

Chapter 4

Nicky (Nicky's Tires)

I woke up to find that snow had blanketed the city overnight. It was mid-January, after all. While ten inches of snow does not stop the world for the people of Minnesota, I was terrified of driving in it, especially with four bald tires. Thankfully, my paid time off at work had just been renewed, so I did not hesitate for one moment to use one of those days. It was also a great opportunity to get some much-deserved rest. Between school, my job, the farm project, and the fashion show, I was exhausted. All of it was beginning to take a toll on my body and mind.

My phone rang, and when I saw who it was, I couldn't decide whether to answer or just let it go to voice mail. It was him again! *Either this man is desperate or he really likes me*, I said to myself.

"Hello?"

"Hi, Nicky. How are you?"

"I'm fine," I said. "How are you?"

"I decided to try your cell after leaving a message on your voice mail at the bank," Roderick said.

"Yeah, I stayed home because my tires are bad. I'm afraid to drive in the snow."

"Aw, you are a Minnesotan," he said playfully. "A little snow shouldn't scare you."

"I had an accident a few weeks ago—my car did a one-eighty on Highway 169," I said. "I was very lucky that the cars behind me were able to stop on time and avoid what could have been a deadly accident. By the time my car stopped, I was nose-to-nose with three other cars. That's when I realized that all four of my tires are bad, but I can't afford new ones right now."

"Have you called any tire stores?" Roderick asked.

"Well, I called a few places, and they are asking over five hundred dollars for four new tires. That's much more than I can put up for tires at this time."

"Where do you live, Nicky?"

"I live off Highway 10. in Anoka, Why do you ask?"

"There's a place off Highway 10. that might be near you, where you can get them for less than that," he said.

"Oh really? Where off Highway 10. is this place?"

"It's less than five minutes from the Anoka hospital."

"Do you think I can get at least two tires for, say, one hundred and fifty dollars or less?"

"Yes, I do," he said. "I can take you there, if you'd like."

"That sounds great," I said, feeling like a lightbulb had just turn on inside me. "Okay, I'll get dressed. How soon can you get here?"

"How about sometime around noon?"

"Noon sounds good," I said. "I live at 200. Sunshine Road, in Anoka. Would you like directions to my place?"

"I can get directions from MapQuest," he said. "And I know that area very well, anyway. I meet some clients at the hospital in Anoka at least once a month."

"Oh, okay, what type of work do you do, Roderick?"

"I'm a social worker."

"I see. All right, well, I'll see you when you get here then." I said, and I hung up the phone. *Thank God, I thought. This man may be a godsend after all!*

Roderick arrived at my place around 12:30. that afternoon. I met him in the parking lot. We decided he would drive my car and I would drive his small blue Dodge, not the red minivan. He took me to Tire Castle, which was about five minutes away, just as he had said. Roderick went up to the service counter. "Hi," he said. "We are looking for a set of tires for a 2.0.0.5. Toyota Corolla. How much are your best all-season tires, including service?"

"What?" I asked, thinking, *What is he doing? I can't afford that!*

When I gave him the evil eye, he said, "Let's just find out how much they will cost." The clerk calculated the price of the tires and service—about eight hundred dollars. "What's your next-best price?" Roderick asked.

"That would be six hundred dollars," the clerk said.

"Okay, let's do it," Roderick said, and the clerk started walking the order over to the garage.

I was stunned. *Did he just offer to pay for my tires without asking me? Why is he doing that for me? And then it hit me. Oh my God! He wants me to have sex with him!* I waved a hand at the clerk, signaling him back into the lobby. "Sorry, but we will not be able to do that at this time. We'll come back!"

Roderick pulled me outside. "I'm sorry if I offended you, but you missed work today because of your tires. I just wanted to help," he said.

"But I can't afford to pay you back, Roderick!"

Standing close to me and with a warm smile, he said, "Don't worry. You do not have to pay me back, and there are no strings attached."

The last time I heard that, I ended up engaged to Frankenstein Junior, I thought.

"Nicky, I help a lot of people in this community, and I never ask for anything in return. Please accept my offer," he said.

“I want you to understand that if I do accept your offer, it will not change our relationship,” I told him.

“You have my word that this relationship will only be what you want it to be, Nicky.”

“All right, then, fine,” I said. “Tell him to do it. And thank you!”

While the tires were being replaced, we went to a nearby pancake house. We settled into a booth, and Roderick looked up from his menu. “You still don’t seem happy, Nicky,” he said. “What’s wrong?”

I sighed. “I don’t want to seem ungrateful, but I’ve been here before. Someone else told me once that there were no strings attached, and there ended up being many strings. I must admit that it’s nice to have someone who takes care of things. But you are a married man. Somehow, even accepting this from you seems wrong.”

“I understand how you feel, Nicky. And I will not do anything against your will—although I will be very honest with you, my attraction to you is very strong. I feel privileged being in your presence. I want you in my life, but I also respect your position, and I want you to know that I will not do anything to violate the privilege of having you as a friend. So, please relax, okay?”

“All right,” I said, nodding. His words were reassuring, so I allowed myself to lighten up. We had lunch, and when we got back to Tire Castle, my car was ready. Roderick told me that he worked for the county and had some flexibility at his job, but he needed to get back to work. I thanked him once again, and we went our separate ways.