
HANNAH AND HAWK

Hometown Love Book Two

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This book contains fantasy themes appropriate for mature readers only. Nothing in this book should be interpreted as Blushing Books' or the author's advocating any non-consensual sexual activity.

Chapter 1

Hannah Koberline rolled her eyes and laughed at her brother Hunter as he unlocked the door to their hardware store. “What do you mean, you hate truck day? What kind of attitude is that? Lots of new things to put on the shelf and make us some money.”

“It’s 4 a.m.,” he complained. “I closed last night.”

“We close at 7 p.m.,” she reminded him. “But yeah, I know you didn’t get out of here until late. It looks great.” She looked around the dark store as they headed back to the storage room. It had been six months since they bought it and moved here from St. Peters, MO. She enjoyed southern Illinois, adored Macintyre and really loved her store. She wasn’t crazy about having to share it with her sometimes bossy big brother, but it worked out generally, and they mostly worked well together. They should, they’d had lots of practice at it. She and Hunter had been working together since they were children, so while he was annoying, she was used to him. Looking for a house and getting out of the studio apartment was next on her list, now that they had some good people hired and her schedule settled down to something manageable. Sure, it would be the holidays soon, and those were

always crazy busy during retail sales, but nothing she couldn't handle.

She and Hunter had grown up in their dad's hardware store, both working there as soon as they could walk, and she'd always dreamed of taking it over after he retired. A few years ago, while she had been away, a junior at college, Hunter, who was three years older, had shown up at her dorm room. He'd graduated from the same college a few years earlier, and had gone back to work in the store, just like she thought she would. When he told her that their dad had lost the store through a combination of medical debts for their cancer-stricken mom, and gambling debts that he ran up trying to pay off those bills, she'd been devastated. For her parents, of course, but also for Hunter and for herself. All their dreams, all their plans, just gone. Her folks had moved to Florida and moved in with her grandmother not long after that.

She finished her degree in business administration and went to work in an insurance office and had been miserable. One day while surfing on the net, dreaming, she'd run across this little hardware store for sale in a place called Macintyre, Illinois. She'd never heard of it, but started researching, went to visit that weekend and just fell in love with it. Both the town and the store which was just off the thriving main street downtown and apparently a destination point. There was a big box store at the edge of town, but looking at Mr. Jordan's numbers, she'd been impressed. She approached Hunter who was unhappily running a grocery store, and between the two of them, they'd managed financing and moved to Macintyre.

"Hey, Rodney," she said to the man standing outside the back door when she rolled it up.

"Morning, Hannah, Hunter," he replied. Rodney had worked there for Mr. Jordan and was the only one of his employees who stayed when they bought it. He only worked a few days a week but was an invaluable help and a wealth of knowledge on both store practices and town issues. He was

mostly retired and she really appreciated him coming in to give them support, at least during start up.

“Truck is on time this morning,” he said. “Just talked to Tristan.”

Rodney knew all the drivers, all the sales reps and all the merchandisers, and almost everyone in town it seemed. Of course, he’d been there since the store first opened over three decades ago.

“Good deal,” Hannah said, flipping on the lights in the stock room as he came in. “Hunter will be glad to get out of here early today. I hope Jer shows up on time.”

“He will,” Rodney said. “He’s a good worker. I know his family.”

Hannah agreed with him, silently. They had hired some very good people, including Jer who was attending community college nearby and his dad was some kind of contractor, so he knew the business.

She loved working in the store, but was glad that she had mostly decent hours now. They were open six days a week, which felt odd to her, but most of downtown here in Macintyre closed on Sunday and she and Hunter had decided to keep up that tradition, at least for now. That could change at some point, probably over the holidays, but right now, it was nice to have a known day off, just like what she called real people. Real people hours! She opened three days, and closed two days and so Hunter did the opposite, then Rodney opened once and closed once a week so they could have another day off a week. She often worked hers, doing planograms or cleaning shelves, or whatever, but that was her choice and not something she’d ask anyone else to do. Hunter liked to leave for the lake as soon as he got a day off. He was just boat crazy and worked to support his hobby. She was store crazy and worked because she loved it.

Hearing the buzzer at the front door, she went back through the dark store to let Jer in, and lock it behind him. “Good morn-

ing,” she said to the lanky young man. Jer worked here about twenty hours a week. He learned quickly, and thanks to his dad, seemed to know a lot about hardware, electrical and customer service. A big thing for a nineteen-year-old to have. She’d been impressed. His folks must be great.

“Morning,” he said. “Brought everyone a biscuit.” He handed her a bag and she smelled something wonderful.

“Your dad make them?” she asked, opening it. Jer’s dad seemed to have amazing skills in just about everything.

“This morning,” he said. “Help yourself, he fed me already.”

“I think I love your dad,” she said, biting into the flaky warm biscuit smothered in honey butter.

Jer rolled his eyes. “I’ll be sure and tell Hawk that. He’ll be thrilled.”

“You call your dad by your last name?” she asked. That was odd. Wasn’t it?

“Yeah, everyone does,” he said and headed to the stock room while she followed at a slower pace, enjoying her biscuit and the quietness of the store. Soon the truck would be here and things would be crazy for a few hours before they opened at eight. Then she’d be stocking shelves and helping customers and overseeing the cashiers the rest of the day. Man, this was a good biscuit. She needed the recipe. She needed to unload the truck.

A few hours later, she looked into the eyes of the most handsome man she’d ever seen. A Matthey McConaughy clone? Maybe? Gray eyes. Dark hair with barely visible silver streaks. Scruffy beard, six-foot-tall, at least, she could see his muscles, and well, he was luscious.

“Hello, you must be Hannah. I’m Derrick Hawk. My boy Jer works here and I came to bring him his schoolbooks he left on the counter this morning.”

Hannah tried to make her mouth work or her brain. Either one. This man. Well, he was old – probably ten years older than she was. Who cared? Umm, whatever. Books. He brought books. Jer and Hunter were still in the back room, sorting stock, she'd just unlocked the door for customers and he had been waiting outside for her. No, for Jer. For books? Derrick. Or Hawk. Wow.

“Biscuits,” she said. Oh wow, again. That was intelligent.

“You liked them?” He smiled at her and her knees buckled. No, they didn't. They just trembled a little.

“I did. Thank you,” she managed. See, she was smart and words came out of her mouth that made sense.

“Homegrown honey,” he said, and she tried not to swoon. Honey. Oh, yeah, bees. Did she like bees? Oh, yeah, she freaking loved bees. What was going on in her head?

“I'm Hannah,” she said.

He grinned at her and her breath caught. “I thought you were Hannah,” he said as if he hadn't realized that when he walked in and she was an idiot and now what did she say?

“I loved the honey.” Yeah, now he knew she was an idiot. So she added, “And the biscuit. Thank you.”

“I'm glad,” he said and put three books on the checkout lane. “Will you make sure Jer gets these? I'm so proud of that boy.”

“Me, too,” she said as if that were a thing. Yeah, she was proud of the kid who helped unload the truck. Of course she was. Why wouldn't she be?

He laughed, and said, “Well, Hannah, it was good to meet you. I'll be heading to work now. If you ever need something in your house or store fixed, give me a call, okay?” With that he put down a business card on the counter and walked back out the door.

Her stomach flip-flopped and her knees shook. What had just happened? She watched him walk out the door to a huge green pickup truck in the lot. Green was her new favorite color. Watching him drive away, she wondered what was wrong with

her. What had just happened? Lightning bolt? Idiocy? That man was amazing. Nothing more, nothing less. She had never had someone affect her like that before. Never. Good thing he left because she had work to do. Would she have been able to work if he stayed? She didn't really think so, because the truck had driven away and she was still staring at where it was in the parking lot.

"Hi, Tonya," she said as the morning cashier finally walked in. Hannah felt like hugging her. If Tonya had been on time, she would have been in the back room sorting stock and not unlocking the door and meeting.. well, him. Him.

"Sorry, I'm late," Tonya said. "Overslept." Stashing her purse under the counter, she opened the drawer to count the money.

"No worries," Hannah said. "Not had any customers yet. I'll go get you some candy to stock. Those are Jer's books on the counter. His dad brought them in."

"Oh man, I missed Hawk? Serves me right for being late. The man is fine, isn't he?"

"He is," Hannah agreed feeling a twinge of something that could not be jealousy. What could she possibly be jealous of? Nothing. Shaking her head, she headed to the back room to grab some boxes and get to work.

"Good morning," she looked up a few hours later to see Jess, who had been in here a few times, getting things for her new house. They had hit it off right away.

"Hi, Jess," Hannah smiled at her. She hadn't made many friends here in town yet between work, and work, and then working some more, but Jess was always friendly when she came in. She was a teacher here in town, and had been recently married. "Hi, Sam," she greeted the little boy with her.

Sam held out his arms to her. He was the friendliest little fellow and gave the best hugs. Swooping him up, she hugged him, then put him down. “He’s a doll.”

“I know. How lucky am I?” Jess said. “Hey, I dropped by to give you an invite. I’m having some girlfriends over this evening for,” she air-quoted, “book club.” Laughing, she picked up Sam who had started pulling things off the shelf. “We call it book club, but it’s really us sitting around having some wine and talking. I know you haven’t been in town long and it might be a good way to meet some people.”

“Do I need to bring a book or a snack?” Hanna asked. Yes, it would be great to get out of her tiny apartment and mingle with people who weren’t looking for faucets and electrical wiring.

“If you want to, that’s fine, but don’t worry about it, if you don’t. We always have too much. Give me your phone number and I will text you the address and time.”

“Sounds wonderful,” Hannah said. “Really appreciate you inviting me.”

“Hey, it’s great to have some fresh blood in town,” Jess said. “Come on, Sam, we have some more errands to run.”

“Bye, Sam, bye, Jess, see you tonight,” Hannah said, as she turned back to her shelf stocking. Something fun to do tonight, rather than go home and surf the web.

“Hey, Hannah, I’m taking off,” Hunter said. “Kevin’s coming in at three to close, but you knew that.” Kevin was their new hire and it would be his first night closing alone. She’d plan to pop back in right before closing and just make sure he was okay.

“Yeah, I knew that. Doing anything this afternoon?”

“Going fishing,” he said. “Gotta get the good out of my new boat.” Macintyre had a gorgeous lake that it skirted, called Lake Constance, that he’d parked his boat on and fished there as often as he could. She always thought it was because of the lake that he’d agreed to move down here with her. She didn’t care why;

she was just glad he had. Affording this place alone would have been impossible.

“Have fun, I’ll see you tomorrow.” She waved at him. They rarely hung out together, even though they got along great, but working together at the store and being business partners was enough closeness, they both thought. However, they both knew the other had their back, no matter what. Sometimes she thought he was bossy and annoying. Sometimes she knew he thought she was just a royal pain, but none of that mattered in the long term. They were family and business partners and quasi friends.

“You ready for a break?” she asked Tonya a few hours later. “Go take your twenty.” She opened the other register. There had been a couple rushes earlier, but it was slow right now. She looked around, Tonya had gotten most of the candy restocked under the registers between customers, which was a good thing. They were a nice little spur of the moment grab for most people who came through and certainly for the kids they brought with them. Every dollar helped.

“Good...” she glanced at the clock, “Good afternoon, Mr. Berry.” He was one of their regulars who often came in to just look around. He’d retired a few years ago and said his job now was puttering around his house, so he was often in to pick up something or just get ideas. Hannah thought he often came in just to chatter. There were a couple areas in the store that she felt were underutilized. Maybe she’d put a coffee pot and a few rocking chairs in one of them, like an old-fashioned general store where people could come and just visit. The more people in the store meant the more things they would buy. In the other corner, she wanted to do a little gift shop, with items that were home-made by people in Macintyre. That would bring more women into the shop, also a good thing. The holidays were coming and she wanted a large slice of the holiday shopping dollars pie. Hannah shivered in utter happiness and anticipation. When

Tonya came back from her break, she headed to the back room to work on orders and paperwork.

Sitting down at her small desk, she shivered again. Derrick Hawk. Whatever his name was. What was it about that man? She had never had such a visceral reaction to any person before. Not even kittens made her that crazy, and she loved kittens. As soon as she bought a house, she'd be getting another cat. Her cat, George, was ten years old, but she got him as a five-year-old rescue. She really wanted a kitten, just for the excitement of having something lively in the house. Who didn't love a kitten? What if Derrick Hawk was allergic to cats?

Giggling, Hannah opened the computer program and got to work. What was she thinking? Who knew? It was ridiculous. The entire thing. He was divorced with a nineteen-year-old son. She did know that now, after a little questioning of Tonya who knew a lot, almost as much as Rodney did. She was less than ten years older than his kid, so that made him less than the twenty years older than her that she'd guessed. It had been the silver streaks in his hair, she imagined. Probably genetic, but she liked it. He might be seeing someone for all she knew. Why would he be interested in someone like her? He probably had to beat them off with sticks. She'd let him beat her with a stick if he wanted. If she ever saw him again, and she reacted like she did today, yeah. Whatever.

Laughing at herself, she got back to work and put her stupid nonsense behind her. She had a girls' night to go to later and she felt excited about it, but knew she'd have to leave early to come check on Kevin on her way home.

"Hey, Jer, don't forget to grab your books on your way out. See you Saturday, thank you for all your hard work today."

"It's kinda what you pay me to do," he smiled at her and waved on his way out to his afternoon classes. "See you Saturday."

He was a good kid. His dad had raised him well. Rolling her

eyes, she thought, well, that was about a minute and a half she hadn't thought about Derrick or Hawk, she'd have to see which he preferred. Good job, Han, she told herself. Keep it up!

A few hours later, she'd been interrupted six times with questions and customers, but finished the payroll and the schedule for the next two weeks, and sent in the supply order for the month. Plus she ordered a huge coffee pot and a stand kit for it to go on. She'd started looking for a few chairs to go around it, too. She'd have her cozy little coffee corner before winter, a little gathering spot for the men to sit around in the mornings, or women to meet with their knitting or whatever. Maybe she could hold a few classes later on down the road on how to do simple repairs and things she'd grown up knowing and had been very surprised when she got to college that many didn't. Different lifestyles. That would fit well into her cozy corner, too. Glancing at the clock, she went to make sure that the store wasn't crazy busy and that everything was in order before she went home. Kevin would be here in less than an hour to take over for the night. She'd go home, shower and change, grab something to eat and head over to Jessie's house. It was nice to have evening plans that didn't involve laundry and TV for a change.

"Come on in, Hannah," Jess said, opening the pretty blue door to her adorable little stone house.

"Thanks, I love your house!" she said.

"Want to buy it?" Jess asked, leading the way into a cozy little living room that featured a huge rock fireplace. She had never seen anything as eye catching, she loved it! She could picture a Christmas tree there in the corner, a cheerful fire, and cookies and hot chocolate, waiting to be consumed.

"What?" Hannah looked at her. Had she heard right?

"We're putting it on the market next month. Mac and I are

building a house on the edge of town, as you know, because I've been in so often to pick stuff out for that one and to get this one ready to go on the market. I ask everyone if they want to buy it."

"I am actually in the market for a house," Hannah said. "I'm living in a tiny apartment and it's a little crowded between me and George."

"George?" Jess asked as they walked into the kitchen.

"My cat," she laughed, looking at the small but adorable kitchen where three other women sat.

"Oh, I thought I was hearing some news," Jess said. "This is Emmy, you need to know her, she's a fantastic realtor. Hannah is looking for a house, if she doesn't fall in love with mine."

"Oh, great to meet you," Emmy said, moving her dark hair away from her face. "You working with anyone yet?"

Hannah shook her head. "I haven't officially started looking yet. I've been waiting until my schedule settles down some and it's starting to, so, soon!"

"Hannah and her brother Hunter own the Double H hardware store downtown," Jess said. "They just moved here. This is Bronwyn."

"You I've seen in the store," Hannah said, shaking her hand.

"Yeah, I took over my dad's plumbing business and pop in for things now and then," Bronwyn said.

"Oh, that's right, we've talked a few times." Hannah remembered now. She'd met so many new people.

"This is Marnie, she's Sam's babysitter," Jess said, "and I think Tori will be here later on."

Marnie shook her head, "I don't think she's going to make it tonight. She's has conferences tonight."

"Oh, that's right," Jess said. "I knew that. She told me when I picked up Sam today. Tori runs the day care I take Sam to," she explained to Hannah. "Pregnancy brain."

"Oh, congratulations," she said. "I didn't know."

"I'm not showing yet," Jess said as if that explained every-

thing. "Have a seat, I'll pour the wine I can't have. Then I'll show you around the house, if you want to see it."

"I'd love to see it," Hannah said as she settled on one of the bar stools at the butcher block island. She didn't really cook, but she liked a nice kitchen.

"Help yourself," Emmy motioned toward the platter of cookies and other delicacies on the counter. "We are all frustrated bakers and Jess and Marnie are the only ones with a man to feed, so we tend to bring stuff all the time."

"Do you do this often?" Hannah asked, picking up an oatmeal cookie. "Thank you."

"We try to every couple of weeks, sometimes more often and sometimes less when life gets busy," Marnie said.

"I think that is great," Hannah said. "I hope I fit in." She took a drink of the wine that Jess handed her and smiled. "Now, that is good wine."

"I think you will fit in just fine," Emmy said, and clinked glasses with her. Hannah noted that Emmy had lemonade in hers. Was she pregnant, too? Or maybe she was the designated driver?

Hannah sat and mostly listened, only interjecting enough to be friendly as she got to know her new friends. She learned Jess was hoping for twins, apparently Mac had a twin sister who died and had been Jessie's best friend. Marnie had gotten married right out of college and used to teach, but was now a stay at home mom to a toddler and a three-month-old, while going back to school online and watching Sam a couple days a week but hoped to start teaching again this fall. Bronwyn was single and seemed to enjoy her job as a plumber, a lot. Like she and Hunter had, Bronwyn grew up in her dad's business and took it over when he retired. He was in fact, the Mr. Berry who came into the shop and hung around sometimes. Emmy, too, was single and working her way up in the real estate business. She wasn't certain that was going to be her forever career, but she enjoyed it for

now, and the freedom it gave her to go horseback riding as often as she could. She competed in rodeos which Hannah didn't understand. Wasn't that bucking bulls and things? She'd never been to a rodeo. Maybe a new experience at some point for her?

"Come and see the house," Jess told her a little later on. "I'd love not have to go through the hassle of putting it up for sale, if you are really serious about wanting a house, but if you don't want it, that is no problem. Don't worry about it."

"I heard that," Emmy laughed. "I'll come, too. I know the house, but will do the walk through in case I end up listing it."

"Oh, the pressure," Hannah said, laughing as she got up. "So far it is adorable." They walked through the three-bedroom house, saw a partial basement and an oddly large backyard and patio, all set up for grilling.

"In the new house, there's a place for a swing set and enough room we can put in a garden and maybe a swimming pool when the kids get older," Jess said. "I hate leaving my garden, but it will be fun to plan something new. I have peonies over there, a little strawberry bed, and you can see where the rest of my garden is. There are tulips and daffodils in the spring, too. I love growing tomatoes and have a small herb garden in the side yard."

Hannah could feel herself falling in love with it, despite all the garden things she doubted she'd ever use. She didn't cook. But falling in love? That was twice in one day, she must have some weird hormone thing going on. First Hawk and now this house. What? She wasn't in love with Derrick Hawk, she was just... attracted to him, admired him as an older man. Something. Shaking her head, she listened to Jess talk about her new house they were building.

"The only downside to this house is that it only has one bathroom," Jess said. "When I lived here by myself, it wasn't a big deal, but since Mac and Sam moved in, it's presented some challenges." She opened a door that led to a small room that held a washer and dryer, the hot water heater and furnace. "Mac was

going to build a small powder room in here, but then he got busy with his new job and the other house and it didn't happen."

"That would really enhance the value of the house," Emmy pointed out.

"We know," Jess agreed. "But I don't think it will be a big enough deal that the next person wouldn't be able to see the vision. Plus, I've talked to both Bronwyn and Hawk and we would roll the cost of it into the sale price if that was a deal breaker for someone."

"I want it," Hannah said, shocking herself.

"The powder room?" Emmy asked while Jessie looked at her as if she were nuts.

"No, I want to buy the house." Why were these words coming out of her mouth? She hadn't looked at the housing market yet, or neighborhoods or anything, but something about this house just hit her. She didn't even know how much it was! It just felt right, felt like home already. It was only about fifteen minutes to work, there was a small sunroom off the kitchen with a little table and chairs in it now, but she'd probably put a love seat in there for George. It would be a lovely place to sit and have coffee before work. She'd hire someone to look after the yard and maybe she'd learn to cook? Who knew?

"Am I good or what?" Emmy asked Jessie. Then she looked at Hannah and said, "Your next day off, call me and we will go to the office and go over numbers and things, okay?"

Three months later, Hannah sat in the middle of her boxes, looking around her new living room. Her brother and some of his friends would be here with her bed, couch and a few other things she'd brought from Missouri when they moved. Jessie and Mac had moved out the weekend before, and had started the new powder room for her as a sort of surprise housewarming

gift. Emmy assured her the cost had been rolled into the price of the house, so they weren't really paying for the entire thing, but still, it was very sweet of them to get it set up and the work started. She adored Jessie and while Mac intimidated her a little at first, she found him to be a very loving dad and husband.

Walking around the house, she walked into what used to be Sam's bedroom and pondered the pink wall. It was very odd for a toddler boy's room, but why not? She actually liked the color, though the other walls being red, she wasn't so sure about. How hard would it be to cover up the red? Jessie had offered to paint it, but she told her no. She didn't want the pregnant woman painting and she didn't yet know her theme or what she wanted the color of this room to be. For now, it didn't really matter. But, pink for a boy? How sexist was she that she thought it was strange?

The third bedroom, painted a very light sunshine yellow, was smaller and she thought she'd use it for her home office. She had a tech coming out in a few days to set up the computer to access the one at work so she could do payroll, ordering, bill paying and schedules on either at any time, without swapping flash drives back and forth. Her new bedroom was a lovely shade of periwinkle blue which matched or coordinated with none of her bedding and curtains, which were all autumn shades. But she had time to decide to either paint the room or buy new stuff, that was part of the fun of a new house.

The living room was what Jessie had called jailhouse gray, and said Mac demanded it when they were thinking of putting the house on the market, but she didn't mind it. Jessie seemed to hate it which amused her. The floors were all a lighter hard wood throughout the entire house, but for the bathroom and laundry room, which were both a white tile, and she felt at home for the first time since her parents had sold their house and moved to Florida to be close to her mom's sister while she battled her cancer.

Hearing her doorbell, she frowned. Okay, that sound had to change. She could probably change the doorbell out. She wasn't quite as handy as people often thought she was. She knew a bit about a lot of things, mostly from osmosis and hanging around the store and helping out. She knew she wasn't as handy as Bronwyn or as crafty and cute as Jessie, but... She needed to do it.

“Derrick Hawk!”

At her door. Standing in front of her. Breathing.