
BOONE BEGINNINGS

A Strong Man's Hand - Book 4

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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

GG Beauchamp sat with her granddaughter, Shelby, in front of the fire in her library. There was a voice recorder on the table in front of them. Shelby patted her enormous, pregnant belly and smiled peacefully at her grandmother.

"I'm going to record this so that I never lose it, the way you tell it, in your own words. You know we'll repeat this story through the years, but you know how stories change in the telling. I'm so glad we're doing this, Gran! Are you ready?"

GG took a sip of her tea and a deep breath. Then she began her story.

GG Devereaux stood in front of the mirror in her room, examining her reflection critically. She was wearing a new halter top with her well-faded blue jean bellbottoms. Her jeans hugged her, sitting low on her hips and letting an expanse of her flat, firm belly show below the halter top. She had long, straight dark hair, parted in the middle and brushed to a silky sheen. There was one tiny braid hanging down the side of her face. Her face was

expressive, with dark blue eyes and a light dusting of golden freckles across her nose. She was of medium height, but her long legs made her look taller. Her best friend, Sharon, was flopped on her belly on GG's bed, leafing through a teen fashion magazine.

"What do you think, Shar?"

"I think you look fab, just like always."

Exasperated, GG said, "You're not even looking!"

"I don't have to. You always look cool."

"So what do you think about the music festival they're planning over in Ohio?"

Sharon looked up. "You mean the free one? Outside, at that farm?"

"Yes!" GG dropped onto the bed beside her friend. "How cool would it be to go? We've got to figure out a way to get there!"

Sharon gave a derisive hoot. "Right! The first time we mention the words music festival, both our parents will totally freak out. Sex, drugs, rock music. We have exactly zero chance of going to that concert."

"So we have to find a way to go without them finding out. We need a really good plan."

Sharon looked alarmed. "I don't know. It's kind of scary, there *is* a lot of sex and drugs going on. They talk about it on the news all the time."

"Just because it's there, doesn't mean we have to do it. We'll just enjoy the music. Come on. Wouldn't it be cool?"

"Yes, but it's never going to happen. Our parents keep way too close an eye on us to let us pull that off."

"Then we have to be smart and think of a really great plan. Come on, Shar, let's try it."

"Well..." Always influenced by her friend, Sharon wavered. "I guess it doesn't hurt to try to make a plan. It doesn't mean we have to go through with it."

GG bounced on the bed. "You're the best! We're sixteen, I'm a good driver, and I have my car. We can do this!"

Sharon gave a groan. "Yeah, and if we do, we'll be grounded for life when we get back."

GG got up and paced restlessly. "Sometimes I think the whole world's gone crazy. Did you hear that Eddie Granger got drafted?"

"Oh, no, not another one! I hate this war so much!"

GG rushed over to hug her friend. "I'm so sorry; you guys must be so worried about Tommy."

Sharon's brother, Tommy, had been drafted several months earlier and was somewhere in Vietnam. Her mother was sometimes hanging on by a thread, and she dealt with it by engaging in a flurry of volunteer work of all kinds, keeping her so busy that she was too tired to think. So Sharon spent a lot of time at her best friend's house, where she knew that she was welcome at all times.

"I heard there's going to be a protest against the war in Bloomington next weekend," GG said.

"I'd be there in a second if I thought they wouldn't be protesting our soldiers as well. Do you think they'll keep it about the war?"

"I don't know. It seems like they start out that way, but somebody always starts screaming about how evil our troops are. It's at IU. Think we should go?"

"There's another thing our parents would freak out about."

GG winked at her. "This is an easy one. It's not that far, we can leave in the morning and be back by dinner time. Just another day of shopping, right?"

"Okay, but if they turn against our boys, we're leaving."

GG gave her a big hug. "It's a plan."

GG heard her mother calling to her from downstairs and went to the door to yell down to her.

"Greta Devereaux, do not stand up there and shout at me. Come down here."

GG rolled her eyes. "Why can't she remember to call me GG?"

Sharon giggled. "She wants you to be a movie star. Greta Garbo Devereaux, born to be a star."

GG said darkly, "How could she do that to me? Who could go to school and tell everybody that's their name?"

"You're just too glamorous for an average name." Sharon ducked as GG threw a pillow at her.

"Come on, give me some moral support. Let's go; God only knows what she wants."

The two of them clattered down the stairs, and Sharon said sweetly, "Hi, Mrs. Devereaux, how are you today?"

"Oh, hello, Sharon. I'm fine, how's your mother?"

"She's fine. She's volunteering at the children's clinic today."

Margot Devereaux nodded approvingly. "That's lovely." Turning her attention on her daughter, she shook her head and said, "Greta, what on earth are you wearing?"

GG just raised her eyebrows and said, "I'm sorry. I couldn't have heard you right. I thought you said Greta."

Her mother rolled her own eyes and said, "Fine. GG, what on earth are you wearing? You can't wear a bra with that thing!"

"It's in style, Mom, and I don't need a bra."

"Well, you will not go out in public dressed like that. What would people think?"

"People would think I look fashionable and cute."

Her mother gave her a cool look. "Sharon, you surely wouldn't go out dressed like that, would you?"

Sharon looked earnestly at her. "I don't think I could, Mrs. Devereaux. I just wouldn't be comfortable being that...exposed."

She stifled a giggle at the look that GG shot her.

"There, you see, GG? Why can't you be sensible, like Sharon?"

GG muttered, "Sharon's boobs just aren't quite perky enough for this top."

Sharon pinched her arm hard.

"Well, GG, I need you to go to Vance's and get some Pepsi and a gallon of milk. I swear, your brothers could eat and drink us out of house and home. Take some money from the cookie jar. And don't dawdle in town; dinner will be at six. Sharon, dear, would you like to stay for dinner?"

"Sure, my mother is serving leftover meatloaf tonight. I'd love to stay."

"Good, we're having roast chicken, and we'll have plenty. Okay, run along, girls."

GG got money out of the cookie jar and the two girls slipped out the front door, Margot forgetting that GG was still dressed in the offending halter top. Once the door was closed, they both burst into giggles.

"Thanks a lot for sticking up for me," GG said as they got into her car.

"It was more fun my way," her friend said, giggling uncontrollably. "Your mother kills me. She didn't even realize you were going to town this way."

"She sees what she wants to see. And Daddy will stick up for me."

"Yeah, but your brothers will make up for that."

"I won't let them have their Pepsi," GG said loftily.

"Yes you will; you love them to death, and they spoil you rotten."

"Whose family have you been hanging out with? Can't be mine. They torture me daily!"

"And you torture them right back, and you all love it." Sharon loved to be around her friend's lively family.

The girls walked into the little grocery store in the tiny town of Boone and waved at the owner, Charlie Vance.

"Hi, Mr. Vance," they chorused.

"Hi, girls, how are you two today?"

"We're good," GG said. "Mom sent us for Pepsi and milk."

"Oh, GG," Mr. Vance's wife called from the little customer

service office. "Your mother called and asked me to have you girls get two dozen eggs and a bottle of pancake syrup as well."

"That figures." GG shook her head. "I brought extra money because I knew she'd do that. I think we better just go ahead and get two gallons of milk, too. And she told *us* not to dawdle. We'll be here all night getting her groceries."

Sharon giggled and pulled a shopping cart out of the row. They got the items they had come for, and GG said, "Let's hurry up and pay before she calls again."

Safely out of the store, the two of them chattered with Danny, the bagboy, while he put their purchases in the back of the car. When they drove off, he waved after them, watching with a little longing on his face. GG and Sharon were the object of longing for most of the boys in the little high school in Boone. And yet they seemed unaware most of the time that the boys fell all over themselves to get to spend a little time near them. Everybody at school knew that the two girls had their hearts set on going to California after graduation. And there were heated arguments nearly daily in both girls' homes over what they would do following graduation.

Dinner at the Devereaux home was noisy and spirited, the boys teasing their sister and Sharon mercilessly and Margot trying unsuccessfully to lead a genteel, polite evening dinner. GG's father, Don, played right along with the teenagers, causing his wife to throw up her hands in despair more evenings than not. The fact that Margot secretly enjoyed the antics of her family was well hidden; at least, Margot thought it was. On the occasions that she was startled into a laugh or a half hidden smile, the whole family got a grin out of it.

The boys were twins and seniors in high school. GG was a sophomore in high school and had just turned sixteen. As hard as they all tried to avoid it, the conversation turned serious at one point during dinner.

"Eddie Granger got drafted," Carl said.

GG's father said, "I heard that in town. He'll be in our prayers."

Bryce said, "He has to report right after graduation."

The whole family cleared up the kitchen and did the dishes, and then they gathered around the television to watch the evening news. GG squeezed Sharon's hand tightly when the daily casualty counts were read. As was their custom after the news was over, they all bowed their heads and prayed silently for their soldiers. Margot ended her prayer as she always did, with a plea to keep her boys out of the war.

Carl cleared his throat and then asked, "Who wants to play Clue?"

There was a chorus of agreement, and the boys got out the game and set it up. After a lively game with lots of laughter and hot arguments over the rules, the boys went to the garage to tinker with an old car they were fixing up, and GG and Sharon went up to GG's room.

"I love your family so much," Sharon said. "We never did anything like that at my house."

"Well, there are only three of you," GG pointed out.

"Even when Tommy was still home, we didn't. Now, well, you know."

GG was quick to give her friend a hard hug. "I know. You know we pray for him every night."

Sharon's eyes filled with tears. "I know you do, and I love you all for it."

"Have you had a letter lately?"

"No, but the last one was good. He said he was in a quiet place, at least for the time being. It's just so hard, the waiting and worrying."

"I know it is. We're going to have the biggest party to welcome him home when his time is over!"

Sharon gave her a smile. "That sounds good. Let's plan on it."

"We will. Now, let's plan that music festival."

"GG, you know we're not going to be able to do that. We can't sneak out to a two-day music festival in another state, and our parents are never going to let us go."

"Come on, Shar, just promise you'll think about it. We have lots of time to figure it out; it's not until the end of the summer. Don't be an old fuddy-duddy; we've *got* to go. If you're scared to go to a music festival, how are you ever going to go to California after graduation?"

"That's different. We'll be out of school, we'll be older, and we can go to college out there once we're residents."

"We'll be older by the time of the music festival. We'll be sixteen and a half; we'll be adults. We'll be juniors, so we can do it. Come on, Shar, it'll be so cool!" GG watched her friend, seeing the indecision on her face. "Just promise you'll think about it. Please, please, please!"

"Well...okay," Sharon said reluctantly. "I still think we'll never pull it off, but I'll think about it."

"Promise?"

"I promise. Now, talk about something else!"

"Okay. Did you hear about Katie Gray?"

"No, what?"

"She's pregnant, and her mother's sending her away to some home for unwed mothers that is run by nuns."

"Oh, no, poor Katie!" Sharon exclaimed.

"I know. I guess she's going to give the baby up for adoption. I never really hung out with Katie, but I always thought she was a really nice girl. This is going to be so hard for her."

"I hope she'll be all right."

GG said thoughtfully, "Maybe we could get a card and get everybody from school to sign it. I know it won't really help her, but maybe it would give her a little lift."

"That's a good idea; let's do it. When is she leaving?"

"I think she's already gone. We'll find out when we go to school."

Sharon gave a little shiver. "I'm never letting that happen to me."

"That makes two of us. When I have a baby, I want to be able to celebrate. And I can't do all the things I want to do if I get pregnant. No boy is worth that."

Margot, listening at the door, smiled in approval before she gave a little knock. "GG, it's getting late. Sharon, are you staying over?"

GG opened the door and Sharon said, "No, I better go home. If Mom heard about Eddie, she'll be upset."

"That's good, dear, your mom will appreciate it. GG, you run her home and then get back here and get to bed."

"Okay, Mom. I'll be back in a few minutes."

When GG got into bed that night, her mind raced in a million different directions. Her mom came in to say good night and, uncharacteristically, lingered a minute. She sat down on the edge of GG's bed.

"These are really crazy times," Margot said to her daughter. "You know I love you."

"I love you too, Mom. Are you okay?"

Her mother kissed her on the forehead and got to her feet. "Yes, of course, I think I'm a little tired. Now, you get some sleep; you've got school in the morning. Good night."

"Night, Mom." GG turned over on her side and was sound asleep a moment later.