

Guys, Lies & Alibis

LANGDON PREP #4

Chapter 1

The parking lot behind the gym is almost empty now, everyone gone home or off somewhere to celebrate. I've never been on campus this late and I'm surprised how quiet it is, even though we're just a few blocks west of Cherry Creek. The restaurants and bars over there must be jumping right now, but you wouldn't know it from where I stand. When the school was built, someone smart ringed the property with a thick stand of juniper and cottonwood trees, growing a green fortress around the gray stone buildings. Sixty years later, it not only looks like some bucolic ivy league school in the middle of the city, it sounds like one.

Still, it's a little *too* quiet. I suppose rich people don't party as loudly as they do in my neighborhood. Saturday night on Center Street is full of traffic noise, loud music, police sirens, and an argument or two that will escalate into a fistfight—or worse—before the night is over. Out here, I'm like the guy in

the episode of *Twilight Zone* where he realizes he's the last person on earth. Just twenty minutes ago, I was part of the frenzied riot of people making their way from the bleachers to the exit, chanting, "*Langdon Knights brought the fight!*" I can still hear them in my head, so I add my own voice, out loud. It helps shake the weird I'm-all-alone feeling that came over me as I watched the last car turn out of the lot.

It works. By the time the subjects of the chant burst through the gym doors, still charged from the game, the strange feeling has gone and I'm as pumped as they are, maybe more. We're moving on to the Sweet 16 round of the high school playoffs, not that anyone expected otherwise from the Knights. What does surprise me—and anyone who knows me—is that I, Chanti Evans, hater of all things sport, have become a basketball groupie.

It helps that my boyfriend is the star of the team, and that isn't just my biased opinion. Right now, he's being carried on the shoulders of his teammates, who voted him game MVP. Marco is the shortest player at nearly six feet, so my first reaction is to run up and demand they put him down because that's a hell a long way to fall, but I don't. I'm trying hard not to be *that* girl. It's bad enough I'm the only girlfriend hanging out in the lot in subfreezing weather, leaning against her boyfriend's car. In my defense, the other girlfriends have their own cars and are probably waiting somewhere else for their players. Somewhere warm. With food and hot chocolate.

After another round of reminding each other of their awesomeness, the team finally breaks up.

Marco comes over and before he says anything, kisses me. That earns him a whistle or two from the guys. One of them has to make it nasty and yell out, *Whipped*. It's too late. I'm already *that* girl.

"I was beginning to suspect we spend too much time together, and now I know it's true if that's what they're calling you."

"They're just jealous, and you must be freezing," Marco says, unlocking the car doors. "I would have given you my keys if I'd known we'd be that long. Coach gave one of his *we're better than that* speeches."

"But you guys won. And by 'you guys,' I really mean *you*. That three-pointer just before the buzzer was incredible."

"It never should have gotten that close. It was only the second round of play-offs and Hart Academy isn't that good."

I can think of all kinds of pep-talky things to say, but this isn't my first rodeo. After being with Marco through part of football season and all of basketball, I know he's replaying the game in his head right now. No matter how well he does, he's thinking about what he didn't do right. Marco is pretty laid back about most things, which is why he's so good for me because I'm laid back about nothing, but when it comes to sports, he's got a perfectionist streak. So I stay quiet while he joins the line of cars making its way from the gym parking lot to the school's main entrance.

The procession of Porsches, Escalades, and BMWs, one with a custom paint job in Langdon Prep red, would make a perfect child's game of

Which one doesn't fit? Marco's 1985 Grand Prix, with a custom paint job in Bondo gray, would be the winning answer. As we leave the campus and head down the hill into Cherry Creek—which is congested and bustling just as I'd suspected—we pass the corner where I usually catch RTD, the city bus, and I'm grateful for Marco's hoopdie. If nothing else, the heater is always warm and I don't have to worry about a drunk sitting next to me when I make the cross-town transfer to Denver Heights.

I don't say another word until we're halfway home, which for me is a feat, when I decide he's had enough quiet time.

"Okay, time's up. No more obsessing about the game. The team seemed pretty happy about your performance, even if Coach Rickford wasn't."

"They're just glad we advanced to the next round. I care *how* we get there."

"But right now we're going to celebrate that you did. Anywhere you want to go, my treat," I say, checking my wallet. "Well, anywhere we can eat for under twenty-three dollars . . . and fifty-eight cents."

"I'm not really in the mood—"

I don't know if he really isn't in the mood because he thinks winning a game with a buzzer-beater shot truly is the worst thing in the world, or if he's broke and doesn't want me paying. Marco's been talking about being broke and needing a job lately, so that might be the real story. It turns out my perfect, forward-thinking boyfriend is as old-school as every other guy when it comes to his girl buying. But I'm not having it, and I'm hungry.

“Don’t even try it. We’re at least getting dinner at Tastee Treets. Our last three dates have been me watching you play ball in Heights Park pick-up games.”

“You’re saying that hasn’t been as good for you as it was for me?”

Marco’s smiling now and folds away the armrest he usually leans on, a signal for me to move closer and I do, snuggling under the arm he’s put around my shoulders. I’m pretty sure the basketball segment of tonight’s program is over. Score one for Chanti.

Suddenly the car is full of light because the driver behind us switches on his high beams. Now he’s flashing them.

“Where did he come from?”

I admit to being a little distracted a second ago, but I’m never *that* distracted, even by Marco. I know for sure the road behind us was dark until now.

“What’s his problem? We’re the only cars on the road. He could just pass if he’s in that much of a hurry.”

As if the impatient driver hears Marco, the car moves to the left, crossing the solid yellow line and quickly overtaking the Grand Prix. Just as the car passes us, a blob of orange explodes across the windshield. Marco turns on the wipers, which only makes the blob grow. A second later, I don’t need a clear windshield to know Marco is no longer following the road. We’re spinning out of control.

Also by Kimberly Reid

Langdon Prep Series (in order)

*My Own Worst Frenemy
Creeping with the Enemy
Sweet 16 to Life*