

CHAPTER 3



“There’s no we, Miss P,” Mackenzie said. “This has taken a dangerous turn. We can’t bring you into this.”

“Nonsense.” Miss P stiffened. “I can take care of myself. No small-minded idiot is going to scare me.”

Miss P had been facing down classrooms of teenagers for more years than Mackenzie was alive. Mac and Sam could use her strength and positive attitude if nothing else.

“If I looked up backbone in the dictionary, your name would be there, Miss P.” Mackenzie smiled at her.

“I’m taking that as a compliment,” Miss Freebody’s brow furrowed.

“It is.”

“We should inform the police about this.” Sam headed for her office. “I’m calling my brother.”

Mac’s stomach flipped. Jake was two years older than Mac. When she tried to analyze her reaction to him, she couldn’t figure it out. He wasn’t her usual type. But then, what was her type?

The first guy she’d been involved with was in college. A

long-haired, bearded hippie with a million-dollar name. Nathaniel Xander something. And the last guy she'd been attracted to turned out to be a thief nicknamed Prince Charming.

Jake Sanders wasn't a looker like Prince Charming, nor did he have a beard like Nate. His was a friendly face with a nose that had been broken when he was a kid. A genuine smile that he used a lot and showed teeth left to grow without the restriction of braces.

He wasn't a hunk like Samantha's husband, Alan, who worked as a personal trainer. Mac called *him* Macho Man.

But sometimes when Jake touched her ... there was just something about him. Jake possessed a natural assuredness. Not too full of himself and yet sure of his abilities. Women were drawn to him. But he remained single. Although she'd heard rumors about his dating life. She'd never had the guts to ask Sam if they were true.

Mac had thought about what it would be like to date Jake herself. But what if it didn't work out? He was Sam's brother, and she didn't want to jeopardize her relationship with her partner and friend. Mama always said, "Nothing is worth a broken relationship." Best to let that remain a dream. Besides, Jake never gave her any sign that he was interested in her at all, and she had no wish to become another of his trophies.

"Jake was already on his way. He's got something he wants to talk to us about." Sam walked over to the broken window. "We'll need to get this fixed after he sees it."

"We should take pictures ourselves." Miss Freebody pushed to her feet. "Shall I?"

"Be my guest."

A brisk knock sounded at the door before it opened. "Hello, you—" Detective Jake Sanders took off his hat. "Miss Freebody. I didn't know you were here."

“I forgot to mention that Miss P will be helping us on the case.” Sam rushed over to greet her brother. “She’s had forensics experience.”

“I see.” Jake cocked his head at his sister and mouthed, “Miss P?”

Sam nodded.

“Let’s sit so I can get statements from all of you.” Jake’s eyes found Mackenzie’s, a slight smile on his lips. He nodded his welcome. “We’ll start with Mackenzie.”

A lump formed in her throat, and she went in search of a glass of water.

JAKE FOCUSED on his notes as Mackenzie spoke. If he didn’t, he wouldn’t hear a word she said. He’d be too busy following the movement of her lips and wondering what they would feel like on his. It was getting more difficult to be around her. Harder to hide his attraction to her.

Mac had shown no interest in him, and the last thing he wanted was to cause trouble between her and his sister. What if he asked Mac on a date, and it didn’t work out? Sam told him she’d been hurt once before. He didn’t want to cause her additional pain. No. Best to leave it the way it was. Even if it meant he had to stop coming around and never see Mac again.

“Thanks.” He glanced at his watch. “Let’s break for lunch. I’ll see if I can get some forensics guys in so you can get your window fixed.”

“Detective, I could do the fingerprinting on the rock and the letter if you are amenable to that,” Miss Freebody said. “I have kept up my certification and have a small lab in my home.”

“Thank you for offering, but I’d have to run that by my chief first.”

“Of course.” She clasped her hands on the table and gave him an expectant look.

“Jake,” Sam said. “I think she’s waiting for you to make the call?”

“Gotcha.” Jake pulled his cell from his pocket and walked into Sam’s office. “Chief? I’ve got a situation here.”

“What now?”

“Miss Freebody is here—”

“That woman is still breathing air?”

“Yes, sir, and she claims to be a certified forensics specialist.” Jake glanced at the closed door between him and the women. “She wants to do the fingerprinting on the rock and the note.”

“I believe she could do anything she put her mind to. Give her the okay. Besides, no use wasting the state’s time and money on a prank.”

“So, no forensics?”

“No.”

“Thanks, Chief.”

When he returned, a grin split his face. “It seems my chief knows you, Miss P. Lawrence Baker?”

“Yes, Lawrence. He was a good student. Although prone to daydreaming.”

“He said he trusts you to do the fingerprinting on the rock and the note. He doesn’t see the need to bother with forensics since someone threw the rock from the street, but I’ll arrange to get your window patched until you can order a new one.” Jake rubbed his hands together. “What do you ladies want from Sonic? My treat.”

MAC DOVE into her meal like it was her last. She always ate when she was nervous—and being in the presence of Sam’s brother made her very nervous. But, come to think of it, she ate when she was happy or sad—she just ate. How Mac stayed slim was one of God’s many mysteries that she thanked Him for daily.

“What did you want to talk to us about?” Sam swallowed and glanced across the table at her brother.

“I almost forgot.” Jake wiped his hands and left. When he returned, he laid a file on the table. “I’d like you two to look into a string of burglaries we’ve been having along the river.”

“Burglaries?” Mac pushed her half-eaten sandwich away. “Why haven’t we heard about them before?”

Jake glanced at her. Her hunger spiked, and she pulled her food toward her again.

“We worked hard to keep them quiet,” he said. “We thought we’d get a quick arrest, but nothing so far. That’s when I asked to bring you guys into it.”

“How many have there been?” Sam pulled the file in front of her.

“Four so far. In four different cities, but all of them along the river.”

“We’re swamped trying to find—” Mac said.

“We’ll look at it.” Sam shot Mac *The Look*. “But I can’t promise you anything, bro.”

“That’s all I ask.” Jake smiled all around. “Ladies, it’s been a pleasure. Duty calls.”

Mac went in search of a cookie.

MACKENZIE STARED at her computer screen. Jake was gone, and she was stuffed. Miss P hurried home after lunch to begin work

on the rock and the letter. All was quiet except for the clicking of Sam's nails on her keyboard.

A bang on the door brought Mac to her feet, heart pounding in her throat. She grabbed her revolver, held it at her side, and stood inside the closed door.

"Who is it?"

"Leonard Reese. I come to fix your window."

Mac pulled the door open. "I thought you were a mechanic."

"I do handyman stuff on the side." Reese scuffed his feet on the rug inside the door.

Mac suppressed a giggle as she remembered Miss P's comment about Leonard being good with his hands.

"I brought some plywood for now. You'll have to order a window."

"Thanks." Mac waved toward her office. "I'll be working."

Leonard's face paled. She forgot. She still held her revolver in her hand.

"Sorry. We're a little jumpy around here right now."

"Okay."

But he didn't sound okay. He sounded like a man who wanted to finish his job and get out of there.

"Hi, Leonard." Sam popped her head out of her office.

He gave her a weak smile and got to work, nailing the plywood into place with vigor.

Mac laid her revolver next to her computer and returned to her search. So many hotels in Kansas City. She'd started with those close to the train station and worked her way out in a circle. But no luck so far.

If Eleanor had checked in with someone else, Mac would never find it. Or if someone had picked her up and taken her to their home ... the options were endless. Mac could ask Connor

if Eleanor had a friend in Kansas City. She wouldn't have to tell him why she was asking.

And she could use some exercise. She picked up her phone.

“Connor, it's Mackenzie Love. Are you free? Feel like a walk in Rennick Park?”