
Chapter 1

“Jon, what are you doing?” Abigail Landon asked. She sat at a small mahogany table, in the expensive, barely-lit restaurant when, suddenly, her boyfriend for the past couple of years, stood up from the same table and knelt beside her.

“Abigail,” he started, always using her full given name, which drove her nuts. “You’ve made me so happy the last few years we’ve been together. I’ve worked my butt off to keep you and respected your conditions. I love you so very much, and I’m finally able to say we are both in a place in our lives that we can take things to the next level.” He paused for a moment as he looked up at her. The light was so low, leaving them in the shadows.

Abby’s eyes darted around quickly. Her heart was slamming in her chest as she began to panic. This wasn’t what she wanted, she couldn’t do this. She could hear the thud of her heart, and it wasn’t a good thump, nor was it out of joy. What the hell was happening?

She sat frozen as she caught sight of him, pulling out a small

box from his nice black suit. "Jon, no, don't," she whispered, but it didn't stop him.

He opened the red velvet box, and snug in the holder was a princess cut diamond. It was so beautiful and flawless. The medium-thick band was silver and had tiny circular diamonds about a quarter of the way down the sides.

Abby flew from the chair as the words, "Will you marry me" washed over her. She shook her head fast, making her long brown hair bounce quickly. "No, Jon, please, no, I can't."

Jon stood up, wholly baffled. "What do you mean, no?" he said and scowled at her, very angry and upset.

"I'm not ready at all. I can't. I don't want this." Her emerald-green eyes filled with tears as she turned away from Jon and the table, making a beeline for the exit, leaving him there angry at her.

She couldn't flee the restaurant fast enough. As soon as she bolted out the door, she flagged down a cab. She rattled off her address, and off the driver went. She closed her eyes tightly as she let the tears fall, but it wasn't because of heartbreak. It was because she hated what her life had become.

Repetitive. Same thing every day. Wake up at five a.m., be at her job as an elementary school teacher by seven, come home, meet John for dinner, and go back to an empty house. Typical. She loved the children she taught, one-hundred percent, but everything else was losing its meaning.

Abby's eyes opened slowly, staring out the cab window watching the many lights go by. Her breath left her lungs slowly when they made it to her apartment. She pulled the money out of her tiny clutch bag and handed it to the driver. "Thanks."

She threw open the door and got out, making it to her little one-bedroom apartment. Her phone began to ring. She pulled it out of her clutch. She refused to pick up. She couldn't talk to him right now.

Jon cursed and threw his phone on the passenger seat of his Audi when the call went to voicemail. What had happened back at the restaurant? He was still fuming and wanted to yell at her directly, not through a stupid voicemail. He gave that ungrateful woman everything. His phone began to ring. He grabbed it quickly in hopes that it was Abigail calling to apologize. Instead it was her mother.

“Hello, Karen.”

“Jonathan, how’d it go?” Karen’s voice was too cheerful.

“Ha, about a joke, she ran out on me.” Anger filled his voice.

“I’m sorry, what?” Karen’s voice changed to complete confusion.

“I asked, she said something about not being able to and ran away from the restaurant and me,” Jon growled out.

Karen was utterly silent on the other end of the phone. A few minutes later she started to make excuses. “Maybe she was just caught off guard. Just go talk to her, Jonathan. Abigail can have a lot of anxiety when it comes to surprises like that. But I thought she would have been excited about that kind of surprise.”

Jon let out a huge sigh. “I don’t know, Karen. I really don’t.”

“You love her, right?” Karen demanded.

“Yeah,” Jon answered shortly.

“Then go to her, don’t let her slip away, she’s not easy, you know that,” Karen ordered the man she wanted for a son-in-law.

“Fine.” He hung up the phone and made his way to Abigail’s apartment.

Abby sat on her dark-green leather couch in her dimly lit apartment. Her stomach was in an uncomfortable knot. She tried to keep her breathing more relaxed as she stared at her phone as it

rang for the fifth time since she got home. Why couldn't her mom just leave her alone? She obviously knew about Jon's proposal. She probably even put Jon up to the idea. She jumped when she heard the loud knock on her door.

Abby slowly got up off the couch and opened the door slightly, but was shoved back roughly. She let out a gasp as she stumbled in her heels and fell on the floor. "Jon?" she gasped out as she looked up at him.

"You are an ungrateful piece of work, you know that?" he demanded as he shut the door roughly and then picked her up by the arm, pushing her against the door. "I've given you a life of pure luxury, and you repay me by walking out on me?"

"Jon, please stop, you're hurting me." She had never seen him like this before. She tried to pull away from his tight squeeze on her arm. She was met with a sharp slap against her cheek. She cried out loudly, covering her stinging cheek with her free hand. What was going on?

"Maybe that'll give you something to think about before you tell me no again," he shoved her back to the ground with ease. "You get one more chance, but that's it. Tomorrow, the same place at the same time, and you had better be there and say yes this time. You won't make a fool out of me again." He pulled open the door and slammed it shut as he stormed out of it.

Abby slid back to sitting position against the door as the tears slid down her cheeks. What had just happened? She had told Jon no before, and this hadn't happened. And she couldn't go through another proposal. Her phone began to ring on the couch where she had left it.

She took a deep breath, locking the door and went to her phone. Oh no, this was going to be fantastic. "Hello?" she tried to hide the sound of tears.

"Abby, what's the matter?" Jen Nickels demanded right away.

"Jen, I made a stupid mistake. Can I come to stay with you for a little bit?"

“Of course! Ryder is out of town on business right now, so it’ll be just us girls, but even if he was home you could still come to stay. What happened, Abby?” Jennifer Nickels asked, concerned.

“Can I tell you when I get there, please?” Abby couldn’t lie to Jen, they had been friends since they were in diapers.

“Sure, are you okay, though?”

“Honestly, I don’t know. I’m leaving tonight. though. I’ll let you know when I’m on my way and when I am close to you.” Abby hung up and dropped the phone on the couch as she hugged her middle. Why did she ever agree to date that man? He was obviously no good, especially when he didn’t get his way, apparently.

She went to her room and hurriedly began to pack. She hated being so aloof with Jen but couldn’t bring herself to tell Jen over the phone what was going on. She packed as much as she could, grabbed her keys and phone, and rushed out of the building to her car. Getting away from everything might help make things clearer, but she was sure her mom would hound her continuously. Being away would make that less intrusive. She could ignore it more easily.

She got in her Camry and began the long thirteen-hour drive. It was already nine at night, she’d get to Jen’s, in Wyoming, at ten the next morning as long as she didn’t stop. Once she got there, she’d call the principal at her school and say she had a family emergency and needed some time off. She’d find something to do in Lovell. She texted Jen and began the long trip.

Jen stared at the text from her best friend. She had been crying when she called. No matter how hard Abby tried to hide things from her, it was impossible, and vice versa. If Jen had to take a guess, it probably had something to do with Abby’s mom. She

took a deep breath and replied to Abby, *‘Okay, sweetie, just promise me to stop and rest if you need to, I’m not going anywhere and await your arrival’*. She hoped Abby wouldn’t make the drive straight through. She didn’t get a reply. She sighed as she headed up to her bed, plugged her phone in, and left the sound on just in case Abby needed her.

She lay down after she showered and changed then began to fall asleep, but Abby was heavily on her mind.

Abby glanced at the car clock, three a.m., six hours down, seven more to go. She sighed as she adjusted herself in her seat. Her eyes were getting heavy with sleep. She shook her head, running a hand across her face. She tightened her grip on the steering wheel. She could do this, she had to, she didn’t want to stop, but she was getting so tired at the same time.

She found a little diner that was still open, and she pulled into the parking lot slowly. As she threw the car into park, she took another deep breath. She grabbed her keys, purse, and phone then headed into the small diner. She must look a sight, and she hadn’t even changed her clothes from the date with Jon. All she had thought about was getting away.

She felt like a fool wearing this silky, dark-blue dress, and her matching stilettos. She just knew she had to leave Seattle as fast as possible. The few people in the diner turned to look at her, and she felt the heat rush to her cheeks.

“Hello there, how can I help you today?” the cheery voice came from behind the counter.

“I just need a couple large coffees to go, please?” she whispered, feeling very unsure of herself and like she was on display.

The older waitress looked at her for a moment. “Regular?”

“Yes, please,” Abby answered timidly.

“Everything okay, doll?” the lady asked as she poured coffee into the two foam cups on the counter.

“Fine,” Abby mumbled. Her foot began to tap as she waited.

The waitress turned and searched her face slowly. “Two dollars, honey.”

Abby pulled out the two bills and handed them to the lady, then picked up the two cups slowly. “Thank you.” She began to down the first cup, then the second cup as she got back into her car. This had to work, she didn’t want to stop again. She just wanted to get to Jen’s, be safe, and be able to think freely again.

Her phone began to ring loudly, almost making her spill her last cup of coffee all over herself. She closed her eyes tightly, pulled out of the diner, and continued her way to Jen’s place.

Just keep going. She kept telling herself over and over. She chugged the rest of her coffee and tried to shut out the whole world.

He couldn’t wait to get back home to the ranch. He just wanted his bed again, his life. He wasn’t sure if this trip was worth the hassle. Five more days, and he’d be home. He took a deep breath as he slid into the motel bed and began to doze.