



# Junkyard Dog (Lonesome Garage #3)

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**Category:** Romance

**Description:** Rhiannon: I came to Lonesome to guest host a romance book club and visit some old friends. I didn't expect to have Tall, Dark and Cranky come to my rescue when I have to hide from a fan in his junkyard. Now I can't leave town until I thank JD properly. I haven't found the right form of appreciation yet. But I will.

JD: I only helped her to get her off my property. But she keeps thanking me, and every time she does, she sneaks a little farther under my defences. Rhiannon is so damn sweet I can't tell her to leave. She'll have to find out the hard way that I'm too broken to be the one for her. No matter how much I wish I was.

If youre looking for a grumpy/sunshine, wounded warrior, obsessed fan romance, youve found it.

**Total Pages (Source):** 12

# Page 1

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

## Chapter One

I pucker my Raspberry Razzle glossed lips and blow a kiss at my rearview mirror before I slip my candy-apple green Charger into park.

My strawberry-blonde hair is up in matching pigtails, I'm wearing a unicorn T-shirt under my baby blue denim overalls, and my white canvas shoes gleam like cotton balls on my feet.

I'm on the hunt for a present for my dad and I'm looking adorable doing it because there's no reason not to shine, even in a junkyard.

The girls have told me about Dobermann Salvage and since I'm in town, I figure it can't hurt to check it out and hope I get lucky.

The junkyard is deserted. I'm not surprised.

People probably don't even know it's here.

The sign on the highway is about five years overdue for being repainted, even if the hours of operation are still visible.

It's the middle of the day, so I figure it's safe to get out and walk around.

There is an empty area just beyond the open gate on the single lane driveway, which is where I parked.

To the left, past a rusty shipping container, is a double row of car husks that goes on for about forty yards.

I see at least three more rows of old vehicles off the main driveway, which leads around a copse of trees farther inside the property.

This place is an American automotive graveyard. It's organized by type of vehicle, so I ignore the station wagons and walk past the trio of identical, white vans with Tubby's Plumbing logos on the sides. When I come to the end of the row, I hear a burst of barks.

Then a bear charges at me. It's a small bear, but bigger than a cub.

The beast's big black head comes up, and I spy two small, caramel dots above its eyes and a larger pair of caramel patches on its chest by its front shoulders.

The matching brown coloring at its muzzle and lower legs make it a Rottweiler, not a bear after all.

It stumbles to a stop, then jumps straight up, revealing it's a boy.

"Hello, you handsome fellow. Who are you?" I ask.

It woofs, then trots a few steps away, pausing about twenty feet from me. Then the dog looks over its shoulder at me like it's saying, "Come on, Rhiannon, follow me."

So, I do. What can I say – I love puppies. "I'm coming," I tell it. "Where are we going?"

I follow the dog to the next row. He stops beside a stack of tires and starts whining.

The dog steps aside and watches as I approach.

I see that the top has fallen off the towering pile.

A handful of tires have jammed themselves between two junkers.

Closer inspection reveals a caramel paw scratching through a gap in the squished black rubber.

The dog beside me barks again. “Shit,” I say in agreement.

I climb over the first wreck and pull three tires from between the two vehicles.

I drop them on the edge of the path and return for round two.

I heave on the first firmly wedged tire until it budes and comes loose.

The second is easier, and the third tire rolls away after I give it a powerful shove.

It barely clears the space before a slightly smaller but much rounder Rottweiler huffs and puffs and launches itself from between the car frames.

She daintily walks over a hood, steps onto the still-attached bumper, and strolls to the male dog, who sniffs her over happily.

I stand still as they both approach me. The bitch has less fear and nuzzles my hand. I scratch behind her ears and, all of a sudden, I have two handfuls of delightfully slobbery, happy dog. “You’re welcome, gorgeous. Yes, you are.”

“What are you doing here?” a gravelly male voice asks me.

“Your sign says you’re open and your gate is unlocked,” I counter without looking away from the puppy loving on me.

“Also, your dog came up to my car and led me here. Your bitch was trapped under some tires.” I point at the tiny hollow between the wrecks.

Then I look up. A tall man in an oil-stained flannel shirt and jeans is standing at the end of the next row.

His dark beard covers his entire lower face, a plain black ball cap sits on his head, and he’s wearing mirrored sunglasses.

I can’t see a single feature and he’s still the hottest man I’ve seen in person since I had my picture taken with Mickey Score at a comic con in New York City.

I paid for that privilege; this one is free and I’m soaking it in.

Even with his face hidden, I know who he is: JD Dobermann, like the name on the sign. He looks older than I expected, but I think that has more to do with the mileage than the years.

“Mandy, come,” he says.

It was a good thing he didn’t say “Rhiannon” because I would happily comply.

The bitch trots over to him, but the dog remains hovering beside me.

I stretch my hand out for him to sniff, but JD says, “Don’t pet him.”

I snap my hand back and stand still.

The hottie in denim steps closer. “Good boy, Cajun. Sit.” The dog does. Then JD turns his attention back to me. “You’re not going to tell me that he’s friendly and you’re fine?”

“If a dog’s owner says, “Don’t touch”, you don’t touch. You know the dog. I like all my fingers. It works out for everybody.”

“You’re smarter than most.”

It’s not exactly a compliment, but I don’t think it was supposed to be. “Romy would have warned me if your dogs were a problem, JD. She did say to keep a look out when I was on the property because they ran free.”

His glasses come off with a flick of his wrist, and his intense brown eyes glare at me. “How do you know my name? And how do you know Romy?”

“Romy and I have been friends for years. We met when she was posted at Anacostia. She’s told me about everybody in Lonesome.

She specifically told me all about Bishop’s family, which is how I know that you are his cousin.

Hell, I can probably identify half the people in town from her descriptions.

She was surprisingly detailed for somebody who has only been here for a couple of months. ”

Romy Turner is one of my BFFs. She’d made the move to Lonesome, North Dakota, after her sister Violet took a new job here.

They’d both ended up involved with the Dobermann brothers.

I've heard all about them, plus their reclusive, former SEAL cousin JD.

I make a note to tell Romy off; she definitely skimmed on her description of the buff bod standing in front of me.

She'd left out certain vital information that a girl needs to know.

"Why did she send you to a junkyard?"

"I'm looking for a steering wheel for a first generation Ford Bronco. Preferably from a 1974 but if it fits the specs, I'm interested."

He blinks. Twice. It's hard to tell, but I think the corner of his mouth quirked up before he fought off a smile at my highly specific request. "Can you help me?"

He shrugs. "Maybe."

## Page 2

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Two

Help you? Let me carry you around the junkyard in my arms showing you anything you'd care to look at, princess. I don't know why this little ray of sunshine showed up on my doorstep but for the first time in ages, I'm not sending a potential customer running and I'll be damned if I know why.

"You're right. I'm JD Dobermann. And you are Romy's friend..." I let my question trail off to get her talking again.

"Rhiannon Quill. I'm a romance writer."

Now I know exactly who she is. It seems like everybody in town does.

I've seen Romy Turner and her sister Violet Glass in the office of the Lonesome Garage, pouring over Rhiannon Glass's paperbacks and rating the bare-chested men on the covers.

I've spotted the same books behind the barista counter of the Halfway Café.

The men of Lonesome are in trouble because, according to the sisters, Rhiannon knows how to deliver heroes that women want and they are setting the bar pretty high.

"A romance writer who knows what a '74 Bronco steering wheel looks like?"

"It's been on my dad's Christmas wish list for four years. At this point, I can recite



the specs in my sleep. So, do you have one here?"

I scratch at my beard, and for the first time realize how long it's gotten.

It feels scruffy. "We can check," I offer.

I don't have a Bronco on the property. I know for a fact I don't.

"Cajun, Mandy, come." Rhiannon snickers but I don't know why.

I point her down a row of station wagons and she walks beside me.

"If you don't have a Bronco, could you put out feelers for me? I'll pay, obviously."

The sun on my neck, the dogs panting happily as they run in front of me, a pretty girl at my side. In this moment I feel more at peace than I have in years. It is so good it is almost bad. "Why? It's not like you'll be here to pick it up."

"JD, if you find me a steering wheel, I'll make the trip to collect it personally. Is there anything I can offer for incentive to help sweeten the deal?"

"Nothing you can help me with."

Rhiannon insists we keep looking. After the first couple rows, the guilt kicks in. "I might have misremembered. I may not have a Bronco on the property," I reluctantly admit.

"I don't mind if you don't. A man with this many options must be looking for something in particular.

Give me a hint. What's the missing piece in your life?

” she teases. I don’t know why but the question slips under my shields, and I can hear that it’s a joke rather than a comment about being closed off.

I get those comments a lot. From my cousins.

As family, they got all the details from the hospital after my last SEAL exercise blew up and landed me with a medical discharge.

They offered to help as I struggled to put my broken body back together, but I didn’t want to drag them into the hell pit of pain with me.

Then there are my brothers in the Lost Souls.

I returned to Lonesome a little after they did, but I was there in time to be one of the original members when we became a brotherhood.

They are constantly on my ass to be more social and not let myself rot in my cabin on my own.

They are all good people, but they don’t have a fucking clue.

The scar on my head is more than skin deep; it goes all the way to my bones.

I lost more than blood and guts that day.

I lost a brother-in-arms. And myself. Everybody keeps telling me to come back, but there isn’t much of me left to come back to.

I have supper with Deacon, Violet and Peony, and with Bishop and Romy.

I have a beer at the clubhouse. I have the dogs. It’s all I need.

All I need, but man cannot survive on meatloaf and beer alone.

Sometimes a man needs a little sweetness in his life.

The pretty woman walking with me in the autumn sunshine is better than a chocolate kiss.

“If you know anybody who can get their hands on an authentic 60’s VW van, let me know. In any shape. I could make a killing.”

“JD, I really want my dad to have that steering wheel, but if I could get my hands on a classic VW van, I would learn how to restore it myself. He can unwrap a new tie and matching socks for his favorite suit and be grateful.”

I laugh. Loudly. Cajun and Mandy both jump at the noise since they haven’t heard it before. I have to respect a woman who knows her priorities. “What are you doing in Lonesome? I know you have friends here, but it’s not a top ten tourist destination.”

“I’m multi-tasking.” She smiles. She’s not staring at my scars, or avoiding looking at them and pretending they aren’t there.

She’s just smiling at me. It’s a punch to the gut that knocks the wind out of me.

“I’m guest-hosting the Lonesome Book Club as a visiting author to discuss my newest romance novel.

A group of fans contacted me to ask if I’d speak with them.

Usually, I would offer to do it over a video call, but I wanted to come to town anyway to check the place out.

It's technically a work trip but it's also a vacation that I really need.

I had to get out of Washington, DC. The timing is a happy coincidence. ”

Her words twig a memory. “I think Bishop said that Romy had some silent partners. Would that be you?”

“I wouldn't be very silent if I said yes.” We get to the end of the last row of cars. “You were right. No Broncos.”

“Sorry.”

“I'm not. It was worth the visit. But I do have to get going. I need to get changed for tonight. But maybe I'll see you again while I'm in town?”

“Maybe,” I say. I mean no. I don't want to have to deal with the looks if anybody sees me out with a woman.

The guys won't give me a hard time, but the women will get all googly-eyed and up in my business, and I cannot deal with any more expectations in my life.

Meeting Rhiannon today was a much-needed breather that I can use to get through tomorrow. I'll always be grateful for that.

## Page 3

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Three

The best part about any book club is the wine.

Violet is pouring it like fruit juice. I make a note to switch to water because I'm driving Romy back to her place after we're done.

I'm in styled hair, full make-up, a sweater appropriate for fall evening temperatures, slacks and heels.

It's my professional writer outfit; I want to make a good impression on Romy's friends.

She introduces twins Janie and Jules, who waitress at different establishments in Lonesome, sisters Maya and April, whose parents own the Halfway Café, and another local woman named Carol.

Violet apologizes that their usual eighth member is out of town.

As far as I'm concerned, this is a tremendous turn-out.

If even three of them finished the book, it will be better than average.

I don't know where Deacon is hiding, but his house is full of women, wine glasses, charcuterie and dessert boards, and paperbacks with half-naked men on the cover. This is life.

Violet clinks a spoon on her wine glass to call the club to order. “Ladies, I would like to introduce the best-selling author of “The Barbarian King”, Rhiannon Quill, who is here to talk to us about romance, the book industry, and where she finds her inspiration.”

There’s no applause; the ladies are holding their wine glasses with one hand and reaching for brownie bars with the other, but they whoop encouragingly.

“Hey, everybody, thanks for inviting me to your book club. I met Violet a couple years ago in a self-defence class and I’ve known Romy for slightly longer.

Between the three of us, we have an exceptional collection of fictional bad boys and murderous villains at our disposal.

Throw in an unexpected long weekend at an airport hotel with no Wi-Fi when the only channel you can get is playing a Planet of the Apes marathon, and it’s a recipe for an exciting new series.

Now I have to ask—and I won’t be offended by the truth—how many of you actually read “The Barbarian King?”

Six hands wave in the air. The women stare at April. “I’ve been busy! But I’m almost done, I swear! Drogon is super hot.”

“I think we’re going to have some fun tonight,” I reply.

We do. We discuss the book, the characters, a plot trope they particularly liked.

It’s not all fluff though. The villain is recognizable on paper because that guy exists in real life, not just fiction, and every woman has had to deal with him, so that takes us off topic for a while, but for a good reason.

Then things turn back toward fun, and I get to tease them a little bit.

“Yes,” I say, “I do have some inspiration for the final hero in the series. I was struck by lightning this very afternoon. I don’t know what his name is yet.

Jonah, Davos, Jason, Darian. I’m not sure.

But rest assured, he’s tall, dark, mysterious, and very good in bed!

” JD is going to be a hero in my life, even if it is only on paper.

“Tall, dark, mysterious with an initial of J or D? You and I are going to talk later,” Romy threatens.

At the end of the evening, after the ladies decide on their next month’s book, the club breaks up.

It’s ten o’clock but it is a weekday. Still, I’m not ready to call it a night.

“Is there a place around here that doesn’t close down at ten?

” I ask Romy on the way to my car. Since I’m staying at her place, I promised to drive so she could have the full book club wine experience.

She grins broadly. “The Lonesome Bar and Grill will be going till after midnight.”

“A bar?”

She grins. “Bishop’s cousin might be there.”

“Let’s go.”

It's a short drive down Lonesome's Main Street.

Romy directs me to a parking lot that is surprisingly full.

She waves at the hulk in the biker jacket doing security at the door and pulls me inside.

I take a good look around—concentrating on the room, not searching for anybody in particular—and like what I see.

Wooden planks on the floor, decent lighting so you can see where you're walking without having to hold a hand in front of you.

A bar along one wall, and tables and stools surrounding a small dance floor and smaller stage that can hold a four person band.

It has a mixed crowd, mostly jeans and blue collar, with a couple of dress shirts and loosened ties for the more formal at heart.

I think the man sitting at the bar adds an extra level of attractiveness. JD is here, in a leather jacket with the same patches as the guy at the door. He's nursing a beer and keeping to himself.

Romy knocks my shoulder. "Caught you looking," she teases. "JD takes the strong, silent type to whole new levels. He's got the looks but don't get attached because according to, well, everybody, he doesn't. The only person I've heard him say more than five words to is Peony."

Peony is her niece who isn't speaking in full sentences yet. "That's ridiculous. He talks."



“How do you know?”

“I went to the salvage yard today to look for that part for my dad. JD was there.”

“And he spoke to you? Using words?”

“Yes, using words. He’s funny. And hot. But he didn’t seem interested, unfortunately.

” I could do things to a big, strong man who was good with his hands.

Fictional boyfriends were great but at the end of the night, you ended up with papercuts, not arms wrapped around you and a stubbly chin resting on your shoulder when you fell asleep.

“Did he have a relationship go bad? I volunteer to be his rebound, short term, low commitment, temporary girlfriend.” I’m not in Lonesome for long, but I’d be happy to make it memorable for everybody involved.

Then my good mood is extinguished with a bucket of ice water. “Are you fucking kidding me?” I don’t scream but it’s in the neighborhood. Fortunately, a roar from the crowd watching a football game on the TV over the bar drowns it out.

Romy’s head spins as she tries to spot what set me off. “What?”

“My superfan just walked in.”

“The borderline stalker that lives in Virginia?”

“I don’t think borderline qualifies anymore. How the fuck did she find me and does this place have a backdoor?” I ask.

“I don’t know how she found you, but if she spotted your out-of-state plates in the parking lot, she’s going to be looking.” Romy grabs my arm. “Come on. We’ll go out the back.”

She ushers me in front of her and as we walk past the bar, she taps JD on the arm and cocks her head for him to follow us.

We go down a hall that says it leads to the Lonesome Grill next door.

She blocks it closed once the three of us are in the short corridor.

“Remember when you said that Violet and I were all kinds of trouble?” she asks JD.

“Yes.” He does not sound amused.

“So is Rhi. She’s got a stalker out there who may have recognized her car in the parking lot. Can you ask Mason if he will let us out through the restaurant even though it’s closed? I’ll call Bishop to pick us up.”

“No.”

“Okay,” Romy says slowly. “We’ll try to sneak out the front do?—”

“No,” JD interrupts. “Stay here. I’ll get the key and walk us through. Then I’ll drive you both home.”

“What about my car?”

“Leave it here. I’ll bring you back to pick it up in the morning as long as nobody’s watching it.” He tilts his chin at the door. “Block this behind me. I’ll knock when I come back.” He goes through the door like a man on a mission.

“Holy shit, that was like twenty words,” Romy whispers. “I didn’t know he knew that many.”

“Shut up. He’s doing me a huge favor. But what if she follows me to your place?” I didn’t intend to bring trouble to Romy’s door. She is a really good friend. This visit is supposed to be fun.

“She won’t even know we’re leaving the bar, and she won’t be able to follow a parked car. JD will fix it. You’ll see.” Romy speaks with an absolute confidence that is a complete front because she yelps when the door on the restaurant side opens.

JD sticks his head in. “Come on.”

I squeeze past him in the doorway. He doesn’t react, but my nipples spring to attention after brushing against his shirt. He relocks the door and leads us through the closed restaurant out the back to where his truck is waiting.

Romy climbs into the back without a word, leaving the front seat open for me. JD taps a button on the dashboard and the leather seat under my ass begins to get warm, chasing away the late-night autumn chill. “Where are you taking us?” I ask.

“Once I know we’re not being followed, I’m dropping you at Romy’s place. Bishop is on his way over. I’ll be by in the morning to drive you back to your car. Tell me about your stalker.”

“I don’t have a proper name. She’s probably the only stranger in the bar.

Long, straight, bottle-blond hair, average height, average weight, early to mid-thirties.

Her shirt is two sizes too small for her boobs, so she’s busting out all over.

I'd guess that she's either asking for me or for a man named Brandon or Bronson. ”

He turns his head to stare at me hard. “Your stalker is a woman?”

“Yes.”

“Who are Brandon and Bronson? Exes? Yours or hers?”

“Neither. They're fictional. It's a long story. Don't underestimate her. If there is a car in the parking lot with a DC or east coast licence plate that isn't mine, it'll be hers. The plate number would be useful to give to the police. Do you think you could find out what it is?”

“I'll get it for you.”

I feel a bump in my back. I don't look but I know Romy is grinning at me.

I want to grin myself. I didn't expect JD to ask about exes.

I'm going to take it as some flattering interest in me rather than a professional information request. Maybe there is a little interest on his part.

He did say that I might see him again. That plus Romy's comments about how he doesn't speak to anyone else give me hope.

He goes silent after that, but I don't mind. JD drops us off and after we bring Bishop up to date, I crash for the night in their spare room. I need my beauty sleep. I have another date with JD in the morning.

## Page 4

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Four

I dream of sexy blondes and wake up hard to wet kisses on my cheek.

I turn my head and get hit with full-on doggie breath.

“Mandy, off!” The dog keeps climbing onto my bed at night.

I tell her “no”, but she doesn’t listen.

I don’t want to kennel her so I’m going to have to come up with something new.

This wouldn’t be a problem if I had a delicious, curvy romance writer sleeping next to me, taking up the rest of my king-size mattress.

The dogs are up before the sun, so I have to get up as well.

I let them outside to do their business and pour a cup of coffee from the pot that I set up the morning before on a timer.

For once, my day’s schedule has more on it than pulling parts that my cousins have requested, breaking down new junkers and listing their components on the salvage yard’s website, and hanging out at the clubhouse and chipping in with whatever my brothers need done.

Today I get to play knight in shining armor for Rhiannon.

I don't know why I opened my mouth and volunteered.

Bishop could have driven her back to her car.

He's right there. I tell myself that I don't want her stalker to get a chance to see anything that could lead back to Romy's place.

But that's a lie. I just want to see her again.

I should text Bishop, ask him to do it. I am not the man for the job.

I couldn't handle a training exercise, not without a brother-in-arms ending up dead.

Violet doesn't blame me for what happened to her first husband.

Hell, neither did the rest of my team. But even the revelation that Keith had been set up and I was collateral damage doesn't ease the guilt.

He's gone. I'm still here—at least, pieces of me are.

But I'm not the man I used to be, or even the man I thought I was.

The scars prove it. Why am I deluding myself to think I can handle a protection detail, even on a romance writer?

It would be lying to Rhiannon to let her believe I can look after her.

She, on the other hand, hasn't lied. For a split second, I thought Romy might be trying to set me up with her friend.

It wouldn't be the first time. Then, after I dropped the girls off, I swung back around

to the bar and grill.

There was a kidnapper's white van with Virginia plates in the parking lot, just like Rhi suspected.

The woman in the bar had been polite but the staff told me that they had found her trying to access the staff room. She'd claimed she was lost.

The stalker left at closing. Then she sat in her van for an hour and a half, until the lights were out and the last vehicle drove away, leaving Rhiannon's and one other in the parking lot.

This meant that I had all of five hours sleep last night.

At least it was a solid five. I haven't had that in a while.

I know where this is heading. Both Violet and Romy arrived with trouble in their wakes. I can see Rhiannon isn't going to be any different. How do these women find each other?

The dogs race back inside. I tell them that I'll be back soon, then jump in my truck. I'm pulling up to Romy's place when I realize that it's seven in the morning. Rhiannon's on vacation; she might not even be up yet. She certainly won't be ready for company.

I am in the middle of a three-point turn when movement in Romy's backyard catches my eye.

Rhiannon appears out of the mist, bit by bit, as she climbs the sloped lawn from the lakeshore to the house.

She looks completely unconcerned about the cold temperatures in her jeans, sweatshirt, and flannel jacket.

When she spots me, she lifts a hand to wave.

I've never seen perfection walking before.

"I didn't expect to see you so early. Are you here to drive me back to my car already?" Her face falls. "Or was there a problem with my superfan?"

"No problem," I say in a hurry. Whoever this woman is, she has really freaked Rhiannon out.

"She had no idea that you snuck out the back. She stayed till closing, then hung out in the parking lot for another hour watching your car before taking off. She's parked outside a motel in Dickerson.

I figure now is a good time to move your car out of sight. "

She nods. "I appreciate it. Let me grab my purse."

This is for the best. Good deed done and we part ways, never to meet again. It's ridiculous that I've already formed some sort of attachment. It'll probably fade as soon as I find a suitable replacement for my nighttime—and daytime—fantasies about her.

Fuck, I'm going to be stuck on Rhiannon forever.

She hops in beside me and bounces to get comfortable while she fastens her seatbelt. The scent of her flowery perfume fills the cab. "I'm ready."



The drive around the lake is peaceful. It seems neither of us are talkers this early in the morning.

Another thing we have in common. I slow to turn into the parking lot of the Lonesome Bar and Grill.

Then I see a white van parked around the corner of the building.

I reach across the seat, wrap my hand around Rhiannon's slender neck, and pull her face down into my lap. "Don't move," I order.

"What the fuck, JD?"

"Your stalker is watching your car."

I can feel the heat from her cheek burning through the denim on my thigh. It is way too dangerous to have her this close to my dick. But I also don't want her to move. I drive through town and don't lift my hand until we hit the salvage yard turn-off.

Rhiannon shakes out her hair when she sits up. "Well, fuck. This is officially out of control."

I drop my ball cap onto my sensitive lap.

What a disaster. I push my fingers through my hair roughly.

Lonesome has already experienced the trouble that its new residents have brought to town.

This is the first time it has involved illegal activity right out of the gate.

Rhiannon's right; things are beyond serious.

This is no superfan. This is a stalker. The danger level just skyrocketed.

"Well, fuck." I agree.

I tell her to go into the house while I make a call.

I'm going to need backup to ensure that nothing happens to her on my watch.

I text the boys—Tolk, Picnic, and Duck. Tolk lets me know he's out of town, but Duck and Picnic say they'll be right over.

I stomp back into my house, trying to burn some of my frustration so I don't take it out on Rhi. "You want a coffee?"

"Do I need one?"

"You will."

"That's not encouraging."

"It's not supposed to be. But don't worry, I've—we've got you covered."

"You've got me covered? What have you done, JD? I mean, if you can block her van in and give me a head start, that's all I need. I'll drive back to Washington and sic my lawyers on her."

I walk over and grab her hand. "Rhiannon, you aren't going anywhere."

## Page 5

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Five

I know the details because I snooped when JD stepped onto the front steps to take a phone call.

He said I could use the bathroom. I just took the scenic route.

Now we're waiting for some of his friends to arrive to help us figure out what my next move is.

I already know what it should be, but JD has a bug up his ass about me leaving.

I don't want to go, but it's safest for everybody involved.

It doesn't take long for a pair of motorcycles to rumble up the driveway.

The two men look virtually identical from the back until they take off their helmets.

The one called Duck has a head full of steely gray hair.

Picnic's hair is darker, but his eyes are such a bright blue that I can't concentrate on anything else.

They're almost as pretty as JD's brown ones.

Both of them are solid guys. Like JD, they haven't lost any of their military fitness according to their muscular frames.

And all three of them are staring at me.

JD introduces them as his motorcycle club brothers. They fill his small living room. He guides me to the sofa and sits beside me, still holding my hand. I see Duck and Picnic share a look, but JD doesn't notice. He squeezes my hand again. "What can you tell us about Abby Trask?" he asks.

"Abby Trask? That's her name?" It sounds normal.

"We got the name and address attached to her plate. When did this start?"

"I'm sorry that I dragged you into this. Really, it's not necessary. This is what lawyers are for."

"I think it's gone beyond that," Duck says. "Tell us what's happening."

I sigh. "I don't know what JD has shared.

I'm a romance writer. I'm a big enough fish in my romance pond to have a fan base.

I didn't know the woman's name. I just have an email and social media handle.

ILuvThisGuy69 appeared as a normal fan on my social media pages with the release of my third book, raving about the cover model.

I used the same guy on a book in my next related series and said it was the other hero's twin brother.

That's when the trouble started. She started emailing and messaging me asking for the model's contact information.

My initial responses about using stock photos were met with rebukes and dismissals that I was trying to keep her man to myself.

I activated full social media blockage, but she kept coming.

A bookstore in Washington where I did a signing let me know that she had come in asking for me.

I decided to see if she'd cool it if I wasn't around.

Hence my vacation to Lonesome. Apparently, it didn't work. ”

This whole thing is ridiculous. I understand celebrity crushes.

But ILuvThisGuy69 is literally obsessed with my model.

I contacted my cover artist and the photographer who listed the photos for sale to warn them.

It turns out the model is from New Zealand, so he should be fine. I'm the only one suffering right now.

“This bitch is unhinged,” Picnic says.

They look at me. “I'm not arguing. I know she needs to be dealt with. I just want to know how she found me in Lonesome. I would have noticed if I was followed halfway across the country. I hope,” I add.

“I doubt you ignored a kidnapper van for two thousand miles,” Picnic says.

“A kidnapper van?” Oh my God!

“Shut up, Picnic. He means a white van with no windows.” JD puts his arm around my shoulders. Again, he misses the looks between them. “Did you tell anyone that you were coming here?”

“No. I posted that I was deep in my writing cave working on a new book. Nobody except the girls at the book club knew I was coming, and Romy asked them to keep it off social media until after the fact. ILuvThisGuy69 showed up here last night.”

Duck looks at Picnic. “Something on her car?”

“Maybe. Give me your keys,” Picnic says to me.

“Why?”

“We’ll check your car for a tracker. She might have slipped one under your bumper. We’ll go over it and if we find something, we’ll have a reason to talk to her.”

“Get Moritz on it,” JD adds.

“Who’s Moritz?”

“A friend with the state police.”

“Now we’re getting the police involved? Guys, just let me get home and I’ll take all this trouble off your hands.”

“I told you, Rhiannon. We’re going to take care of you.”

JD’s voice is so sincere and so comforting. His hand brushes my cheek and comes away wet. I didn’t even know I was crying. I guess that the constant looming shadow of my super-stalker has been heavier than I realized.

I fish my keys out of my purse and give them to JD. He and Picnic head outside to coordinate, leaving me with Duck. The biker with the “President” patch on his leather vest leans forward. “JD will take good care of you. But our boy has had a tough go of it. I think you already know that.”

I nod. “Violet gave me the broad strokes.”

“I don’t think you’re the type to take advantage. But if you are?—”

“I’m not,” I interrupt. “I like JD. I didn’t ask him to get involved.”

“It’s good that he is. For both of you. If you have any problems, let us know.

Me. Picnic. Tolk. What’s your phone number?

” I recite it. I immediately get a text, adding me to a group chat about an upcoming birthday barbecue for someone named Mason.

“Put your number in here, and the guys will give you their contact information.”

I hesitate, but not for long because I don’t think I have much time. “From everything Violet and Romy have said, JD is the strong, silent, loner type. Last night, Romy said he was different with me. Is he?”

“Oh, yeah.”

“Is that good?” I ask quietly.

“I think it’s the best thing that could happen to either of you,” Duck says.

## Page 6

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Six

Picnic will drive Rhiannon's car to the Lonesome Garage.

He and Bishop are going to give it a once over to look for a tracker.

If they don't find one on the first pass, they're going to tear Rhi's Charger apart.

The guys are also going to ask Moritz to speak to Superfan to inform her that she isn't welcome on club property, which includes the Lonesome Bar and Grill's parking lot.

Sometimes it's good to be the gorilla on the block, and in Lonesome, the Lost Souls are King Kong these days.

Romy is packing Rhiannon's suitcase. Bishop will take it to the garage to hand off to one of the guys, and they'll bring it to me.

I haven't told Rhi that she's moving in yet.

My place is the safest location in town.

Nobody can see it from the highway. Plus, I can lock the gates to the salvage yard.

It's not out of character for me to close up shop for a couple days.

I don't think Rhiannon will run. She's hiding it, but she's scared.



The problem is going to be me keeping my hands off her while she's here.

I have never had this kind of attraction to a woman before.

And I know I shouldn't. She can hide here, but I'm not sure I can protect her.

That's why I called in the boys as back-up. I know they can do what I can't.

Duck joins us outside. "She's good to go," he says. "She's stronger than she thinks. She's going to need you to keep an eye on her though. Keep her mind off things. You've got this."

"You think so?"

"No doubt." I'm not sure. I start to get worried when Duck grins. "But you have to tell her that she's moving in. Have fun."

The guys take off. When I go back inside, Mandy has her head in Rhiannon's lap and is getting scratches behind her ears.

"New plan," I say. "You'll be staying with me for a while.

It keeps Romy off the radar, and nobody will be able to find you here.

Romy will pack your stuff and give it to Bishop, who will hand it off at the garage. Okay?"

"Okay," she agrees quietly. "I could just go."

"It wouldn't be safe." I don't want to think too hard about me being responsible for her safety, so I blaze forward. "You take the bedroom. I'll sleep on the sofa."

“Absolutely not!”

“I sleep alone. I like this sofa. I sleep on it all the time. Besides, the bedroom door has a lock. I want you to use it. I have nightmares sometimes.”

All the time. I haven’t slept through the night in almost two years.

Ever since I got hurt. “I was in an accident,” I explain.

“With Violet’s husband, Keith. We were both SEALs.

We were doing a demolition training exercise, working with underwater explosives.

The detonator was faulty. Keith and I didn’t get clear.

He was killed instantly. They fished me out of the water and got me breathing again but I was a mess.

As you can see.” I wave at the scar that runs over my ear and around the back of my head.

The puckered, pink tissue is very visible through my short, dark hair.

During my recovery, they had to keep shaving the area to monitor healing.

I’ve kept it up, making sure I can see it to remember what happened.

A breath of air explodes from my mouth. “I know,” I say before Rhiannon can say anything about being sorry or it not being my fault. “We couldn’t have known that Russo tampered with the detonator. We followed all the protocols. We did everything right.”

Suddenly I'm beside Rhiannon on the sofa.

I don't remember sitting down. She gives Mandy a gentle shove.

I end up with a dog in my lap, and I immediately begin to pet it.

"If I had been even five feet further away, the explosive concussion might not have knocked me out. I might have been able to grab Keith and surface. But I wasn't, I didn't, and he died. "

I've had this conversation a million times.

It won't change anything. At least Rhiannon's not insisting that I need to forgive myself for not being Superman.

"Everything that happened is on Russo. I know that. He didn't get away with it.

Violet figured it out. He wasn't charged though.

He died before he could be taken into custody.

Car accident." I helped with that. I don't regret it.

God knows how many other SEALs and civilians he would have murdered to keep his fucking little crime ring profitable.

Now we're on the porch. Rhiannon points down the driveway. I'll go wherever she leads. The dogs are on either side of me, bumping my legs and rubbing their heads under my hands as we walk. She pushes her windblown hair away to look at me when I begin speaking again.

“I was fucking thrilled to identify Russo’s body.

I couldn’t stop what happened, but at least I got to do that much.

I made sure people knew he wouldn’t be hurting anybody else.

I got that part right.” I’m panting like I just ran a four-minute mile.

I stopped him in the end. That counts for something.

“I’m glad he’s dead. I hope it hurt.” Rhiannon’s voice is quiet.

The venom in it shocks me. She looks like such a sweet little thing that I didn’t think she had it in her.

“If he was in jail, still breathing, while Keith was dead, while you are all still hurting, that’s not justice.

You can’t bring Keith back, but you survived.

You made sure Violet and Peony survived. And Russo can’t hurt anybody else.”

“It’s still not fair, but it’s as fair as it can get.” Keith, Violet and I lost, but in the end, Russo didn’t get the final win either.

“Life,” Rhiannon says in agreement.

“Yeah, life.”

I hear the scrape of an undercarriage bouncing off one of the ruts in the driveway, then the knocking of an engine as it’s turned off. I shuffle Rhiannon to the side, so

she's hidden between two SUVs. Then I head to the gate. "We're closed," I yell as I come around the corner.

Fuck me, it's a white van. "Can you help me? My friend told me to meet her around here, but I think she's lost. She's driving a green Charger, DC plates. Have you seen her?" Abby Trask, according to the driver's licence photo that Picnic shared, is not being subtle as she looks around.

She crouches to duck under the gate. "Lady, we're closed. This isn't a rest stop. I haven't seen your friend. Try looking in town."

"The bitch isn't there anymore," the woman snaps. She runs her hand through her hair until it stands up wildly. "I've looked everywhere. She's probably holed up in some love shack with my man."

"I thought you said you were looking for a friend."

"The homewrecking whore used to be."

Now I really don't like this woman. Neither do the dogs. Cajun steps forward and growls. I know the feeling. "Look, I don't know you. I don't know your friend. I haven't seen that car. And I'm not your man, so I really don't give a shit about any of this. You're on private property. Fuck off."

Abby looks like she wants to say more, but Mandy barks once. Rotties can look ferocious as hell. Both of mine are giving this bitch the full treatment. The woman falls on her ass and scoots back under the gate. She glares at me before she climbs back into her van.

After she backs down the driveway, I return to where I stashed Rhiannon. She hasn't moved a step. "You are definitely staying here, behind locked doors, as long as that

woman is in North Dakota.”

“Whatever you say.”

## Page 7

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Seven

I 'm reeling. JD doesn't talk, my ass. Maybe he doesn't speak often, but when he does, he chooses his words for maximum effect.

No wonder everybody says he's fucked up.

His last few years sound like hell. It also sounds like JD knows it; he understands what really happened and is on the road to believing it.

I'm not military and I'm not a therapist, but I can listen to him say that it wasn't his fault as many times as he needs me to before it's his truth, not just everybody else's.

In the meantime, JD is in the shower. I'm writing a grocery list. I wish I could take advantage of his little kitchen, but I cook like a writer constantly on deadline.

Lots of tomato soup and grilled cheese sandwiches, cereal, and ordering in.

But since neither of us think I should show my face around Lonesome until we are sure that Abby Trask is gone, I can at least try to contribute.

I look twice when I catch a glimpse of JD coming out of the bathroom.

His jeans sit low on his hips. Drops of water decorate his broad shoulders and tanned back.

Heat blooms in my lower half when he looks back to ask if I need anything and I see

that he's trimmed his beard.

It has a shape now; the mountain-man without a mirror look is gone. No one man should look that good.

JD returns as I finish texting my grocery list to Picnic. "I've got shit to do around the junkyard. Are you okay here?"

"I'm fine." Aside from having a stalker and being locked up with an inaccessible man I'd like to climb like a jungle gym, I couldn't be better.

"I'm leaving Cajun with you. If you have any problems, if you get scared, yell. I won't be far away."

"Thank you, JD."

I don't have my laptop or any of my notebooks so I pull out my phone and do what I can. It's not long before I hear voices again. When I recognize JD's, Cajun and I head outside. Picnic is there with my luggage and two boxes of groceries. "Hey, Rhiannon. I got your food."

"Any updates on Abby Trask?"

"Yep."

I walk over to JD in case I need the support. "Hit me."

"We moved your car. Bishop towed it to the shop, and we put it up on a lift for show. We found a Lo-Jack Luggage Tracker duct-taped to your rear bumper."

"Oh my God." This is so much worse than I thought, and I thought it was pretty



fucking bad. “What did you do?”

His evil grin reassures me. “She was at the Halfway Café asking about you. We blocked her van in case she got any ideas. Then we took your car off the hoist to bring it here. I parked it behind the first row, out of sight from the road. As for the tracker, it’s now headed east to Minneapolis with a friendly trucker. That bitch never saw the switch.”

“Thanks, brother.” JD takes the grocery boxes. “Rhi, you should get back inside. I’ll bring your luggage.”

“Thanks for everything,” I say to Picnic. I ignore his look as JD waits for me at the door.

“No problem, sweetheart.”

Picnic’s news has shaken me to the point where I can’t concentrate on writing, so I start a new project.

I mix the whole wheat flour, eggs, pumpkin puree, and the rest of the ingredients and begin kneading the dough by hand.

JD pauses briefly in the kitchen, pointing out a lonely pizza sheet when I ask about baking pans, then returns to whatever he was doing before.

Two hours later, the first two trays of biscuits are cooling on the counter, and the final one is in the oven.

JD reappears, and I feel like I can take a full breath for the first time since he left.

He snags a biscuit and takes a bite before I can stop him.

The look on his face triggers an explosion of giggles from me.

He gags, then determinedly chews more and swallows it. “I wasn’t expecting it to be savory,” he says diplomatically. He looks at the rest and forces a smile.

I can’t let him suffer. “It’s a dog biscuit. You can eat it. There’s nothing dangerous in it, but it is not flavored for humans.”

He laughs too. A decade of heaviness vanishes from his face. “Oh, thank God. These are terrible!”

“I have to warn you. My people cookies aren’t much better.”

“That’s what stores are for.” He calls the dogs over. Mandy gobbles the rest of JD’s biscuit without hesitation. Cajun sniffs JD’s next offering with deep consideration before he condescends to eat my cooking. Honestly, I don’t blame the dog. “The dogs are going to love you forever,” JD says.

I wonder what it would take to get that response from their owner.

## Page 8

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Eight

When Rhiannon tells me she is planning to make supper, I hesitate until she informs me that the soup is canned and even she can make grilled cheese sandwiches. It beats eating out again, so I tell her to go ahead.

The dogs' ears perk up a second before I hear a car horn sound twice. Considering that I know that Picnic closed the gate behind him when Wylie picked him up. I have no idea who the fuck is on my property now.

I burst through the door, pausing only to lock it behind me. Rhiannon has her phone in her hands. She's ready to call for backup but I'm not going to let anybody get that close.

For fuck's sake. A dirty white sedan is parked at the end of the first row of cars.

It seems like Jordan Pratt and Neil Cort, a couple of local boys, opened my gate and drove right through.

It's not like they haven't done it a hundred times.

I've given them shit for doing it before, but they obviously haven't taken me seriously.

Today is not the day to test me. "What the ever-loving fuck, Pratt? The gate was closed for a reason" I shout.

“Dude, when did you get the new car? That Charger is in great shape. How much do you want for it?”

Motherfucker, they’ve seen Rhiannon’s car. Nobody is supposed to know she’s here. “It’s not for sale. I’m holding it for a friend.”

“Come on, Dobermann. I can make a better offer. I’d look sweet in that thing.”

The moron is six foot four. Rhiannon barely hits five foot six. He’d look like an ogre hunched over the steering wheel. “It’s not for sale. Forget you even saw it. Now fuck off.”

“Chill, man. We need a bumper that will fit an old Chevy SUV, preferably a?—”

“What part of “fuck off” are you not getting, Pratt? I’m closed. I’m going to get really pissed off if you need me to come over and explain it to you.”

“Fuck you too, Dobermann. See if we come back to give you any more business,” Cort says.

But they finally leave, taking their lame threats with them. Those morons are two of the reasons I stay in business. They need repair parts every other month, plus they are responsible for about half a dozen of the wrecks in the yard. They’ll be back.

I go inside to check on Rhiannon. She is a fucking wreck. Not even Cajun sitting on her toes is enough to make her relax. When I sit beside her and take her hands in mine, I realize she’s clenching her fingers so tightly that they’ve gone cold. I should have known she’d be upset.

“It’s okay. You’re fine. You’re safe. It was only a couple of locals looking for parts. They don’t even know you’re here,” I say. I don’t mention that they took notice of

her car. She doesn't need to know that. Besides, I took care of it. Those two fuckers definitely don't know who it belongs to.

"You should let me leave. That bitch put a tracker on my car. What if there's another one that Bishop didn't find?" she asks. "Who knows what she's capable of."

"She won't find you. I promise." If I have to ask my brothers to do drive-bys all night, I will, if that's what gives Rhiannon peace of mind.

Being behind a locked door is not making her feel safe. It's time for a different tactic, according to the therapists I saw at the VA. I have walked this entire property a hundred times over the last two years. "Let's go for a walk behind the house. There's a rise where you can see the river."

Rhiannon has stopped shaking by the time we get back to the house.

It's a small improvement but I'll take it.

She makes the soup. I take over the sandwiches after she nearly burns them to a crisp.

She's too jumpy to enjoy a movie, so I pull out my grandfather's old cribbage board after supper.

I've forgotten most of the rules. She has not, and proceeds to skunk me two games in a row.

I lost the first one fairly. I throw the second one just to make her smile.

"I'm going to take a shower and crash," Rhiannon says after losing our third game by two points.

I try not to think of her naked in a steamy cloud. Then I stop fighting it and enjoy the vision. “I’ll grab my stuff for the sofa.” I don’t sleep naked. It’s too vulnerable. My T-shirt and track pants will prevent any embarrassment for either of us if Rhiannon sees me.

By the time I’m out of the bathroom, my bedroom door is closed and there is no light coming from the crack under the door.

I make a loop around the property with the dogs.

The gate is closed—with a padlock this time.

Nothing is out of place. The bugs and night critters in the surrounding trees tell me no strangers are lurking in the dark.

I lie on the sofa. Sleep is not coming. Not with Rhiannon next door in my bed. I bet the pillow is going to smell like her tomorrow. If she’s still here, I plan to swap the one I’m using tonight for hers. I want that memory of her.

Screams erupt from my bedroom. I’m up and through the door before they stop. Rhiannon is sitting upright in bed, her wavy, fair hair a chaotic halo. “Sorry. Sorry,” she gasps. “Nightmare.”

“Will you be okay?”

“No. Don’t go.” She pats the mattress beside her. “Can you stay? I mean, I know you won’t. But just until I fall asleep?”

She is heaven and hell in the same sweet package. How can I say no to her, even though I should. It’s just for a couple minutes. Until she feels better. I can give her that much.

I lay beside her, on top of the blankets.

“The first time I ever slept out in the woods—at my friend’s cottage—it was raining.

And they had a tin roof. That was a first for me too,” she tells me in the dark.

“It wasn’t a thunderstorm. Just a long, gentle, soaking rain that lasted all night.

Every time I woke up because it was a new place and a different mattress, the drumming would put me right back to sleep.”

That’s the last thing I remember until the sun shining through the window wakes me in the morning.

I wedged my leg between Rhiannon’s some time during the night.

My arm is wrapped tightly around her waist, holding her against me.

My body is telling me I should never let her go.

For once, my brain is in agreement. How can two people who fit so well together be wrong?

She needs looking after and I’m here to do it. We don’t need anything else right now.

Rhiannon’s eyes pop open. I’m not ready for the guilt. “I’m so sorry,” she says, trying to pull away.

“For what?”

“You said you sleep alone.” She unhooks my arm. Then she kicks my leg away. “I’m

trying to respect that.”

“Maybe I don’t want you to.”

She clambers out of bed. With her hands on her hips, she looks like she’s a naughty, nighty-wearing school m’arm about to lecture the class bad boy. I can work with that. “Hey, I was ready to jump you the minute I saw you. You’re the one who’s not interested.”

“I’ve always been interested. I thought I was protecting you.”

“I don’t need protection, JD. I just need you.”

She’s killing me. Rhiannon could be the one to put the pieces of me back together. But if this goes wrong, she could also be the one to crush the last of those pieces into dust. I want to be her everything, but I can’t lie. “I don’t know how much I can give you.”

“Then give me what you can and let me decide if it’s enough.”

She makes it sound so easy. But everything about her has been easy so far. What if it’s just me getting in my own way? Before I can figure out if that’s the case, she has one more question for me.

“What do you want, JD?” Rhiannon demands, blue eyes sparking.

I was a fucking SEAL for fuck’s sake. I’ve jumped out of airplanes. I can do this. “I want you.”

“Thank fucking Christ!”



## Page 9

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

### Chapter Nine

It took me faking a nightmare to trick JD into laying down beside me. I have never worked so hard to bed a man in my life. But he's going to be worth it. I can tell.

I knew JD was the most desirable man I'd ever seen the moment I first laid eyes on him.

He's worried about his scars, but that's just skin.

Sexy is getting back up after being knocked down.

Strength is asking for help from your family.

Any man who engenders trust from fellow soldiers as well as two year old nieces and Rottweilers has character down to his bones.

Plus, he is really, really ridiculously good looking. I understand why Violet and Romy went after the Dobermann brothers, but those two are from the weaker branch of the family tree. JD is hot.

So hot that he is heating up the bedroom.

I'm wearing too many clothes. I pull my satin nightgown over my head.

It slides over the strawberry-blond waves of my hair, letting the strands fall to my shoulders once they're free.

JD's gaze goes right to my breasts. I shift on the mattress to face him full on, making sure to add a bounce to jiggle them a little.

I'm not above using all the tricks in my repertoire.

JD slowly raises his hands. His warm palms land on my rib cage. Then his thumbs brush the soft skin there and move over my nipples. "I want to be gentle," he murmurs.

"I want you to do whatever you need to do," I say. "I won't break. Neither will you."

With that permission, he wraps one hand around my neck and pulls me down for a kiss.

His tongue slips between my lips and his taste fills my mouth.

He only gives me a taste though, before he's gone.

The next thing I know, his whiskers tickle my stomach when he sucks my nipple into his mouth.

I arch under the touch, and he uses the movement to push my panties over my hips.

They catch on my ass. JD squeezes my cheeks as he pulls the material to my thighs, and then down my legs.

I mew, rubbing my legs together in anticipation as the heat builds between us.

JD had gone to sleep in track pants. I see him straining against them.

I help with the drawstring. He doesn't need any assistance in shucking them as soon

as that obstacle is removed.

He's gone commando underneath, and his solid, tanned body continues to make my mouth water as soon as it is revealed.

It will take me an entire weekend to fully explore this new playground, but since I don't know how much time I have, I'll enjoy what I can, while I can.

He is all ridges and muscle. I am softness and curves.

The faint light filtering through the curtain highlights and shadows all of our contours and angles.

We are a picture of opposites, and it is working for me.

I slide my fingers down JD's abdomen, searching for treasure, then find it hard and ready in my hand.

"Please tell me you have a condom," I whisper.

"Shit."

I panic momentarily when he rolls away. Then I hear the drawer in his night table open and he is back. "Someday soon, we're not going to need these, Rhiannon."

I hope so. I like the thought of someday soon with him. I explore the breadth of his chest and the broadness of his shoulders as he protects us both. This isn't about worship or tenderness. Not this time. This is life and overcoming our fears to live in the moment.

When he rolls me to my back, I'm hot and slick and ready for him. I gasp as he

nudges at my heat. “Yes,” I whisper, encouraging him to come all the way home.

“God, Rhiannon, I—” JD moans. He pauses, his hips locked against mine.

He takes a shuddering breath. I wait for the storm to break.

When it does, it’s glorious. JD cages me in his arms, and then drives forward, filling me completely.

His hips pump, building the tension in my core until it’s all I can do to gasp for air in between kisses.

“JD, I can’t!” I can’t hold back. My orgasm bursts over me, arching my back to the sky and lifting us both off the bed from the power of my release.

“Princess, me too.” He stiffens and his hips stop moving, but I still feel him twitching inside me.

He drops his head until his forehead is resting against mine.

“This is it for me. It’s you or nobody for the rest of my life, Rhiannon.

I’m in love with you. I know it seems fast but you’ve got all of my heart. ”

Fast? Try lightspeed. I’ve known JD for less than two days, but I feel the same.

Sometimes the noise of the world falls away and the one you are supposed to be with steps into the sunshine glowing like a beacon that says, “Hey, over here, I’m your future!

” What more do I need? “I love you too, JD. We’ll work it out. ”

He squeezes me tightly. “I’m only letting go for a second. I’ll be right back.”

JD hugs me hard enough that I can still feel it when he returns to bed, wearing a smile and carrying another condom.

### Chapter Ten

I am absolutely spent. Rhiannon is sugar and spice and sweet deception because I've never had a woman fuck me so thoroughly in my life.

If I thought it was going to be hard to let her go back to Washington, DC before, it's impossible now.

She's not leaving the county unless she's with me.

I need to find a way to sell Lonesome to her.

With shitty timing, my phone beeps at the same time she rolls over and drops a kiss on my biceps. "One second, princess."

Tolk has sent a text telling me that Abby Trask's kidnapper van disappeared overnight. He and Wylie did a patrol around town and didn't find anything. They think Rhiannon is in the clear.

"Bad news?"

"No. Excellent news. Your stalker seems to have taken the bait and moved on."

Rhiannon falls back, her red-blond hair fanning against her pillow. "Thank God."

"What do you say to some breakfast and then a ride?" I laugh at the leer that crosses her face. "On my bike. I haven't taken you out on it yet." I didn't get to ride at all

yesterday. With winter on its way, I don't want to miss another day.

“Really? I'll be dressed in five minutes.”

I'd hoped to work up more of an appetite, but Rhiannon kisses me and is gone in a shot.

I hear water running in the bathroom as I respond to Tolk.

Unfortunately, that was the end of his good news.

They guys need me for a while this afternoon.

I have never turned down a brother in need before.

I'm not about to start now. I just have to find a safe spot to stash Rhiannon while I'm working.

There are plenty of places in Lonesome where somebody can keep an eye on her while I'm busy.

Rhiannon squeezes my chest tightly as I drive us into town to the Halfway Café for breakfast. I smile when she orders two eggs, two sausages and two pieces of toast. I know how much energy she burned this morning. I order double what she does.

While we eat, I point out Lonesome's landmarks through the window. It's not hard; they are all on one street. Vet clinic, laundromat, grocery store. We have everything you need, but not everything a city girl might want. She's polite but I don't think I've convinced her of Lonesome's potential.

I don't want to head straight home, so I swing the long way around Lac Lu, past

Deacon's place and the rental houses on the east shore, until we arrive at a new sign announcing the home of the Sunny-Lu Salon and Spa.

I hang back and watch Romy show her the property and the newly renovated salon building.

It looks like they are beginning to fix up some of the other structures in the old campground.

Rhiannon bounces back to me. "Anybody who invested in this place is going to be very happy with what's been done so far," she says.

"Random anybodies?"

"Totally random, as a prediction from a completely uninvolved observer."

"Investors should be around to check on their investments regularly," I say. "Daily would probably be best."

She offers me a small smile. "Regularly, at least," she agrees. If that's all she can give me, I'll take it but fuck I want more than just crumbs. I can finally breathe again. I don't want to have to hold my breath whenever she's gone.

Tolk texts to let me know that they need me. Romy offers to drive Rhiannon back to my place when they're done.

"She's gone, JD," Rhiannon says when I hesitate. "If it makes you feel better, I'll head straight to the house and stay out of sight."

I don't like it. I don't have a reason, but I don't like it. "Text me when you leave here. Text me when you get there." I'm pleased as shit when Rhi steps up and kisses me



goodbye. “I’ll see you soon,” I promise.

The ride back to town takes longer than my meeting with Wylie and Tolk.

I’m heading out to get Rhi when she texts me that they are leaving, so I have a couple minutes to stop at the garage to see if my cousins have any new relationship tips they can pass on that will help me convince Rhiannon to stay.

They have nothing useful to offer but back slaps and good wishes.

The highway home is unusually busy. With oncoming semis and passing Greyhounds, my head is on a swivel. A logging truck has ninety percent of my attention when I look in my side mirror to see a white van coming up behind me.

I get out of the way. Then...wipeout.

### Chapter Eleven

My investment in the Sunny-Lu Salon and Spa is not the secret that we originally planned.

That may work out in my favor, especially if I'm on hand to take a more active role if Romy needs me.

I'm a writer; I can create as many reasons as I want to move but the bottom line is that JD is here and not there.

My friends are here too. I can travel just as easily from North Dakota to see my family as I can from the east coast.

"JD sure had everybody fooled thinking that he was the strong, silent type. That Dobermann is downright loquacious when it comes to you," Romy teases.

"Don't be hating because I got the best looking one."

"Rhi, he nailed you in a junkyard."

"Romy, you got down and dirty in a staff room above a garage."

"What's your point?"

"We're smart enough to take good sex wherever we can get it," I say. We both crack up.

Romy drops me in front of the gate. “Text JD when you get to the house. I don’t want him coming after me. Bishop gets growly but JD can be downright scary.”

“Will do.” I wave good-bye and am already thinking about supper by the time she vanishes from sight. The dogs are antsy, so I let them out while I stare into JD’s empty freezer. When I hear barking, I close the fridge. When I hear the yelp, I race out the door.

Mandy barks frantically at a white van. It’s hung up on a car trailer that was hiding behind a stack of tires.

Cajun is on his side, whining, with one leg pointing the wrong way.

The van engine is still racing but there is nobody behind the wheel.

Mandy whirls to bark at me. That dog has been nothing but sweet to me, so I take it as a warning and throw myself to the ground.

A pipe whistles by my head and hits the post beside me.

“Jesus, you pathetic bitch, what is wrong with you?” I try to scramble to my feet, but I’ve winded myself. Wasting my breath on the insult has slowed me down.

“You are the reason that I’m not with Brandon and Bronson right now. Why are you trying to keep us apart? They would never want you!” Each of Abby Trask’s comments is punctuated with a swing.

“They are fucking fictional, you lunatic.”

“Stop trying to steal them from me!” She looks like she hasn’t washed in days. Her hair hangs in greasy chunks over her face. Her clothes are equally gross. I think she’s

been living in her van.

Mandy jumps and snaps. Abby swings and nearly connects. “Mandy, come,” I shout. Cajun has stopped making noise. I can’t let JD’s other dog get hurt too.

“You think you’re so smart, trying to lead me away. But those guys in the bar told me they saw a Charger here with Washington plates, you lying whore. Cheating on the twins with some random guy just because your bed is empty. I could kill you for that. Brandon and Bronson deserve better than you.”

I see movement up the row beyond the disabled van. It’s JD. He looks like hell—jeans torn up, jacket covered in dust. I think he might be limping. I try not to stare. I don’t want Abby going after him as well. I risk another glance. He holds his finger to his lips. I look away.

“You’re right, Abby. I don’t deserve them,” I say. I need to buy JD time to do whatever he’s planning. “But it’s not what you think.”

“You’re definitely trying to steal them. I saw?—”

“Brandon and Bronson are planning a surprise for you.” The words fall from my mouth. I have no idea what comes next. I haven’t plotted this scene in my head. But Abby slows down to listen, so I keep going. “They asked me to help them plan it all for you. It’s you they want.

“I don’t believe you.”

“It’s about Brentley. He’s going to be on the cover of my next book.”

She staggers. “What? Who the fuck is Brentley and why should I care?”

I have no clue where this is coming from, but JD is practically on her.

I have to keep going. “Brandon and Bronson aren’t twins.

They’re triplets. They wanted to keep it a secret until Brentley’s book.

All three of them asked me to dedicate it to you.

Their biggest fan. They know all about you.

That’s why I’m here. To finish writing it while they plan your surprise party back in Washington. ”

Abby stills. She pushes her wild hair out of her face to study my expression. “Really? They’re doing all that for me? They love me that much?”

JD launches himself off a tire and slams into Abby, taking her down like he’s a wrestler coming off the top rope. They both grunt when they hit the ground. I only care about JD. I pick up the pipe that Abby dropped and step away.

“No, not really, you moron. It’s one fucking model and he doesn’t know who the fuck you are.” I’m tempted to bash her over the head to make sure she doesn’t get up. Then JD rises to his knees and cold cocks her. She’s out for the count.

He pushes himself to his feet. “Are you okay?”

“I’m fine.”

“Rhiannon, you’re not.” He reaches for my hand. When he turns it, I see a gash on my wrist I haven’t felt. JD pulls a bandana from his pocket and wraps it around the cut. I feel like he is a second from calling an ambulance for me.

“I must have fallen. I jumped out of her way. She never made contact. I swear.” If JD starts thinking he failed in protecting me because of that bitch, I’m going to kick her while she’s down. I wouldn’t be here right now if it wasn’t for him.

His grip on me is like iron. “I can’t lose you, Rhiannon. I love you. I just found you.”

I never expected him to say the words. I’d hoped he felt the same way as I do, but I thought I’d have to work to get them out.

I’ll take them any way I can get them. “I love you too, JD. I’m not going anywhere.

” I’d mostly decided after talking to Romy that I’d be trying life in Lonesome for a while. This proves I made the right decision.

“Promise me, Rhiannon.”

“I promise, JD.”

## Page 12

*Source Creation Date: July 30, 2025, 7:09 am*

I haven't had a natural night's sleep in two days. The meds keep pulling me under. I'm not complaining too hard. If I am awake, it's fucking agony, especially to breathe. When I do surface, though, Rhiannon is right there, thanking me for saving her and promising to take care of me till I'm better.

My mouth won't let me protest that I didn't save her. When I got back to the salvage yard, Cajun was down, Rhiannon was a mess, and Abby Trask was swinging for the fences. I didn't protect anybody. But I couldn't stay awake long enough to explain that.

The sun shines through the open window. The sound of birds and the wind in the trees is a gentle way to wake up.

A breeze ruffles the curtain and moves the air so it's not stagnant with the stink of sweat and bad dreams. I open my eyes to see Rhiannon curled up on the armchair that she's dragged in from the living room.

I didn't hear a thing. It's heartbreakingly sweet that she is trying to keep a compromise between her promise to watch over me and my desire to sleep alone.

I don't think I'm physically capable of attacking anyone in my current condition, but the distance between the bed and the chair, and the chair and the door would give her time to run. That's my woman, thinking ahead.

"Hey, there. Are you awake for real this time?" Rhiannon's soft question cuts through the last of the haze.

“If I’m not, this is the best dream I’ve ever had in my life.” It seems like the painkillers have loosened my tongue as well as my muscles. “Are you okay?” I don’t care about me. Rhiannon’s the priority.

“I’m fine, I promise?”

I remember something else. “The dogs? Something was wrong with Cajun.”

“Your cousins took him to the vet clinic in town. The vet had to do some surgery on his leg but said Cajun will be okay.”

Bishop and Deacon wouldn’t lie to me about that. They know how important my dogs are to me.

Rhiannon puts her cool hand on my forehead. “How are you feeling, JD?”

“Like my motorcycle got run off the road and then I hoofed it on foot for the last mile to take down a murderous bitch who was about to kill my girlfriend.”

For some reason, my answer has Rhiannon beaming. “I knew it would kick in if I told you often enough!”

I push until I’m sitting upright. My ribs and left shoulder protest. With the sheet pooling at my hips, I look down and see a rainbow of bruises stretching across my torso. No wonder I feel like shit. “What are you talking about?”

“You shook off a car accident and murder attempt to come and rescue me and you succeeded. You didn’t screw up.

You didn’t fail me. So cut yourself some fucking slack, Dobermann.

You saved me, and you’ll do it again next time, be it another stalker or an



overambitious movie producer who wants to buy my rights or a desperate Bronco owner who needs a steering wheel for a 1974 model and knows I know where to find one. ”

There’s too much. I grab hold of the easiest thing. “You found a steering wheel?” I’d sent out some emails and put out feelers, but nobody has gotten back to me yet. I wanted to be the one to track it down for her.

“No, but you’re going to find one for me in time for Christmas this year. That is, if you decide you want to stick around for this gong show that is my life because I can’t promise it’s going to get any less demanding.”

Rhiannon is still sitting in that chair. The blanket she’s been using has slipped to the floor, revealing a rumpled set of pyjamas that should not look so sexy on anybody. I lift my comforter and pat the mattress.

She is on the bed in a shot. She carefully arranges the pillows against the barnwood headboard so she is sitting up to talk to me without actually touching me.

I grimace when I throw my arm around her shoulders and pull her close so she’s leaning on the less damaged side of my chest. The comfort is worth the pain.

“I love you, so I’m sticking around. What are we thinking?

Me moving to Washington? Or are you moving to Lonesome?

” One of us will have to sacrifice. I could probably be okay in DC.

There would be other former military people to connect with, so I’d have that support.

Although, it’ll kill me to have to give up my brothers in the Lost Souls.

They are as much family as my cousins and their future wives are. But home will be where Rhi is.

“I have no family commitments tying me there. I have to travel for the holidays anyway. And two of my best friends live here. I can write anywhere. In fact, a move might be beneficial. I’d have fewer politicians around which is always a good thing.

Plus, I’ll be surrounded by a ton of inspiration for my next set of heroes.

But you won’t be one of them. I was going to use you, but I’ve changed my mind.

You, JD, are all mine and I’m not sharing you with my readers,” she teases.

I’ve had all of fifteen minutes of spare time since Rhiannon exploded into my life, but I put it to good use.

I remember what I read about her books. I’d never heard of her before Romy and Violet came to town, but her online fans—stalkers excluded—are absolutely rabid when it comes to their favourite heroes in her books.

I have no desire for that kind of attention from anybody but her.

But that’s not the important part of what she just said.

“Are you seriously offering to move here to be with me?”

“I don’t want to be without you, JD. If you’re here, that’s where I want to be. I love you too. That’s how it works.”

I’ll need to clear out the spare room, so Rhiannon has an office to work in.

I have to find a place to store the furniture that isn’t going to fit in the house.

And talk to Romy and Bishop to find somebody to put on an addition because we're going to need more room eventually.

"Are you absolutely sure?" After the accident, I had to do breathing exercises with cracked ribs.

That was less painful than waiting for her reply.

I should have known that drama follows Rhi, but she doesn't create it for her own entertainment. She very carefully swings a leg over my waist, straddling me. Then she kisses me so deeply I can feel it in my soul.

When we come up for air, her words seal the deal and put my worries to rest. "Of course, I'm sure. Every good romance writer knows a happily ever after when she sees it, JD. And for me, you're it. Forever."

THE END