

# LBRIS

We know  
books

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LUCY SCORE

## Things We Never Got Over

  
HODDER

## Worst. Day. Ever

*Naomi*

I wasn't sure what to expect when I walked into Cafe Rev, but it sure as hell wasn't a picture of myself behind the register under the cheery headline "Do Not Serve." A yellow frowny face magnet held the photo in place.

First of all, I'd never set foot in Knockemout, Virginia, let alone done anything to warrant a punishment as egregious as withholding caffeine. Secondly, just what did a person have to do in this dusty little town to have a mugshot hanging in the local cafe?

*Ha. Mug shot.* Because I was in a cafe. Gosh, I was funny when I was too tired to blink.

Anyway, thirdly, it was an incredibly unflattering picture. I looked like I'd had a long-term threesome with a tanning bed and cheap eyeliner.

Right about then, reality penetrated my exhausted, dazed, bobby-pinned-to-within-an-inch-of-its-life head.

Once again, Tina had managed to make my life just a little bit worse. And considering what had gone down in the last twenty-four hours, that was saying something.

"Can I help . . ." The man on the other side of the counter, the one who could give me my precious latte, took a step back and held up hands the size of dinner plates. "I don't want any trouble."

He was a burly guy with smooth, dark skin and a shaved, nicely shaped head. His neatly trimmed beard was snow white, and I spotted a couple of tattoos peeking out of the neck and

sleeves of his coveralls. The name Justice was stitched on his curious uniform.

I tried my most winning smile, but thanks to an overnight road trip spent crying through fake eyelashes, it felt more like a grimace.

"That's not me," I said, pointing a finger with a wasted French-tip manicure at the photo. "I'm Naomi. Naomi Witt."

The man peered at me with suspicion before producing a pair of spectacles from the front pocket of his coveralls and slipping them on.

He blinked then gave me a head-to-toe scan. I saw the realization begin to hit.

"Twins," I explained.

"Well, shit," he murmured, stroking one of those big hands through his beard.

Justice still looked a little skeptical. I couldn't exactly blame him. After all, how many people actually had an evil twin?

"That's Tina. My sister. I'm supposed to meet her here." Though why my estranged twin asked me to meet her in an establishment where she clearly wasn't welcome was another question I was too tired to ask.

Justice was still staring at me, and I realized his gaze was lingering on my hair. Reflexively, I patted my head, and a wilted daisy fluttered to the floor. *Whoops*. I probably should have looked in the mirror at the motel before I set foot in public looking like a disheveled, unhinged stranger on her way home from a role-playing festival.

"Here," I said, reaching into the pocket of my yoga shorts and thrusting my driver's license at the man. "See? I'm Naomi and I would really, really like a gigantic latte."

Justice took my ID and studied it, then my face again. Finally, his stoic expression cracked, and he broke into a wide grin. "I'll be damned. It's nice to meet you, Naomi."

"It's really nice to meet you too, Justice. Especially if you're going to make me that aforementioned caffeine."

"I'll make you a latte that'll make your hair stand on end," he promised.

A man who knew how to meet my immediate needs and did it with a smile? I couldn't help but fall just a little bit in love with him right then and there.

While Justice got to work, I admired the cafe. It was decked out in what looked like manly garage style. Corrugated metal on the walls, shiny red shelves, stained concrete floor. All the drinks had names like Red Line Latte and Checkered Flag Cappuccino. It was downright charming.

There were a handful of early morning coffee drinkers seated at the small round tables scattered throughout the place. Every single person was looking at me like they were *really* not happy to see me.

"How do you feel about maple and bacon flavors, darlin'?" Justice called from the gleaming espresso machine.

"I feel great about them. Especially if they come in a cup the size of a bucket," I assured him.

His laugh echoed through the place and seemed to relax the rest of the patrons who went back to ignoring me.

The front door opened, and I turned, expecting to see Tina.

But the man who stormed inside was definitely *not* my sister. He looked to be in more dire need of caffeine than I was.

Hot would be a decent way to describe him. Hot as hell would be even more accurate. He was tall enough that I could wear my highest pair of heels and still have to tilt my head up to make out with him—my official categorization of male height. His hair was in the dirty blond range and was cut short on the sides and swept back on top, which suggested he had good taste and reasonable grooming skills.

Both of those criteria landed high on my List of Reasons to be Attracted to a Man. The beard was a brand-new addition to the list. I'd never kissed a man with a beard and I had a sudden, irrational interest in experiencing that at some point.

Then I got to his eyes. They were a cool blue-gray that made me think of gun metal and glaciers.

He strode right on up to me and stepped into my personal space like he had a standing invitation. When he crossed tattooed

forearms across a broad chest, I made a squeaky sound in the back of my throat.

Wow.

"Thought I made myself real clear," he growled.

"Uh. Huh?"

I was confused. The man was glaring at me like I was the most hated character on a reality TV show, yet I still wanted to see what he looked like naked. I hadn't exhibited such poor sexual judgment since I was in college.

I blamed my exhaustion and emotional scarring.

Behind the counter, Justice stopped mid-latte creation and waved both hands in the air. "Hold on now," he began.

"It's okay, Justice," I assured him. "You just keep making that coffee, and I'll take care of this . . . *gentleman*."

Chairs pushed back from tables all around us, and I watched as every last customer beelined for the door, some with their mugs still in hand. None of them made any eye contact with me on their way out.

"Knox, it's not what you think," Justice tried again.

"I'm not playing any games today. Get the fuck out," the Viking ordered. The blond god of sexy fury was rapidly plummeting lower on my sexy checklist.

I pointed at my chest. "Me?"

"I've had enough of your games. You got five seconds to walk out this door and never come back," he said, stepping in even closer until the tips of his boots brushed my exposed toes in their flip-flops.

*Damn*. Up close, he looked like he'd just stormed off a marauding Viking vessel . . . or the set of a cologne commercial. One of those weird artsy ones that didn't make any sense and had names like Ignorant Beast.

"Look, *sir*. I'm in the midst of a personal crisis and all I'm trying to do is get a cup of coffee."

"I fucking told you, Tina. You are not to come in here and harass Justice or his customers again, or I'd personally escort your ass out of town."

"Knox—"

The bad-tempered, sexy man-beast held up his finger in Justice's direction. "One second, bud. Looks like I gotta take out the trash."

"The *trash*?" I gasped. I thought Virginians were supposed to be friendly. Instead, I'd been in town barely half an hour and was now being rudely accosted by a Viking with the manners of a caveman.

"Darlin', your coffee's up," Justice said, sliding a very large to-go cup onto the wooden counter.

My eyes darted toward the steamy, caffeinated goodness.

"You even think about picking up that cup, and we're gonna have a problem," the Viking said, his voice low and dangerous.

But Leif Erikson didn't know who he was messing with today.

Every woman had her line. Mine, which was admittedly drawn too far back, had just been crossed.

"You take one step toward that beautiful latte that my friend Justice made especially for me, and I will make you regret the moment you met me."

I was a nice person. According to my parents, I was a good girl. And according to that online quiz I took two weeks ago, I was a people pleaser. I wasn't great at doling out threats.

The man's eyes narrowed, and I refused to notice the sexy crinkles at the corner.

"I already regret it, and so does this whole damn town. Just because you change your hair doesn't mean I'm gonna forget about the trouble you've caused here. Now get your ass out the door and don't come back."

"He thinks you're Tina," Justice cut in.

I didn't care if this ass thought I was a serial killing cannibal. He was standing between me and my caffeine.

The blond beast turned his head toward Justice. "What the hell are you saying?"

Before my nice friend with the coffee could explain, I drilled my finger into the Viking's chest. It didn't go very far, thanks to

the obscene layer of muscle under the skin. But I made sure to lead with the nail.

"Now *you* listen to *me*," I began. "I don't care if you think I'm my sister or that weasel who jacked up the price of anti-malarial drugs. I am a *human being* having a really bad day after the worst one of her life. I do *not* have it in me to stuff down these emotions today. So you'd better get out of my way and leave me alone, Viking."

He looked downright bemused for a hot second.

I took that to mean it was coffee time. Side-stepping him, I picked up the cup, took a delicate sniff, and then shoved my face into the steaming hot life force.

I drank deeply, willing the caffeine to perform its miracles as flavors exploded on my tongue. I was pretty sure the inappropriate moan I heard came from my own mouth but I was too tired to care. When I finally lowered the cup and swiped the back of my hand over my mouth, the Viking was still standing there, staring at me.

Turning my back on him, I flashed my hero Justice a smile and slid my emergency coffee twenty dollar bill across the counter. "You, sir, are an artist. What do I owe you for the best latte I've ever had in my life?"

"Considering the morning you're having, darlin', it's on the house," he said, handing my license and cash back to me.

"You, my friend, are a true gentleman. *Unlike some others.*" I cast a glare over my shoulder to where the Viking was standing, legs braced, arms crossed. Taking another dive into my drink, I tucked the twenty into the tip jar. "Thank you for being nice to me on the worst day of my life."

"Thought that day was yesterday," the scowling behemoth butted in.

My sigh was weary as I slowly turned to face him. "That was before I met you. So I can officially say that as bad as yesterday was, today beat it out by a slim margin." Once again, I turned back to Justice. "I'm sorry this jerk scared away all your customers. But I'll be back for another one of these real soon."

"Looking forward to it, Naomi," he said with a wink.

I turned to leave and smacked right into a mile of grumpy man chest.

"Naomi?" he said.

"Go away." It felt almost good to be rude for once in my life. To take a stand.

"Your name's Naomi," the Viking stated.

I was too busy trying to incinerate him with a glare of righteous anger to respond.

"Not Tina?" he pressed.

"They're twins, man," Justice said, the smile evident in his voice.

"Fuck me." The Viking shoved a hand through his hair.

"I worry about your friend's vision," I said to Justice, pointing at the mug shot of Tina.

Tina had gone bleach blonde at some point in the past decade-plus, making our otherwise subtle differences even more obvious.

"I left my contacts at home," he said.

"Next to your manners?" I quipped. The caffeine was hitting my bloodstream, making me unusually feisty.

He didn't respond with anything other than a heated glare.

I sighed. "Get out of my way, Leif Erikson."

"The name is Knox. And why are you here?"

*What the hell kind of name was that? Was it a hard Knox life? Did he tell a lot of Knox Knox jokes? Was it short for something? Knoxwell? Knoxathan?*

"That's none of your business, *Knox*. Nothing I do or don't do is your business. In fact, my existence is none of your business. Now, kindly get out of my way."

I felt like screaming as loud as I could for as long as I could. But I'd tried that a couple of times in the car on the long drive here, and it hadn't helped.

Thankfully, the beautiful oaf heaved an annoyed sigh and did the decent, life-preserving thing by getting out of my way. I swept out of the cafe and into the summer swelter with as much dignity as I could muster.

If Tina wanted to meet up with me, she could find me at the motel. I didn't need to wait around and be accosted by strangers with the personalities of cacti.

I'd head back to my dingy room, take every last pin out of my hair, and shower until the hot water ran out. Then I'd figure out what to do next.

It was a solid plan. It was only missing one thing.

My car.

*Oh no. My car and my purse.*

The bike rack in front of the coffee shop was still there. The laundromat with its bright posters in the window was still across the street next to the mechanic's garage.

But my car was not where I'd left it.

The parking spot I'd squeezed into in front of the pet shop was empty.

I looked up and down the block. But there was no sign of my trusty, dusty Volvo.

"You lost?"

I closed my eyes and clenched my jaw. "Go. Away."

"Now what's your problem?"

I turned around and found Knox watching me intently, holding a to-go coffee cup.

"What's my problem?" I repeated.

I wanted to kick him in the shins and steal his coffee.

"Nothin' wrong with my hearing, sweetheart. No need to yell."

"My *problem* is while I wasted five minutes of my life getting to know you, my car was towed."

"You sure?"

"No. I never have any idea where I park my car. I just leave them everywhere and buy new ones when I can't find them."

He shot me a look.

I rolled my eyes. "Obviously, I'm being sarcastic." I reached for my phone only to remember I no longer had a phone.

"Who pissed in your Cheerios?"

"Whoever taught you to express concern for a person did it wrong." Without another word, I stalked off in what I hoped was the direction of the local police station.

I didn't make it to the next storefront before a big, hard hand locked around my upper arm.

It was the sleep deprivation, the emotional rawness, I told myself. Those were the only reasons I felt the jittery *zing* of awareness at his grip.

"Stop," he ordered, sounding surly.

"Hands. Off." I flailed my arm awkwardly, but his grip only tightened.

"Then stop walking away from me."

I paused my evasive flailing. "I'll stop walking away if you stop being an asshole."

His nostrils flared as he stared up at the sky, and I thought I heard him counting.

"Are you seriously counting to ten?" I was the one who was wronged. I was the one with a reason to pray to the heavens for patience.

He got all the way to ten and still looked annoyed. "If I stop being an asshole, will you stay and talk for a minute?"

I took another sip of coffee and thought about it. "Maybe."

"I'm letting go," he warned.

"Great," I prompted.

We both looked down at his hand on my arm. Slowly he loosened his grip and released me, but not before his fingertips trailed over the sensitive skin inside my arm.

Goose bumps broke out, and I hoped he wouldn't notice. Especially because, in my body, goose bumps and pointy nipple reactions were closely related.

"You cold?" His gaze was most definitely not on my arm or shoulders but my chest.

*Damn it.* "Yes," I lied.

"It's eighty-four degrees, and you're drinking hot coffee."

"If you're finished mansplaining internal temperature, I'd like to go find my car," I said, crossing my free arm over my

traitorous boobs. "Perhaps you could point me in the direction of the nearest impound lot or police station?"

He stared at me for a long beat, then shook his head. "Come on then."

"Excuse me?"

"I'll give you a ride."

"Ha!" I choked out a laugh. He was delusional if he thought I'd willingly get in a car with him.

I was still shaking my head when he spoke again. "Let's go, Daisy. I don't have all day."

## A Reluctant Hero

### *Knox*

The woman was staring at me like I'd just suggested she French kiss a rattlesnake.

My day wasn't even supposed to be started yet, and it had already gone to shit. I blamed her. And her asshole sister, Tina.

I also threw some blame in Agatha's direction too for good measure, since she'd been the one to text me that Tina had just walked her "trouble-making ass" into the cafe.

Now here I was, at what counted as the asscrack of dawn, playing town bouncer like an idiot and fighting with a woman I'd never met.

Naomi blinked at me like she was coming out of a fog. "You're kidding me, right?"

Agatha needed to get her fucking eyes checked if she mistook the pissed-off brunette for her bleach-blonde, baked-tan, tattooed pain-in-the-ass sister.

The differences between them were pretty fucking obvious, even without my contacts. Tina's face was the color and texture of an old-ass leather couch. She had a hard mouth bracketed by deep frown lines from smoking two packs a day and feeling like the world owed her something.

Naomi, on the other hand, was cut from a different cloth. A classier one. She was tall like her sister. But instead of the crispy fried look, she went in the Disney princess direction with thick hair the color of roasted chestnuts. It and the flowers in it were trying to escape some kind of elaborate updo. Her face was