

# All the Munchies

By Catherine Beck

*Note: "All the Munchies" takes place a few months after the events of Leah's Perfect Christmas. While you don't need to have read the novella to enjoy Maddie's adventures here, you may enjoy going back to it to meet the rest of Maddie's family!*

"Hey there, a new face! First weekend?"

Maddie finished unsealing the pickle barrel and then looked up. The dude at the next food stand leaned against his table, smiling at her. He had artfully tousled hair and a pre-faded obscure band t-shirt that had been bought off a website. Basically, he was wearing the uniform for the average Williamsburg white guy. He was certainly cute enough to get his way often, with a crooked smile and perfectly straight teeth.

She smiled back, careful to aim for friendly rather than warm. If they were going to be food stand neighbors, it would be nice to be friends. But she wasn't stupid. Best to establish things right off. "Howdy, neighbor! Yeah, it's our Smorgasburg debut. My girlfriend's just getting our last pickle barrel." She put just enough emphasis on *girlfriend* to make it stick out a tiny bit, not enough to make it sound like a rebuke.

"Girlfriend, eh? Like, 'pillow-fight ladies-night out with the girlfriends' girlfriend, or like, girlfriend-girlfriend?" His eyebrows didn't actually waggle, but she could sense

the waggle hovering. Darn.

"Girlfriend-girlfriend," she said firmly. "So what's your specialty?"

He leaned back and spread his hands expansively. "Let me introduce to you the glory of Kung-Pow Bacon Bao, the best of East-Meets-West. Silky bun, spicy bacon sriracha, tangy bacon kimchi, all slathered on roast pork wrapped in bacon."

Holy cultural appropriation, Batman. She casually ventured, "Sriracha instead of Kung Pao sauce?"

He shrugged, all loose effortlessness. "Gotta ride the trend wave, babe. Kung Pao is so, what, 1980s? But the name rhymes."

Maddie was pretty sure that the sriracha stopped being trendy back in 2009. There had been a potato chip flavor, for God's sake. For that matter, she'd gotten over bacon years ago—sure, it was tasty, but it didn't actually need to be on everything. But if the tourists thought it was sufficiently Brooklyn-esque, who was she to argue?

"So what's your thing?" Bacon Dude leaned over. "Macarons? Cupcakes?"

She was leaning on a pickle barrel under a sign for pickles, having just declared her girlfriend was arriving with more pickles. She smiled sweetly. "CBD-infused pickles. Get the munchies, get the cure, all in one. Dose of stress relief and probiotics at the same time!"

"Duuuuude." A passerby sporting white-guy dreads and way too much patchouli oil, early for the lunch rush, eased his way into the conversation. Bacon Dude squashed a momentary look of annoyance. Potential customers were potential customers, and you didn't block someone else's sale. "Are there free samples?"

"No, afraid not!" Maddie smiled to keep the tone light. "But we sell them individually on a stick, or you can buy a pint or quart to take home. Our packaging is compostable corn-based plastic!"

"But these are, like, edibles?"

"They are edible, but they're not edibles," Maddie said carefully. "CBD oil has many beneficial properties, but it will not get you high and is not a regulated substance."

"Oh," the stoner said, looking downcast. Then he perked up. "Hey, do you have free samples?"

Oh dear. "Nope, sorry! You can buy them individually on a stick, or in a pint or quart to take home."

"Whoa, so I could, like, eat a whole quart at once?"

She wrinkled her nose. "I guess? That's a lot of vinegar at a go, your stomach might not like it."

"What if I, like, ate some with my," he held his pinched fingers to his lips and mimed puffing.

"They'd be delicious," Maddie promised.

"So hey, do you have any free samples?"

She wasn't sure if he was trying to run a scam or really was that high, but she'd spent enough time with college students and hanging out in Washington Square Park not to be thrown. In the exact same tone of voice, she repeated, "Nope, sorry! You can buy them individually on a stick, or in a pint or quart to take home."

"Far out." The neo-hippie drifted towards Bacon Dude. Maddie had never heard someone say 'far out' in actual conversation before, and wondered if maybe the guy had modeled his stoner persona on Shaggy from Scooby-Doo reruns.

Bacon Dude was looking at the stoner with trepidation, but Maddie could safely ignore his plight. She'd just caught sight of Kennedy.

Kennedy had never met a lesbian stereotype she didn't love, and she knew her marketing. Undercut, stompy boots, flannel shirt tied around her waist in deference to the day's early heat, she broadcast "Brooklyn queer" in a visual language that could be read by the most corn-fed tourist possible. Smorgasburg was a collection of food stalls originally centered at the Brooklyn Flea, although lately they'd been opening outposts across the city. It was Instagram heaven—a collection of trendy artisanal food stalls located in a park along the waterfront in the hippest neighborhood of Brooklyn. If you wanted photos of yourself posed with alcoholic popsicles or duck poutine with the Manhattan skyline behind you, you couldn't beat it. And the food was good enough to draw a wide mix—well-heeled Manhattanites, equally-prosperous but deliberately scruffier Brooklyn hipsters, old-time locals who scoffed at the prices and buzz-driven trends but still liked a good cupcake now and then, and of course, tourists from all over the world drawn by endless photos on social media.

"My knight in shining armor," Maddie called out affectionately.

"Darling goose girl," Kennedy replied with a bit of a grunt. It was an old running joke for them. Her parents had always called her "princess." Still did, actually, and expected the ladylike behavior that went with the name. Maddie's taste in knights had gone over about as poorly as she'd expected, although they'd come around. Sort of. The part where she opened up a food stall instead of either marrying an investment banker or at least becoming one herself had also gone over poorly. The thing was, Maddie had always identified better with the plucky peasant who got her "happily ever after" through cleverness and kindness than with the pretty princess in the tower. If she ended the story as a princess, fine, but she wanted to get there through her own hard work and decency.

Maddie grabbed her phone as her girlfriend expertly spun the last barrel into the place. The muscles of her shoulders bunched under her white tank top, gleaming in the sun. It was totally hot, and Maddie reveled in the familiar thrill that she'd get to take that top off later tonight. It was also a perfect Story for their Instagram. She captioned with a reminder to their followers to come visit their first day and posted.

"Got the 'Gram, kitten, or you need me to do that again?" Kennedy straightened, placing her hands on her lower back, and stretched back. Maddie watched

appreciatively. This sight, she'd keep to herself.

"Good on my side," Maddie said and checked her phone again. "Likes are already rolling in. Hopefully it'll drive some actual foot traffic."

"Need me to grab a couple of shots?"

"If you don't mind. I won't post until noon, but hopefully we'll be too busy at that point to get the shot."

She handed Kennedy the phone and placed her hands on top of the barrels. The off-the-shoulder ruffles of her yellow flowered sundress gave her an old-timey barmaid look. They'd tested four outfits with the barrels last week, trying to find the perfect image for their launch. The floppy straw hat wasn't totally necessary under their little tent, but it set off the sun-kissed beachy waves of Maddie's hair. Maddie loved fashion, and make-up, and everything femme, but she was also a canny enough businesswoman to understand how critical getting the right look would be to pulling in their audience. Kennedy took a dozen shots to choose from, but she did it quickly. She'd gotten a lot of practice, and they knew each other's angles by heart at this point.

"We still on for victory dinner with your brother tonight?" Kennedy asked as she switched to a new vantage point. At least her brother and his girlfriend were actually supportive, both of her relationship with Kennedy and of her business model.

"Let's not call it victory prematurely." Maddie laughed, a little nervous, a little excited. "Got something that'll work?"

"Yeah, that should do it."

"You want a couple shots of you together before stuff heats up?" Bacon Dude wandered over, having managed to finally shed the stoner. "I'm Chris, by the way."

"Nice to meet you, Chris." Kennedy stuck out a hand. "Kennedy. And you've met Maddie?"

"Yeah, we were just making friends," Chris said, smiling. That was a little too strong a statement, Maddie thought, but maybe she'd misjudged him. Not having to dig out the tripod would definitely be a help. "Here, look cute."

Kennedy needed no invitation to slip an arm around Maddie's waist. But she paused and glanced in surprise at Maddie when she felt the tension in her spine. Maddie gave a microscopic shake to her head and deliberately softened, leaning into Kennedy's shoulder as Chris clicked away.

"Give her a kiss," Chris encouraged. Maddie didn't like where this was going, but it would be a good picture. She smiled, looking away demurely as Kennedy kissed her cheek. Below the counter, Kennedy's hand stroked somewhere significantly less chaste, a promise for later. Maddie didn't give her the reaction she'd been expecting, though, not in front of Chris. Kennedy gave her another concerned glance—Maddie usually wasn't this shy about PDA. She'd explain when they didn't have an audience.

"Oh, you should get one biting a pickle," Chris exclaimed as if he'd just thought of it. There was no way he'd just thought of it. "That would be totally hot."

It was Kennedy's turn to stiffen with understanding. Again behind the stand, she patted Maddie's hip reassuringly. She'd gotten it now, and she'd follow Maddie's lead. Maddie relaxed, just a little.

"Thanks," Maddie said breezily, holding her hand out for her phone. "Not really our brand, though. You've been super helpful, these'll be great."

Chris wasn't quite done with her phone, though, and Maddie realized with a little horror that Kennedy had been shooting with the phone open and hadn't gone back to the lock screen before she'd handed it over.

"Here, I'll just text myself and then you'll have my number, neighbor," he said, handing the phone back with a wink.

Maybe it would be ok. Maybe he just wanted to be helpful. Or maybe she would have to block his ass.

Fortunately, before it could get any more creepy, a customer came over to the bao stand and the day began.

While the bacon bao rolled out fairly steadily, business at the pickle stand started slow. Maddie tried to remind herself that it was still early in the day, and most people weren't going to want pickles for breakfast. Finally, a fan of hers from Instagram showed up, gushing over the morning video. She walked off with three pints of pickles in assorted flavors. It was a good luck charm. Business started picking up, and soon, they were selling at a brisk clip.

Things died down a little again after lunch, which was good, because Maddie was starving and could use a little time to catch her breath. Kennedy offered to go get them both veggie burgers, and Maddie accepted gratefully.

"First day seems to be going pretty well." Chris drifted over. "Congrats. Say, you and your girlfriend are pretty hot together."

"Thanks." Maddie kept her voice inflectionless.

"What are you girls doing after close? I've got some beers in the fridge back at my place. You could come up, maybe we'll order some nachos, toast your success."

Oh. Great. Schrodinger's come-on line. She had to shut this down, but if she tried to turn him down directly, he'd claim he'd just been being friendly and call her some variation on "full of herself" and "bitch."

"Sorry," she said, not sorry at all. "I'm afraid we've got a pretty full social calendar."

A vaguely familiar voice cut in. "So hey, do you have any free samples?"

Under any other circumstances, she would have been exasperated by the return of the stoner, but right at this moment he was welcome. Not quite welcome enough to get a free sample, though. "Sorry, dude, no."

"Just a little gherkin?" he said, holding up his fingers a few inches apart.

"No means no, my man," said Chris, stepping closer to Maddie protectively. She wished he wouldn't. Chris lowered his voice and said to just her, "except when 'no'

means 'yes' and 'yes' means 'harder.'"

It took all her willpower not to shudder away from him. She recognized this kind of guy. He'd decided "lesbian" meant "challenge," and he wasn't going to give up. He'd probably spent his life navigating the rules, keeping it all within plausible deniability. But that didn't mean he couldn't and wouldn't be dangerous. She just needed to make it to the end of the day. She'd text her brother at the next opportunity—maybe he could meet them here. And then she'd see if she could get their stand location changed for next week.

"Hey," the stoner said slowly. "That's not cool."

"Look, buddy, buy something or beat it." Chris was still doing the protective thing, as if she couldn't take care of herself. As if she were his to protect. Stupid white knights.

"Oh," said the stoner slowly. "Oh yeah. I can buy things. Can I buy a pickle?"

"Yes, of course," said Maddie. She glanced over at the bao stand. "Hey Chris, I think you've got a potential customer. Anyway, we've got full sour, half sour, garlic, dill, sweet, and sweet fire."

She gladly spent far too long explaining the subtleties of pickle flavors, which really weren't all that subtle, trying to keep an eye on Chris without looking like she was keeping an eye on him. The stoner seemed to be having trouble wrapping his head around a pickle being both sweet and spicy at the same time. When he finally got it, he looked like he'd just experienced a revelation.

He reached into his pocket and pulled out a crumpled handful of papers, none of which were actual money.

"Oh." He looked crestfallen. "I don't have any money. I mean, like, I have money, but I don't have any with me. I guess...I must have left my wallet...somewhere? At home?"

She opened her mouth to rip his head off. She'd had more than enough of men today. Of their taking up her time, and wanting things from her that they had no right to. And this dirty loser comes by, high as a kite, and chases off real paying customers. Decent people with actual money who knew how to dress themselves and could tell the difference between money and crumpled Taco Bell receipts.

She almost said it, and then she realized that it would be her mother's voice emerging from her throat. And she wanted to be better than that. She wanted to be the kind goose girl who shared her humble bread crust with the wizened crone and rescued the fox caught in the trap, not the haughty princess. Not that she thought this guy would turn into a fairy godmother or anything—this was about being a decent person, not trying to keep up some kind of image. That's what her parents never seemed to get.

She blew out a slow breath, letting go of her anger. It wasn't the stoner's fault that Chris was a creepy jerk. "Hey," she said softly. "Dude. You ok?"

He was already cringing, clearly expecting a well-deserved rebuke. He took a

moment to process her words. Slowly, his shoulders came down from around his ears. "Uh. I don't know? I maybe overdid it a little."

"Yeah, I think so." She rubbed the bridge of her nose. His stomach growled audibly. "Here. Have the pickle. It sounds like you need it. Some folks think the CBD can inhibit the THC high, anyway, maybe it'll help you come down a little. If not, at least it'll help with the munchies."

"Really?" His eyes lit up. "You're my new favorite vendor of all time! I'll pay you back next week, I promise!"

She doubted he'd remember any of this next week, but that wasn't the point. She wouldn't let this become a habit, but she could afford one pickle for a sweet idiot. He looked like he might go to try to hug her, and she pulled back a little. He pulled his hands back right away, which put him one up on Chris, at least. She handed him the pickle, which he took with reverence.

He toddled off, meditatively chewing.

Chris, on the other hand, kept glancing over at her. His eyes didn't tend to rise that much above her collarbone.

Kennedy returned with the promised late lunch and Maddie filled her in *sotto voce* on the Chris situation.

"I'm wearing my boots, I could kick his ass," she offered.

"Please don't make a scene," Maddie whispered. "He deserves it, but he's established here and we're not. I don't want us to be labeled as difficult right off the bat, ok?"

Kennedy narrowed her eyes, but accepted the decision for now. Maddie wasn't sure how long that would hold.

She felt pretty justified a few minutes later, though. Ricardo, the site manager, passed them escorting an older woman with an expensive haircut and a gray silk shift dress Maddie's mother would have loved. They made a beeline for Chris' stand.

"Chris!" Ricardo waved. "This is the investor I was talking about, the one looking to get into the restaurant space. Diane's very impressed by your sales numbers, and wanted to meet you."

Chris smiled that crooked smile, and Maddie was disappointed to see the answering sparkle in Diane's eyes. It wasn't fair. They weren't ready for expansion yet themselves, but somehow it was always guys like Chris who got the breaks, whether or not they deserved them. She was being a hypocrite, she knew. She could always go to her parents and their friends if she needed investors, but she'd wanted to do it on her own. Plenty of small business owners—especially ones who weren't lucky enough to be white or from well-off families—couldn't say the same.

Chris started dishing up a serving of his bao, chatting about supply chains and ROI all the while. Diane leaned in. Next to Maddie, Kennedy rolled her eyes. Maddie stepped gently on her foot, a warning. People were always looking, her mother had

taught her that. Kennedy, more familiar than she wanted to be with Maddie's mother, patted her hand reassuringly and stopped with the eyerolls.

The stoner guy wandered over to see the excitement. Maddie groaned mentally. She hoped the poor guy stayed out of this. Diane looked like the kind of person who would eviscerate him.

"You're not actually going to invest in him, are you?" he asked, tapping Diane on the elbow.

Diane didn't recoil the way Maddie expected, when faced with a slightly disreputable wannabe-hippie with pickle juice on his shirt. She sighed. "Quincy. Is there some reason I shouldn't?"

"Well, you're always saying how much you want to support women- and minority-owned businesses," the stoner said. "And this guy is, like, a total dick."

"Hey," said Chris, outraged.

"He's been totally harassing the poor pickle chicks all day," Quincy the stoner continued. Maddie wanted to sink into the earth. He was so sweet, and he thought he was helping, and all he was doing was painting a giant target on their backs.

"You're going to just believe some random loser who's stoned out of his mind?" Chris demanded.

"While he is regrettably a loser, and he is once again stoned out of his mind, the one thing I did succeed in instilling in my son was a strong feminist principle," Diane said with a raised chin and a tone that was downright frosty.

Whoa. Although if Maddie had been named something like Quincy, maybe she would have leaned farther into the pot, too. Now that she looked, she could see the resemblance in the eyebrows, the jawline.

Diane turned to the pickle stand. Maddie swallowed. "Well? Is this true?"

If they didn't believe her, she'd be flushing both their dreams down the toilet. She'd have to go crawling back to her parents and admit she'd failed. Heck, even if they believed her, it still probably wouldn't go great. These things never did. She'd lose everything.

Kennedy grabbed her hand and squeezed. No, not everything. She'd have her social media presence, and her kickass pickle recipes. And she'd have Kennedy. And integrity.

"He's been trying to flirt all day, even though he knew we're a couple," she ventured. That sounded too innocuous. "It's gotten pretty gross."

"What—you loved it!" Chris protested.

Diane ignored him. "And did you give him any encouragement?"

"No," Maddie said emphatically. "I kept referring to my girlfriend, but he wouldn't take the hint."

"Was he threatening?" Ricardo asked seriously.

Was he? "He brought out the old "no means yes" thing..."



Diane rolled her eyes. "That old chestnut. You'd think they would have thought of some new phrase by now. Well. Young man. I do not think our business interests are going to align after all."

"Wait, what do you mean?" Chris looked panicked, and angry.

"I mean no."

"You can't do this!" He lunged after her, grabbing her elbow and spinning her around.

She twisted her elbow and did something with her knee and Chris suddenly went flying into his table. The collapsible legs collapsed and bao buns rained down. He looked up groggily, sriracha dripping down one ear.

Diane stepped over his legs, followed by Quincy. He paused and leaned down to bring his face level with Chris' stunned one. "No means no," he said helpfully.

Ricardo lowered his walkie talkie as security came pounding up the aisle. "Dammit, Chris, we talked about this. You were at two strikes already for harassing people, you're done. And if Diane wants to press charges--"

"Oh, yes," Diane said over her shoulder.

--then we're just going to have to ban you completely. You're no longer welcome on the grounds."

"But--"

"We'll have your stuff shipped to you, but you're leaving right now."

Security marched the protesting Chris off. The sriracha was far more visible from the rear. It was dripping all the way down the back of the vintage t-shirt. Maddie hoped he spent a long time trying to get the stain out.

Diane paused in front of their stand. She smiled a little at their gobsmacked expressions. "If you haven't tried aikido, I have to recommend it. You never know when it might be handy. You're all right?"

Kennedy found her voice first. "Just fine, ma'am."

"Mom, you have to try their pickles," Quincy said. "They're the most amazing thing in the universe."

"Quincy, my darling idiot, you have told me that your own hands are the most amazing thing in the universe." She sighed. "You have a perfectly good master's in math. Accenture would have been delighted to give you a consulting gig, but no, you want to spend all your weekends staring at your fingernails in wonder instead of working at something that might actually advance you in life."

With a mom like that, Maddie could understand why Quincy would choose to be stoned.

Diane's eyes flicked down to the sign and up again. "But he sometimes knows a trend when he sees one. You're new, I take it? Hold on to your records for six months and we'll set up a meeting to review."

She and Kennedy watched Diane pick her way back through the stalls,

doubtlessly so her car could whisk her back to her hermetically-sealed Manhattan office.

"Now there's a woman who could use a CBD pickle," Kennedy said finally.

"No kidding," Maddie replied.

"What just happened?" Kennedy asked.

Kennedy had not read nearly as much Grimm as Maddie had as a child. "You know in fairy tales, how the heroine gives her food to somebody out of pity and it turns out later they were someone fabulously powerful in disguise? I think that."

"Oh. Huh." Kennedy digested that. "So, plucky goose girl, do you get rewarded with true love at the end of your story?"

"I already had that," Maddie said, stepping closer and tucking her hands into Kennedy's back pockets, which conveniently contained Kennedy's ass.

"True love's kiss, then," Kennedy offered, smiling at her. "I didn't get to slay any dragons for you, I can at least reward you with your kiss."

With no Chris around to leer, Maddie had an afternoon-worth of PDA to catch up on. "True love's makeouts."

Kennedy slid her hand up the back of Maddie's neck to tangle in her hair. She tasted a little briney, as intoxicating as a pickleback shot. Someone whistled encouragingly. Maddie didn't have to open her eyes to feel Kennedy cheerfully giving them the finger. People laughed and clapped, and it occurred to Maddie that Chris probably hadn't made too many friends. It sounded like they had the approval of the rest of the vendor row. Then she stopped caring about what other people thought and focused on kissing the only knight in shining armor she'd ever wanted, the one who let her rescue herself.

"Let's close out?" Maddie finally said.

"Don't forget your last post."

"We never settled on an official hashstag, you know."

"Didn't we? I think we just got one."

*Thanks for a great first day, everyone! #PickleChickPrincess*