

Cold Lips, Warm Cheese

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As Pete moved his rough hands across her face, Abby was struck by how sweaty they were.

They had been dating for over a year now, and Abby had come to terms with many of Pete's flaws. He never drank the last few sips from his soda can. When he ate, he always scraped the fork across his teeth as he pulled it out of his mouth. Sometimes, he even left flaky white saliva stains on her pillow because he slept with his mouth gaping open. And that was only the tip of the iceberg.

Abby had run through this catalogue of flaws so many times that she had believed it to be extraordinarily thorough. But until now, sweaty hands had never made it to her list. She wondered why she had never noticed it before. Pete's hands were so clammy and sweaty that it was almost...unnatural.

Suddenly, Pete pulled away from Abby and stared at her with his flat, grey eyes. She knew the routine all too well. This was Pete's attempt at what a Harlequin novelist would call "the smouldering glance." This never failed to make her uncomfortable, though. Abby was never quite sure where she should look. It was too awkward to just stare into his eyes like some sort of dead, unblinking fish. But whenever she tried to look away, Pete mistakenly interpreted her action as a kind of feigned coyness. Without fail, he would cluck his tongue like a condescending schoolmarm, put his thumb underneath her chin, and raise her head to meet his stare.

She supposed that it was all supposed to be quite sensual.

Tonight, Abby didn't break away from his stare. She let it go on for as long as Pete could stand it. After all, if she didn't let him have his way, he'd just put his sweaty thumb all over her.

Pete grinned his familiar lopsided grin, and scooted closer to Abby on the couch. With a rehearsed tenderness, he stroked her blue-black hair, and ran his tongue over his cold lips. As he slowly bent over to kiss her, two words leapt into Abby's mind:

Warm cheese.

That's what Pete's hands reminded her of. They were like two slabs of American cheese that somebody forgot to put back into the refrigerator after lunch. Abby had done that more times than she cared to count, and knew just what it was like. After a few hours on the counter, cheese took on a peculiar shade of deep orange. Unavoidably, the texture would transform itself into some unnatural hybrid between rough and rubbery. If the cheese sat out long enough, it would even start to sweat these oily beads of cheese perspiration.

That was Pete, all right. As Pete's kisses slowed to a trickle, he gathered Abby up in his arms and rested his lips in the hollow of her neck, close to her ear. It seemed to Abby that they remained in that position for quite some time, as her left arm was becoming noticeably numb. To pass the time, Abby played games to herself. She counted the seconds between Pete's breaths, gauging the length by an old trick she learned in grade school. One Mississippi, two Mississippi, and so on. Then, she contemplated changing her rate of breathing to match Pete's, but rejected the idea because she found it impossible to concentrate on anything but the unpleasant sensation of Pete's hot breath on her neck.

Slowly, Pete stirred. Draping his cheese-hand across the back of the couch, he raised his lips up to the level of her ear, and pressed his forehead against the side of her head.

"Love you, babe." Pete whispered.

"Love you more." Abby responded.