyone was sitting around an unlit campfire. Jenn and I fought over the only driftwood seat left, but I hip checked her away so that I was sitting, happily, opposite Will. Who was sitting next to Nicole. She rested her head on his shoulder and hugged his arm. I tucked my hands between my knees and looked at the sun melting into the horizon.

"Wow, what a sunset," I said, reaching in my bag for my camera. I held it up to my eye and focused on the deep orange

sun above the two faces in front of me. Nicole leaned in closer to Will. “Nice,” I said.

Hate’s a strong word, but I felt a dark rage when I remembered all the ways she had tortured me in elementary school. She’d excluded me from the playground games when I was too slow, or too shy, or overwhelmed by fear. Her questions about the boat accident and my anxiety weren’t asked to be helpful; they were asked to embarrass me in front of others. Like “You probably don’t want to be in the band because the loud noise will freak you out, right?” No, I’d told her, I thought band was boring, which was a lie. Once, at fifth-grade snack time, she asked, “Did you see a light when you almost died?” The room went silent, and everyone turned to me. And last year she asked, “Are you finally over the drowning thing?”

Recently, though, Nicole’s exclusions had seemed more subtle: a look, a whisper, eye rolling, a dismissive laugh. But they were just as powerful.

I’d thought a lot about why guys like her. She’s not really beautiful—she’s average at best—but she has confidence. Or maybe it’s a power vibe, like electricity. And like electricity, it can zap you.

My coping strategy with Nicole was never to make direct eye contact. My camera lens was my protection, and I turned away from Will and Nicole and focused it on Bo as he set up his grill, his dark curly head moving to the music. I felt better

as soon as I looked at him. I stood up to say hi, when I felt a cold bottle against my thigh and jumped. It was Will.

“Here you go.” He held it to my lips and I sipped. Beer. It was bitter and fizzy—two things I hate—but I took it from him for three reasons: He had a beautifully sculpted body, he was paying attention to me, and I knew I wouldn’t actually drink the beer.

“Thanks,” I said, turning the color of the sunset.

He nodded toward the bottle in my hand. “You gonna drink that or hold it?”

“I haven’t decided.” I took another sip and made a face.

“Hang on,” he said, and went over to the cooler and got me an iced tea. He held it out to me, and I studied his arms, all browned, golden hair glistening in the late-day light.

“Thanks,” I said, smiling big.

“Sure.”

“I like you.” I couldn’t believe the words popped out like that. I hadn’t planned on moving so fast.

He laughed and peeled at his label and then took a gulp of beer. “I’m kind of going out with Nicole now,” he said. He knocked me gently on the head. “You should have said yes when I asked you out.”

Now it was my turn to take a sip.

“What changed?” he asked.

I shrugged. He’d probably think I was a dork if I told him

this was my Breakout Summer. “I don’t know. Things. I just know that this summer is going to be different.”

He nodded like he understood, then pulled a pack of cigarettes from his pocket and shook one out for me, like in a movie scene. And like a movie star, I put it between my lips. I held it with shaky fingers while he leaned in close to light it.

“Hey, Will, get your butt over here!” Nicole called.

“In a minute,” he said. He leaned in even closer so we were almost nose to nose. “Are your eyes blue or green?”

Everything stopped. I could smell his beer breath mixed with the cigarettes, and even though I didn’t like either, right then I wanted them both in the form of his lips. Preferably a kiss. I managed to say, “Um.”

“Oh, they’re green.” And then he was off.

I stubbed out the cigarette, tossed it, and then wished I’d saved it for a souvenir. Shit, Will Beckham made my heart pound.

I walked in the opposite direction until I was at the end of the island, the place where people went to be alone. The sun had gone down, and everyone was back at the pit getting a fire going. I sat on a rock looking at the cottages across the cove, their lights just coming on. Through my zoom lens I could just make out who was having a cocktail party, and who was sitting on their porch steps, and who was having a cookout on their patio. A breeze shifted, and Mrs. Gooch’s laugh skipped

across the water to Strawberry Island. This wasn't unusual. She had a big laugh, and the cove had a way of capturing sounds and carrying them out to the island. I followed it with my lens until I located the Kane cottage, and there Mom and Dad stood in a small group with the Gooches, the Kanes, and another couple.

Everything was as it should be.

But within minutes, the breeze that had carried cocktail party laughter now rumbled with an ominous storm. A snapshot flashed in my memory. *Dad, hand on the mast, squinting in the driving rain, yelling for Hal.* The present sky was not unlike that night ten years ago when we sailed off for the weekend cruise.

Blurry fingers in front of my lens brought me back to the present. It was Bo. "I heard the thunder," he said, settling himself beside me. "Don't worry, it's far off."

I held my camera tighter to my eye and squeezed a few shots off. The rapid-fire sound of the shutter was soothing to me, and I focused on that instead of the memory.

"Are you okay?" Bo asked, moving closer.

I gave a nod but didn't look up.

"Just showers," he said.

Thunder rumbled again, but farther away this time.

"So, are you going to do Photo Club again in the fall?" Bo asked.

Words stuck in my tight throat.

He continued. "I'll actually bring a camera this year if you promise to organize it with Mr. A."

Instead of responding, I turned the lens on him and clicked before he could raise his hands to his face. He hated having his picture taken, but this one was decent, I thought. I showed him the shot. He was half smiling, and his right eyebrow was raised up, the way it always was when he was surprised.

"You haven't answered me," he said.

"I'll do it." I got up and we headed back toward the fire.

"If you hand over your camera, I'll shoot you back," he said, hands outstretched. I gave it to him but kept walking. He jumped in front of me and walked backward, snapping away like a fashion photographer.

"Oooh, yeah, work it, baby," he said in an over-the-top British accent. I tried to look annoyed but couldn't and broke into a grin.

"That's it, hon. Let it out, be that girl," he coaxed. I laughed when he stumbled and apologized to the rocks that were in his way.

More people had shown up, and the fire circle was loud and crazy. Doug and Jenn were sitting with their arms around each other, and Will and Nicole were sharing a beer. Dory, from Quebec, was here for the summer. She had a much

longer and more French name, but we'd come up with Dory as a nickname and it stuck. She was talking with Nicole's best friend, Lindsay, who worked at Kingsport Café with Bo. Matt was there, but on the other side of the fire from Jenn and Doug.

Looking past the crowd, I could see the moon reflecting on the rising tide, and I headed to the causeway.

Bo followed me over. "You're leaving? Where's Jenn?"

I glanced over to the fire circle. "She's with Doug."

"Doug Jacoby? That can't happen."

"Too late."

"Let me walk out with you."

"Yeah, thanks."

We slipped away from the crowd and onto the rocky causeway.

He talked the whole way, giving a running commentary on that day's events at the café, where he was a combination barista and chef.

Then he asked me about Jenn and Doug.

"You probably know him better than Jenn or me," I said.

"That's the thing. He's an ass, plus he's twenty-three or something, and Jenn's seventeen." He picked up a shell and whipped it into the water.

"It's just a crush. It'll be over pretty quickly," I said.

"Let's hope. Have you ever seen him hang out with

anybody? He's always alone, and if you talk to him, he's all about Doug and what Doug thinks and what Doug wants."

Bo was right, but Jen couldn't see that; she only saw the dark eyes and the brooding artist she wanted to see.

"I'll keep you posted."

We climbed the path to the parking lot.

"Let me give you a ride," he said.

It was sprinkling now. "Sure, thanks." I yanked on the door, but it didn't open.

Bo climbed in and braced himself against the driver's door. "Stand back," he yelled. With a kick, my door flew open.

I hopped in and gave him a look of mock fear. "If I didn't know you, I'd think it was scary that your passengers were now trapped in here with you."

"Just another thing I have to fix on her," he said, giving the dashboard a pat.

We pulled out of the parking lot and drove past the big cottages on Beach Rose Island Road before taking the beach loop back to the Kingsport Village. Bo turned the radio on and cruised slowly down Beach Avenue. Too slowly.

"Are we in danger of breaking down before I get home?" I asked.

Suddenly, the truck lurched forward and I grabbed the seat to steady myself. When it jerked ahead again, I gasped.

"I'd better pull over," he said, and swung onto the soft

shoulder. We bumped along until we came to a dirt drive and he turned, swerving around the potholes. "I might be out of gas," he said, looking at the gauge. "Nope, it's worse than that."

"Shit," I said, grabbing the seat and looking at him for reassurance. "So why are you going down here if you're breaking down?"

He gripped the wheel and swerved around the bumps, while the truck bucked.

"Bo, what's going on?" I turned to him when he didn't answer and saw he was pumping the gas pedal and grinning at me.

"Damn you, Bo!" I yelled, and pounced on him, giving him a lame one-two punch. He managed to switch off the key and throw it on the dash. I got in one more jab before he grabbed my wrists and wrestled me back to the passenger side. This was a routine we'd had since we were kids and we knew it by heart, but now Bo was looking at me and he wasn't smiling. He was strong, stronger than I remembered. And he was breathing hard. Somehow this was different.

One of us was supposed to say uncle, the way we did when we were kids, but it didn't seem right to speak at all. This wrestling had a sexual tension.

He let me go and we sat back on our sides of the truck. Bo started the engine and backed down the dirt drive and onto Beach Avenue.

Finally, he spoke. “I totally had you, didn’t I?” he said, and gave me a wink.

“Did not,” I said, but I let my breath out in a loud gasp and we both cracked up. “Yeah, you did.”

“Bo,” I said, not knowing where I was going with my words. “Was that weird?” Without waiting for him to answer I said, “Yeah, that was weird.”

“Weird?” he said. “Not for me.”

He shifted roughly.

“Good,” I said, “ ’cause that would really mess things up.”

He looked at me, and I pretended to adjust my seat belt. I felt his eyes linger on me a second too long. When he turned back to the road, the mood had changed.

Was it possible that Bo, one of my best friends, could have feelings for me?

I said it again, but silently. *Weird.*

CHAPTER 4

THE NEXT MORNING I SNUGGLED DEEPER INTO MY quilt while a light rain pattered my window. Would it storm today or hold off like last night? I played a game with myself. *If it doesn't thunder in the next minute and a half, I'll get up and go to work. If it storms, I'll call in sick, because I'm not moving from this house until it's over.*

I hoped for an excuse to stay in so I wouldn't have to go to Portland today.

Mom went by my bedroom. "I see blue sky fighting with clouds, and the blue sky is winning!" From the bathroom she sang and ran the water. "It's going to be a bright, bright, bright, sunshiny day."

I groaned and went down to the kitchen for coffee. Just as I touched the brew to my lips, I saw Dad standing by the door.

He jiggled a set of keys, and behind him, out in the driveway, was a little white car with a red bow on top.

“It’s yours, Kennie,” Dad said. He smiled in my favorite way: blue eyes crinkling at the corners, almost laughing. That was his true happy face, and I knew it like I knew anything that was real.

“I love it!” I ran to him and gave him a quick hug, grabbed the keys, and went out the door. White, clean lines—new. Or newish.

“It’s a barely used Prius. Excellent on gas.”

I opened the driver’s door. “How did you get it so fast?”

“It belonged to a client, and now it’s yours,” he said over the roof.

Pausing, I remembered the last time I drove and how I went directly into panic mode when I got upset instead of doing any of the calming strategies I’d learned. Dad had dropped everything and come to the site of the fender bender. He took care of the details with minimal haggling, even chumming around with the cops and charming the other driver.

“I love you, Dad,” I said, hopping in and putting my hands on the wheel. “Let’s go!”

“I love you, too, but don’t you want to get out of your pajamas first? Maybe a raincoat?”

“Nope. I just need my coffee,” I said, patting the passenger seat.

While he was getting the coffee, I sat behind the wheel and ran my hands over the dashboard. It was mine. My own space. I flicked the power locks off and on, and in those seconds I let the image of Dad and his girlfriend in front of the brownstone creep into my mind, but it vanished as he pulled off the bow and threw it in the backseat. He hopped in with two travel mugs, and I backed my new car out of the driveway.

“Listen to this,” he said, cranking up the radio. “It has a six-CD changer, GPS, air conditioning. The works.”

I drove the beach loop and pulled up to the Seaside, where Jenn was a chambermaid, and called her cell. She came out the front door and ran down the stairs.

“Way cute, Kendra!” she said, still talking on her phone. She came over and leaned in the driver’s window. “Will you get me one, too, Mr. Sullivan?” She pressed her hands together and batted her eyelashes.

“Only if you’re a good girl,” he said. “And there’s no chance of that, right?”

“Probably not,” she said. She ran her hand along the steering wheel. “I love it.”

“*I’ll pick you* up tonight,” I said.

“If Doug doesn’t first,” she said.

“Let me know. Like you could keep it to yourself.”

Driving back to the house with the windows down, music up, we both hung our arms out the windows, drumming on the doors, and catching the occasional raindrop. Maybe Dad made a mistake, but I could talk to him about it later. I dropped him at his car and then went inside to change for work, still thinking about his surprise gift. Without my realizing it, he’d done another pretty cool thing; he’d gotten me to drive through the rain without being anxious.

After the boat accident, he’d worked out of his office in Kingsport. Mom had a long recovery with surgeries on her leg and I had developed severe anxiety, so Grandma Sullivan moved in to help. She took mom to physical therapy and got me to go back to school, but Dad was my rock, and I was attached to him. He was the only one who could talk me down from a nightmare or an anxiety attack, and he had this way of coaxing me to go to school even when I was petrified. When Mom was back on her feet, he went back to work at the Portland office and Grandma went home to Massachusetts, but one thing didn’t change, and that was the special connection we had developed.

As I drove the half hour to Portland, I thought about how my job at Sullivan and Sullivan would change this summer from cleaning the Portland office to also being office gofer.

This would be double the money I made last year. Now that I had a car, I would need to keep gas in it.

When I arrived at Sullivan and Sullivan, Uncle Steve was on the phone, and Ellie, the paralegal, was typing. They both gave me a wave as I walked by them to the workroom. I hung up my bag and poured myself a cup of coffee. Still terrible. I'd fix that this summer.

Uncle Steve and Dad were opposites. Dad was kind of a show-off, but in a good way. He loved to do things that were different and edgy. We always went to the newest restaurants and vacationed in different places. He was the one who'd take the risky cases. Uncle Steve was quiet and thoughtful and liked things simple. He had a work schedule that he stuck to, and on weekends he went to his lake house with Aunt Mimi.

I only remember one time they fought, and it was like they had switched bodies. Uncle Steve came over to the house and screamed and yelled at Dad in the driveway while Mom and I watched from the kitchen. Dad made "calm down" hand motions, but it didn't help. We only heard a few choice words like *idiot*, *stupid*, and *liar*.

The memory was interrupted by Uncle Steve, who bounded into the room and gave me a big bear hug.

"How's my girl?" he asked, giving me a kiss on top of my head.

“Good, real good,” I said.

“Senior year coming up, right?” he asked.

“Yup,” I said, dumping the pot of stale coffee in the sink.

“Ellie’s coffee is pretty bad, isn’t it? How about you take over that job this summer.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.”

Besides making a new pot of coffee, I shredded papers, organized the supply closet, watered the plants, and fed Bubba, the resident koi.

While I vacuumed Dad’s office, I noticed a planner on his desk and flipped it open. It was the kind that had tasks organized by priority, but when I opened it, I noticed it wasn’t his handwriting; it was Ellie’s beautiful script. It listed conference calls, lunches, and client appointments. In a pocket on the inside cover were receipts mostly for restaurants, but one from Nick’s Sporting Goods caught my eye. The word *Skipper* was scrawled across the top of it. Without thinking it over, I pocketed it.

“Do you need something, Kendra?” Ellie called over the noise of the vacuum.

I startled and flushed, turning off the vacuum and flipping the planner closed.

“Oh, no, I just wondered what Dad was doing today.”

“You probably won’t find it in there. He mostly uses his phone for everything. That’s just for office appointments.” She put a stack of papers on his desk and went to the doorway. “He’s lunching with a client, but he’ll be in later.”

I stared at the planner, wanting to check what he had down for yesterday, but I held off my urge. Getting caught being nosy was embarrassing, and I wanted to get out of there. I pushed the vacuum past Ellie and into the workroom, then signed myself out for the day with the excuse of meeting someone.

Traffic entering Kingsport was bumper to bumper because of the bridge. It opened for almost every boat. I didn’t mind traffic in Market Square on my first day back. I could take it slow, and from where I was in the line of cars, I watched Will, who was working at the Clam Shack takeout. He was eating some fries and looking adorable while he dipped them in catsup. How can someone be so cute while eating fries? I like fries, too, I thought and quickly jumped to the conclusion that we were meant to be together. I waved, but he didn’t recognize the car. When I got home, I called Jenn to tell her about the Will sighting.

“Yes, Kendra, it’s definitely a match. The math goes like this: Will plus fries plus Kendra plus fries equals long-term relationship,” she said.

“I thought so; don’t forget you’re helping me with the party tonight.”

“I’m on my way now.”



THE DINNER PARTY WAS TYPICAL SULLIVAN STYLE. Mom invited the Kanes, the Hubers, the Gooches, and Uncle Steve and Aunt Mimi, too.

Jenn and I had strung the sunporch and patio with white lights, and we even put some around the pool. It was beautiful, and Mom and Dad looked like they’d walked off the pages of *Town and Country*.

We served drinks and passed canapés, and soon everyone was loose and happy. Jenn and I hung out in the garden and stuffed ourselves with olives and appetizers. From here I could see that Dad was alone in the stairwell.

“Watch my dad,” I said to Jenn. “He’s checking his phone again.”

“Waiting for a verdict?”

“No, watch him. He’s texting.”

“It’s probably his girlfriend,” she said. “He’s smiling.”

Immediately, I felt defensive. Then disgusted. He slipped the phone into his jacket and then checked his watch. I had to see what he wrote. He definitely looked more like a guy waiting on a girlfriend than a verdict.

“Jenn, do you think my car is more than a gift?”

She didn’t look up but said, “It’s possible. Think about it, Kendra.”

I shook my head, but I knew it was true, and for once we sat in silence. The only sounds were the clinking of glasses and silverware and the summer party chatter.

After dinner the party continued around the pool. I cleared the table, and Jenn scraped leftovers into the sink.

“Dad’s jacket is on his chair,” I said quietly, “and I know which pocket his phone is in.”

Her eyes grew large. “Do it. Do it!”

I handed her the stack of plates and went to his chair, I put my back to the patio door so no one could tell what I was doing and slipped the phone into my pocket.

Poking my head back into the kitchen, I motioned for Jenn to meet me upstairs.

We sat on the floor with the phone between us.

“Go ahead,” I said, and I slid it toward her.

She pushed it back. “He’s your dad.”

“I can’t believe I’m doing this,” I said as I pushed the menu button. Sure enough, he’d received a text at 7:54.

Skipper: where are you?

John: dinner party

Skipper: don’t forget the game tomorrow

John: what time?

Skipper: 9:00 let's meet here first

John: ok love you

Skipper: love you back xo

I slid the phone to Jenn.

She scrunched up her face. "Skipper? He's dating a sea captain?"

"Give it to me," I said, reaching for it.

"Okay," she said. "Not the time to joke." She slid it back to me.

I didn't recognize the number, but I remembered the receipt in my pocket. I took it out and handed it to Jenn. "Check this out," I said.

"Where'd you get this?" She gasped. "You took this?"

"Yeah, it was in his office," I said, scrolling through the other texts. There were more of the same.

Skipper: don't forget me at the dealership

John: on my way

And even more.

John: That guy was obnoxious and his wife doesn't ever stop. Do we have to go?

Skipper: Yes, but I'll owe you.

John: And I won't forget it

Another was too much, though, and I set it down like it was poison. “Oh, gross! This is so bad, Jenn, I can’t look at these anymore.”

John: Happy birthday, babe! Be home soon with your favorites!

Skipper: Just get here. You’re all I need. Love you babe.

Sweat beaded on my forehead and I fought back nausea. I put my arm over my eyes and shut Jenn out while she talked about her mom’s affairs. I wanted to forget. Some people did these things, but not my father.

We returned the phone to Dad’s jacket and finished cleaning the kitchen at warp speed. I wanted out; I couldn’t face Dad. I left a note saying we’d be at the island.

“The island?” she said, looking over my shoulder.

I nodded. “Anywhere but here.”

“Are you going to tell your mom what’s going on?”

“No. Not yet,” I said, and then I remembered his texts to Skipper, whoever that was. “I don’t know. Maybe tomorrow. Maybe never. Let’s just go.”

This time I drove, but all I could think of was the image of Dad texting.

“Kennie, try to forget it. Just think about this car.” She ran her hand over the glove compartment and then opened

it. “Cool. It’s amazingly cool.” Touching the energy display, she said, “It’s like ordering fast food.” She poked the touchpad. “Would you like fries with that? Of course you would, and some for Will, too.” The screen flashed from audio to climate to audio, and then cold air blasted from the vents and a CD ejected from its slot.

“What are you doing?” I asked.

She looked at it. “Is this yours?” She pulled out the disc.

I looked it over. “What is it?”

“It says *Mix*.” She loaded it back in and turned it up, clicking through the tracks. It was classic rock and some folk. “This sucks. We’ll call it Previous Owner Mix,” she said.

I kind of liked it. “Go back to the Zeppelin, Jenn.” It was “Black Dog.” “Yeah, nice,” I said. It reminded me of the parties we’d had on the beach with the Beckhams and Uncle Steve before the accident. Will and I would toast marshmallows with my cousins and have bonfires, and we got to stay up late. I remembered falling asleep against Dad’s chest, wrapped in his sweatshirt, waking only to the sound of his muffled laughter.

As I pulled into the island parking lot beside Will’s car, Jenn flipped down the visor and checked her makeup, and I hopped out and gave my car a pat on the roof.

“My car, Jenn. Can you believe it?”

“Believe it. Remember, Kendra, it’s your Breakout

Summer, right? The car is just part of it.” She turned and ran down the path to the causeway.

She was right; I’d driven tonight without a hitch in my breath or an anxious heart. I’d left all that back at the house with Dad.

CHAPTER 5

“WAIT UP!” I CALLED. I FOLLOWED DOWN THE PATH and stopped at the beginning of the causeway. It was half tide, and I didn’t know whether it was coming in or going out. Water slapped the rocks, and I tried to remember what the water level was when I walked across with Bo the night before. In or out? High or low?

“Hey, Jenn, wait!” She knew I was nervous around water, and she’d left without me. But this was a chance to practice my cool new attitude.

I started down the path after her, then stopped. I didn’t *have* to be in this situation; I had a car and could leave anytime I wanted. I turned and ran back to the parking lot, arriving just as Sam pulled in.

I waved, and they did the nonchalant-guy nod as they

pulled out two coolers. Kind of funny, I thought. I wanted to go out with Will, and I'd heard Sam wanted to go out with me, and here we all were together.

"Are you coming or going?" Will said. He set his cooler down in front of me.

I looked out at the island, then back at him. "I, um, haven't decided. Is the tide coming in?"

He picked up one end of the cooler and said, "Not for hours. Come on, get the other side."

I smiled, picked up the other handle, and tromped out to the island with Will. Sam took a cooler and went ahead of us.

"You're quiet," Will said. "But then you're always quiet."

What could I say to that?

"Where's Jenn?" he asked.

"Oh, Jenn's just being Jenn."

"You mean crazy?"

"I don't even think she knows I'm not with her. Doug's here."

We were close to the island, and I could see Nicole sitting on a log by the fire, watching us as we came up the path to the fire circle. She and Lindsay were laughing, heads together. Nicole spotted us, bounced over and kissed Will, and grabbed the handle from me. "I'll get that," she said.

Alone now, I scanned the group for Jenn and spotted her

laughing with Doug. I didn't bother going over. They were in their own world.

I found a spot at the fire circle and pulled out my camera. I shot the sky as it settled into a yellow-peach color. Usually the smoke kept the bugs away, but tonight was hot and muggy, and every kind of flying insect was out. I zoomed in on Jenn and Doug as they discussed something intensely, faces close, hands gesturing.

Will gave me a soda and sat beside me. The fire crackled, and he waved a mosquito away. When I gripped the can too hard, he laughed. I tried to fix the dent but just made it crinkle worse. What was wrong with me? I hadn't said anything except "thanks." Did I even say "thanks"? What should I say?

Nicole yelled something and Will jumped up. I'd done it again. He was there being nice and I'd done nothing. I was pathetic. I lifted the camera to my eye again and clicked away mindlessly. My anxiety evaporated with each shot. I pointed at Lindsay and Dory. They put their arms around each other and posed.

"Post it!" said Lindsay.

"Definitely," I said.

When I put my camera down, I could see that Will and Nicole were gone, and so were Doug and Jenn. It could only

mean one thing: They were on the back side of the island, a signal of an upgrade in Doug and Jenn's relationship.

I'd be leaving without Jenn again.

Bo was here, though, doing something over at the clearing.

"Hey," I said.

"Hey back atcha. Kendra, I need you to document this," Bo said.

"Document what?"

"Le Café Rose de Plage."

Sam came over with a piece of driftwood. "Le Café what?" he asked. He set it down. "You mean Sam's Bar and Grill."

"I like Le Café Rose de Plage," I said. Sam looked confused. "The Beach Rose Café."

"Not a bar and grill?" Sam shook his head in his disgust.

"Cafés have more class," Bo said, heading down to the shoreline. He whipped a mussel shell and hit me squarely on the butt. "Come help us."

A tangle of driftwood had washed up, and I carried the biggest piece I could and set it up as a side table next to a seat that Bo had constructed. Soon we had a rhythm going. Sam and Bo brought up heavy stones and set them around, and I dragged wood, buoys, and lobster trap parts to fill in. It was just like when we were kids and Bo and I would play for hours in his clubhouse, setting up a store with the recyclables and

sometimes even real items from our cupboards. I sat in a drift-wood chair and stretched my legs out.

“Bo, I think we need cushions or something,” I said, trying to get comfortable.

He nodded. “And more side tables,” he said, motioning to the left and right. He jumped up and looked around. “Where’s Sam?”

I hadn’t noticed that he’d left. We looked at each other and laughed.

“That’s so Sam,” he said.

“Yeah,” I said. It got very quiet. I recrossed my legs. “How was work at the café?”

“Lindsay cried today. Again.”

“What happened?”

“She made a caffeinated beverage for a man with a heart condition, and he chewed her out in front of everyone.”

“Wow.” My laugh came out like a snort, which made us both crack up.

“He turned all red, and then he stopped yelling and clutched his chest.”

“What!”

“No, I made that part up, but all afternoon I kept telling her she had phone calls from the hospital, or his wife. It was funny as hell.”

“Nobody cried at Sullivan and Sullivan except me. Almost.” I immediately wanted to take it back.

Bo looked at me. “What’s going on?”

I didn’t know why I’d said that. It was the second time in two days that I had blurted something out. “It was crazy busy today, that’s all. The office was insane.”

Bo nodded sympathetically, but he screwed up his mouth the way he did when he was thinking. I wondered if I should tell him about Dad but decided against it. Maybe it would blow over soon and I wouldn’t have to think about it at all.

It was dark, but from where we sat we could see that a bunch of people were around the fire circle. “I’d better go find Jenn.” I stood up.

“*Bonne nuit, mon amour.* And thanks for your keen sense of design.”

“Whoa, you sound so, so, um . . . what’s the word . . .”

“Sophisticated?”

“No, you sound like the Candlestick in *Beauty and the Beast*,” I said, remembering our Disney days.

I headed down the back path to see if Jenn was there with Doug. Bo’s French was replaying in my head when I heard the crunch of pebbles behind me. I turned.

“Will,” I said. I swallowed.

“I wanted to say good-bye,” he said.

“Oh.” I motioned to the end of the island. “I have to see if Jenn wants a ride.”

“I’ll come with you.”

A path went along the west side of the island. Below were striped slabs of rocks that reached out to the sea. At the north end there was one sand dune hidden by thorny *rosa rugosa* bushes, where couples wandered when they wanted to be alone.

We heard them before we saw them. Doug’s low mumble and Jenn’s whispery voice rose from behind the bushes.

“Jenn,” I said, breaking into a laugh. “I’m leaving. Can you get a ride from Doug?” I asked. They stopped and Doug mumbled something.

Giggles from them. “Um, yeah, I think so,” she said.

We turned back, walking faster than before.

“So awkward,” I said.

“Yeah,” Will agreed.

He put his arm around me. “Remember when you said you liked me?”

“Last night,” I said, thinking about the way it had popped out.

“I like you, too. You’re great. Really great.” He stopped walking and swung me around to face him. We were between the dunes and the fire circle, and no one else was around. My body knew what he was going to do even before he moved in

for a kiss. My knees wanted to give out, and I tingled all over. I tilted my head to meet his lips. The kiss was sweet and soft. Then I pulled away and we looked at each other in the dark. He kissed me again, and this time I ran my hands over his back and arms and through his hair.

I can feel myself going under, I can drown in his kisses, I thought, *but this is where I want to be and it's safe.* We let go of each other, and he squeezed me one more time before we headed back. I pushed Nicole out of my mind and settled into his shoulder as we walked, our strides matching perfectly. I pictured us walking around campus in the fall, fooling around on the hill at lunchtime, and giving each other quick kisses in the hall.

When we got back to the fire, he tugged my ponytail. Then he was gone in the crowd, and I walked back on the causeway alone, not once thinking about the incoming tide.