

## PROLOGUE

AS KENDRA STUMBLES onto her residence porch, she tries to recall how much she had to drink. The answer should be easy. Two beers consumed over two hours, which should not make her drunk. The second one had been a black velvet, combining beer and wine—totally Yolanda’s fault for ordering a round—but still, that wouldn’t even put Kendra over the legal driving limit. Not that driving matters in Haven’s Rock, where there are no cars. The point is that two drinks over two hours should not have her tripping over her own feet.

The problem, Kendra decides, is that even two beers is more than she’s had since college. Kendra’s idea of going “out drinking” means she goes out and has a drink. One. She knows most people would blame this on her growing up Indigenous in the Canadian north. But, really, it’s just Kendra. She doesn’t mind a beer, but she’s just as happy with a soda. Unfortunately, there is no soda in Haven’s Rock.

Kendra stands on the porch and blinks. It’s past midnight and pitch-dark and freaking cold. Okay, she’s being a wimp about the cold. Haven’s Rock might be in the Yukon, but she grew up at a higher latitude, and for late March, they’ve actually been having a warm spell. Tonight, though, a fierce north wind slices right through her sweatshirt.

Sweatshirt? Where's her parka? It might be a "warm spell" but it's still hovering around zero.

Did she leave her parka in the Roc? Why would she do that?

Because she's drunk.

Okay, but why is she on the residence porch instead of getting her ass inside where it's warm?

Right. The bathroom situation.

The residence has three toilets, perfectly reasonable for a building designed to house a couple of dozen people. Kendra should know. During town construction, she'd been hired for her unique combination of talents—a social worker with extensive experience plumbing in a northern climate. They needed the plumber part and wanted someone to help with any psychological effects of the isolation. That was also why she'd been offered long-term employment after construction was done. Because a town with an off-grid sanitation system needs an on-site plumber, and a town this unique needs all the mental-health experts they can get.

Why is she thinking about her job right now?

Right. Because she needs to pee and there are no available toilets because residents flushed nonflushable items down *two* of them. The fixes require replacement parts. She'd also ordered *extra* replacement parts for sanitation in a town with people accustomed to being able to flush whatever crap they wanted.

Damn it, she really needs to pee, and the Roc just closed, and she wasn't fast enough getting back to snag a toilet, so now she's left staring into the forest and considering her options.

Dropping her trousers in freezing weather should not be one of those options. Especially in a pitch-black forest. But it won't be the first time she's done it. When you head out on the land to hunt, you don't haul along a chemical toilet.

Still . . .

She should just wait for a stall to be free. How long can it take?

A moment later, Kendra finds herself on the edge of the forest and stops short. How did she get here? She was just on the deck, thinking she should wait it out.

*Something's wrong.*

She shakes off the internal whisper. She's drunk and not accustomed to being in that state.

*You shouldn't be blacking out after two drinks.*

She didn't black out. She's just confused, and as long as the forest is right there, she might as well use it.

She takes two steps, and her foot slides in the melting snow. As she's righting herself, she hears a crackle behind her, like a boot breaking through a skin of ice.

Kendra spins, and her foot slides right out from under her, and she collapses into the wet snow and—

She's on her feet again. She goes still and looks around.

Did she imagine falling?

No, there's the skid mark from her boot and the handprint from where she landed. When she clenches her fist, her fingers are wet.

Wait, where are her gloves?

Why is she outside without gloves or a parka, like some newbie to the north, thinking "I'm only walking a hundred feet"?

Is it the booze, making her not feel the cold?

She remembers when she was in college, studying the "starlight tours" in Saskatoon, where police would drive drunk Indigenous men past the town limits and leave them there, often improperly dressed for the weather. Three froze to death.

She shivers and shakes her head sharply. Her brain is zipping all over the place, and she needs to . . .

What did she need to do again?

Her aching bladder reminds her, but when she looks at the forest, something else nudges at the back of her mind.

She heard something. That's why she stumbled.

She peers around.

No one's out here, and even if there were, it'd just be someone heading home from the Roc.

Why isn't she seeing people heading home from the Roc? She'd left at closing, and there'd still been others behind her.

She checks her watch.

Past *twelve-thirty*? How is that possible? The bar closed at midnight. Her watch must be wrong. Even if it's not, hearing someone out

at one isn't a cause for alarm in Haven's Rock. They'd just be heading to or from a lover's bed, the lucky—

Wait. That's why she'd had a second drink. She'd been flying high because one of the new residents, Tish, has been making what seems like a concerted effort to "bump" into Kendra as often as possible. Kendra thought she might catch the right vibes, but also feared that after nearly a year of celibacy, she was seeing what she wanted to see.

Damn it, her brain is like a terrier tonight, chasing everything that runs across its path. Forget this nonsense. By now, there has to be an empty stall in the bathroom.

Kendra takes a step toward the residence, and the next thing she knows, she's flat on her back with no idea how she got there. She pushes to her feet.

Something is definitely wrong. Two drinks do not cause blackouts.

Is she having an allergic reaction?

In college, her first thought would be that someone slipped something into her drink. But this isn't college, and she didn't just walk out of a bar full of strangers. There are seventy people in Haven's Rock. Dose a woman here, and you'll get caught.

Hell, it's not even a remote worksite filled with guys who might think that's a perfectly fine way to get laid, especially if the woman you're eyeing "claims" she's not into men. Kendra had narrowly avoided that once on a remote job, saved by a guy who'd caught the offender tipping something into her drink. It's one reason Kendra had joined Yolanda's construction team—it was seventy-five percent female. Which, to be honest, made her happy in more ways than one.

Kendra smiles . . . and then she remembers what originally prompted that memory and the smile evaporates.

*Was she dosed in the Roc?*

No, she was just arguing that she couldn't have been.

Stop thinking. Start moving. Get her ass inside and lock her damn door—

Crunch.

Kendra wheels just as something slams into her back, and her

first and only thought is *This is it*. Someone hit her from behind, and now, instead of spinning and slugging them, she'll slip and fall. Or she'll just black out. Because someone put something into her drink, and that is not fair.

It's not fucking fair.

At least give her a chance to fight. She isn't very good at it, and she isn't big or strong enough to power through, but at least give her a literal fighting chance.

She doesn't slip, though. Or black out. She even manages to half spin before another blow comes. This one knocks her face-first into the snow. She manages to get one hand down in the slush, ready to push up, when her attacker grabs her feet and yanks so hard that she face-plants in the snow again. She tries to flip over, but she's being dragged.

Someone is dragging her into the forest.

Scream!

She opens her mouth, but time jumps again, and now she's in the forest and there's a hand over her mouth.

Bite! Kick! Scream!

She bites as hard as she can and clamps down on a wool glove. She kicks backward and somehow—*somehow*—her foot actually makes contact. Her attacker grunts, and the grip on her mouth slips, and she screams. She screams with everything she has, and from the town, a voice answers.

She doesn't know what the voice says. It's just a voice, alarmed, and her attacker drops her. They try to grab her again, catching her by the sweatshirt, but she lunges free and runs.

There's a figure up ahead. She can't quite make it out, but someone's running her way, and she waves frantically and then her foot slides and she goes down, and—

Darkness.

A FIST POUNDS on our chalet door. I lift my head to squint at the clock. 1:16.

A knock in the wee hours of the morning is never good.

Beside me, Dalton makes a noise that could be a curse or could just be a still-half-asleep grunt.

"I'll go see what it is," I say, patting his arm as I rise.

He starts making another sound, one that might be sleepy acceptance. Then he bolts upright.

"No!" he says, as if I've suggested running into a burning building. "You stay. I've got this."

"I'm already out of bed."

"Then get back in it."

In the moonlight I can see Storm, our Newfoundland, look from one of us to the other. Then she sighs.

"Sorry, pup," I say, patting her with my foot. "He's a little weird these days. I have no idea why."

"For the same reason you're petting the dog with your foot instead of bending down to use your hand." Dalton points at the cause of my inability to bend—my eight-months-pregnant belly. Which, yes, is the same reason he's leaping out of bed to answer the door instead of just gratefully staying where it's warm.

"I'm fine," I say. "Even April's long list of 'things Casey can't do' does not include answering doors."

“Yeah, but if it doesn’t include ‘going down the stairs in the middle of the night,’ it should.”

I could point out that going down a flight of stairs while sleepy is always dangerous, and no more so when heavily pregnant, but when we started this journey, I knew I was going to have to deal with Dalton’s protective streak. Or, more accurately, deal with him using my pregnancy as an excuse to indulge his protective streak.

Also, granted, it’s not purely indulgence. Old damage to my uterus means I could have issues. In eight months, I’ve had two scares, one where I’d been certain I’d miscarry, and one a month ago, where there was some concern I’d gone into early labor. Being seven months along meant it would have been a premature birth. Not a huge problem . . . if I were living down south with access to proper preemie care.

Dalton had been ready to take me to Vancouver so we could spend my last two months in an apartment, preferably one close enough to a hospital that he could carry me there in an emergency. My sister had been on his side . . . because as the local doctor, she’s the one who’d need to deal with premature birth, and she’s a neurosurgeon, not an obstetrician. Fortunately, my actual obstetrician convinced them both that I was fine where I was. In an emergency, Dalton could fly me to Whitehorse himself and she would come up to the hospital there.

So I understand if he’s fussing over me walking down the stairs. It isn’t as if we intentionally put ourselves in this position. It was an accidental pregnancy that we decided to continue while knowing the risks. And I decided to continue it while knowing he was going to freak out if anything went wrong, including false alarms.

Another pound on the door below.

“Stay here,” Dalton says, pointing at the bed.

When I glower, he says, “Keep her here,” to Storm. Then he leaves, and Storm heaves to her feet, walks three paces, and collapses in the doorway.

I turn my glower on her. “Traitor.”

She only lets out a slobbery sigh and watches me with all the patience of Nana in *Peter Pan*. Having a Newfoundland means I understand why Barrie chose one for his canine nanny. She’s the

sweetest and most patient dog imaginable, but also, if she's in that doorway, I am not getting out of this room.

Below, Dalton answers the front door.

"We have a problem," a voice says. "I know you aren't going to want Casey getting up at this hour, but I think she needs to take this one."

I scramble to get ready without even hearing my husband's probably profane response. It isn't that the caller sounds panicked or even stressed. The voice is perfectly calm with just the right hint of apology.

If I didn't know the speaker, I'd think that tone meant a very minor problem, an inconvenience and an annoyance that unfortunately did require my personal touch . . . such as our deputy being unable to access the gun locker because baby brain meant I misplaced the key again.

The speaker, though, is Sebastian.

Sebastian had been our youngest resident in Rockton, and at twenty-two, he's still the youngest adult resident in Haven's Rock. He came to Rockton because he's too infamous to live a normal life down south. At the age of eleven he killed his parents. He had his reasons, but no court would consider them a defense. If he *had* a defense, it's that he was an undiagnosed sociopath who thought this seemed a valid solution to the problem of rich parents who wouldn't let him attend school because it interfered with their social calendar. He served his time and while serving it, he dealt with his diagnosis and continues to deal with it. He's not a serial killer. He has no interest in hurting anyone. He just needed to understand that murder is not a valid problem-solving strategy.

All this means it's really hard to rattle Sebastian. Maybe impossible. He could stumble over a dead body, and unless it's someone he cares about, his response would be purely practical. Go find someone to deal with it.

I dress and tell Storm to move. Her eyes roll up to meet mine, her disapproval clear, but she's technically my dog, and she knows it. She lumbers to her feet and down the stairs.

I expect Dalton to spot her and tell me he can handle this, but



before Storm's even down the stairs, he's at the bottom, looking up, his expression grim.

"You do need to handle this," he says.

"What happened?"

Sebastian pops in behind him. "Kendra was attacked. She's fine—unhurt, that is. But it seems . . . Well, it looks as if someone dosed her in the Roc and dragged her into the woods."

"Dragged—"

He lifts his hands. "They didn't do anything to her. She got away in time. But, yeah, that's why I, uh, thought you should come. Because it looks as if they planned to . . ."

He trails off, and genuine emotion flashes over his face. He likes Kendra, and that flash is undiluted anger. He reins it in fast.

"I thought of going after them, but that didn't seem like a good idea. So I helped Kendra instead."

"Thank you. Where is she?"

"At the clinic with your sister."



SEXUAL ASSAULT HAD ALWAYS BEEN a serious concern in Rockton. The population had been three-quarters male with no couples allowed, and as law enforcement, we'd been dealing with the potentially explosive situation of women escaping victimization and men who could be victimizers snuck in under a cover story. Explosive and completely unacceptable, but Dalton's only option had been solid policing and the strictest of penalties. Oh, and there was a brothel—women residents were allowed to sell sex. Isabel and I had endless disagreements over that, the feminist politics of consensual sex work versus the fact that it presupposed men needed that outlet or there'd be trouble. Yep, it was complicated.

Haven's Rock has no sex trade. Unless you count Gunnar, but he's free, so there's no "trade" involved. We allow couples, and we have a mixed group of men and women and sexual orientations, so . . . Well, if you want sex and you aren't an asshole about it, you can probably get it, especially if you're a straight woman because . . . Gunnar.

Now, as a cop, I'm the first to say that sexual assault is not always about sex. The type that *is* about sex is the sort that involves coercion and dubious consent, where someone has manipulated a situation to get what they want. Drugging a woman in the Roc could be that sort or it could be the other sort, where it's about control and violence.

Coercion sexual assault is the most likely scenario, whether it's Rockton or Haven's Rock. One would hope that anyone driven to drag a resident into the forest would realize he was going to get caught. We have seventy people in Haven's Rock and a professional police force of three.

But if you've convinced yourself that you just "talked her into it," you don't see a crime. Even if drugs are involved, it's their word against yours, and besides, you didn't give them any drugs and so you thought it was consensual sex. Really.

If Kendra was attacked and possibly dosed, there is no way I'm turning this over to Dalton and Anders, as I have—grudgingly—with most of my late-pregnancy workload. I absolutely trust both of them to treat it with all due gravity and respect, and if I weren't here, they could handle it. But I am here.

The clinic front door is unlocked. That's the only way I know April is inside, because the windows are shuttered, blinds drawn. To avoid giving the town away at night, all of the buildings have been designed to be as close to dark as possible, even if someone has a light on, because in the dead of winter, you can't expect people to be in bed by four when the sun sets.

I still tap on the door as I open it. Inside, it remains dark, meaning my sister unlocked the front door but didn't turn on the waiting-area light. I don't make it to the next door before it's yanked open.

The first time Dalton ever saw April, he knew she was my sister. Of course, siblings often resemble each other. It's genetics. But I grew up hearing how different we looked, and I realize now that what people really meant was that I have distinctive features that favor our Chinese-Filipino mother, and April does not, and by "distinctive features" I really mean just eye shape and skin tone. It only takes that, though, for me to look Asian and her to look white.

Get beyond that, and it's very obvious that we're sisters, with the same straight dark hair, heart-shaped face and cheekbones. But those differences are one of many things that drove a wedge between us growing up, the other main one being April's previously undiagnosed place on the autism spectrum.

April steps out, flipping on the light and closing the door as she glares at me. "What are you doing here?"

I make a show of looking around. "Have I lost clinic-visit privileges? Or sister-visit privileges?"

"Both if it's one in the morning. I thought Eric was handling all this for you." Her glare moves to my shoulder and hardens to annoyance when Dalton isn't there to receive it. The fact that she's glaring at all tells me she's out of sorts. When it comes to irritating April, Dalton gets the free pass that her little sister never does.

"April?" I motion toward the door and for her to make sure her voice is lowered so Kendra can't hear.

Her eyes narrow.

"Considering the nature of the case," I say, "I'm going to be here."

"She was not sexually assaulted. Nor is it clear that was her attacker's intention. If it were, I would have asked you to be here myself."

"Even if the motivation is unclear but she *was* dosed, that could mean other residents have already been dosed and assaulted."

"No one has come to me with such concerns."

"But . . ." I gentle my tone. "If they were dosed, they may not be aware that what happened was nonconsensual. Or they may not come to the doctor unless there was . . . damage."

"Oh." She colors a little. "Yes, of course. I had not considered that."

"May I see your patient, April?"

She nods. Then she pauses, and visibly girds herself before saying, "You were right to come."

I could tease her about finding that so hard to admit, but it is hard. Being wrong upsets her. It feels like failure.

April leads me into the examination room, where Kendra sits cross-legged on the table.

“Lie down,” April says. “You have been drugged and should not attempt sitting.”

Kendra salutes and stretches out, arms folded over her chest like a corpse. “Can I at least get a pillow?”

I grab two from the next room, and Kendra flips onto her side, hugging one pillow as she props onto her arm.

“I will be in my office,” April says.

When April’s gone, Kendra tells me her story. She’d gone to the Roc with Yolanda. Anders and Gunnar had joined them for a while. Then Kendra had invited Lynn over, and Gunnar slipped off, with Anders following shortly after.

Kendra had two drinks, which was one past her norm, so when she’d felt tipsy after leaving, she blamed the extra booze. The problem with being intoxicated—by booze or drugs—is that your brain isn’t working well enough to assess whether “I just had too much to drink” is a valid explanation for what you’re experiencing.

The memory holes start after Yolanda left shortly before closing. Kendra stayed until the end with Lynn—having invited the other woman to join them, she didn’t want to abandon her. The next thing Kendra remembers is being on the deck of her residence, having apparently gone in and found the toilets occupied.

Unable to wait for a toilet, she’d headed for the woods. Time stutters there, as if she’d been blacking out. Someone attacked her, knocking her down and dragging her into the forest. She managed to scream, which is when Sebastian heard her—he’d been taking his dog, Raoul, for a bedtime walk. Sebastian came running, which scared off Kendra’s attacker.

“I didn’t see who grabbed me,” Kendra says. “I can’t even say for sure it was a man.” She fusses with the pillows. “I know I might have been drugged, but I still can’t believe I didn’t take two seconds to look at who had me.”

“Because you were fighting for your life, not thinking about making an ID. No one is going to wish you’d taken that risk to catch this person. That’s my job.”

Her eyes fill. “Thank you. I’m hoping I did catch a glimpse, and it’ll come to me later.”

I squeeze her hand. “Maybe it will, and if I’m a halfway decent

detective, I'll have already caught whoever attacked you." I drop my voice. "While people think eyewitness accounts are the best kind of proof, they're actually one of the least reliable."

Kendra nods. "When I was doing social work, I had two clients who'd been wrongfully incarcerated because the victim saw an Indigenous person and ID'd them."

"Here it might seem as if it'd be harder to get it wrong, but add drugs into the mix, and you could end up accidentally ID'ing the last person you saw at the bar. Or even Sebastian."

Her smile softens. "Who is the one person I know did *not* attack me. I'm so grateful he was out there. He's proof that therapy can work, whatever someone's condition."

Kendra knows Sebastian's diagnosis. He insists on that for all staff, partly because he thinks they deserve to know and partly to expand his network of "monitors"; having people watching him helps compensate for what he lacks—the inner voice that tells us things we shouldn't do.

"Eric's talking to Sebastian now," I say, "and getting a look at the site to see whether he can pick up a trail."

"I'm sure you want to be out there getting a look yourself. My questioning can wait. The crime scene cannot."

"It'll be fine."

"So will I." She meets my gaze. "I'm shook, but I'm okay."

When she sees my expression, she sighs. "Yes, there are nightmares in my future, and I probably won't be drinking for a while . . . or peeing in the woods. But you know what I mean. Go dive into my crime scene, Casey. Find whoever did this before they try again. That's my real concern right now. That they'll try again with another woman . . . and there won't be a Sebastian to save her."