

# *Taming My Bodyguard*

## **Chapter One**

### ***Bronco***

Grayson Calhoun knows I don't want this job.

He's giving it to me anyway. Shit.

I glare at the text on my phone and tuck it in my back pocket, then go back to waiting for my damn coffee. Pepper's is packed this morning with its usual mix of old cowboys and Valor Springs locals. Warm apple and pecan pie slices are served up, making the shop smell like coffee and home, and today's special is "everyone's business". It's as much of a hub for gossip as every other shop in this small town. I'd avoid it completely, but the coffee is good. Better than I can make at home, even if it's served with a battle of wills.

"Broderick," Rose calls, setting my coffee on the counter. She's in her sixties now and has a smile for everyone—except me. Because she also remembers everyone's name, and that's where we clash.

No one but my mother calls me Broderick, and that's the way I prefer it.

"Broderick," Rose says louder, scanning the crowd until she spots me.

Not like I'm hiding. I'm 6'3" and twice as wide as she is. I'm not hard to miss.

Rose narrows her eyes at me. "Your coffee is ready."

"Sorry, ma'am. Didn't hear you call me." I saunter up and grab the coffee, giving her a wink, same as I do every time we have this conversation. Which has been every day this week.

"Broncos get sugar cubes and carrots, not coffee. So unless you're changing your diet, this coffee cup is going to say the same thing tomorrow." She grins and shoos me off, already calling for her next customer.

I chuckle and head for my truck, already looking forward to another round with her tomorrow. One of these days she'll break and accept the nickname. I've been called Bronco since

I tried to break a horse in when I was eight. I didn't, and nearly got trampled, but the name stuck. That was thirty years ago, and I'm not changing it now.

An older couple are just getting to the door when I reach it. Stepping through, I hold it open for them and tip my hat.

“He’s a big one,” the woman whispers to her husband.

“He has to be. He works for Lone Star,” he whispers back, then gives me a nod of respect.

Valor Springs has high regard for Gray and the group he’s put together. Every person here knows they can go to him for help when life gets messy, and we’d be there to stand in front.

It’s not the kind of life that leads to lasting relationships, like these two have. Something I hadn’t thought twice about until my brother settled down. My focus has to stay on protecting clients.

For me, it’s easier to do this job when the asset is an average person instead of an arrogant celebrity, deceitful senator, or spoiled princess whose daddy has more money than brains like this next assignment. I don’t know why Gray’s chosen me. There are a half dozen other guys who would play nicer than I would. But he’s called me in, so I’ll go.

I zip my jacket against the frigid January air and take a sip of coffee, letting the heat warm me. Even though I grew up on a farm in Montana, I’ve acclimated to the warmer Texas winters. Forty-degree mornings are colder than hell. Damn.

As I drive toward The Ranch and my meeting with Gray, I roll past the limestone courthouse, the feed store, and the grocery store that’s more a community gathering place than anything else. Valor Springs is all small-town charm. Much like my hometown of White Falls. There’s something peaceful about knowing your neighbors.

It makes it easier to recognize the people who aren’t.

I clear town and drive the short distance to the sprawling compound that’s half training center, half ranch. Stone pillars flank the massive gate with rough-hewn timbers stretching over it. Beyond, thousands of acres and the best men I’ve ever worked with.

Lone Star Securities was exactly what I needed when I left the military. Gray gave me a way to use my skills to help people and a place to call home. A place to breathe when I needed it most. People I could count on.

I park the truck, grab my coffee, and head for the office. Mae's on the phone, but waves as I stride in and remove my hat. She's brilliant at the books and somehow manages to keep us all in line.

"Bronco," Gray greets, striding into the room. He's broad-shouldered and carries himself like a man who runs into the fire and expects others to follow. Or not. There's a Lone Star badge clipped to his belt and enough dust on his clothes to earn a scowl from Mae. It's barely after nine and he looks like he's been around the ranch three times.

I nod in acknowledgement and accept the folder he hands me.

His eyes skate to the cup in my other hand, and his lips twitch. "One of these days Rose might stop servin' you."

"She likes me."

Mae smothers a laugh with her hand, then busies herself with the phone again.

"Let's hope the asset does." Gray nods to the folder in my hand.

And just like that, the ease of the day is erased. The folder is slim, but I'm already dreading what's in it. "I start Monday?" From what Gray said earlier, it's babysitting duty. Follow an oil heiress around as she makes final preparations for her wedding, then make sure she gets there in one piece.

I've never turned down a job before, but if she turns out to be a Bridezilla...

"Need you sooner." He nods at the folder and takes his phone out.

Setting my coffee on the edge of Mae's desk, I flip the folder open.

And feel the floor drop out from under me.

My breath stutters as if I got sucker-punched in the stomach, and my heart skips a beat. The pages crumple in my hands when a shiver of awareness rolls through me, sharp and uncomfortable. I skim the details—Camille Whitaker, 21, birthday on New Year's—and land back on her picture because I can't look away.

She's exquisite, with auburn hair and eyes so light blue it feels like they're looking through me. There's something behind her polite but fake smile. Something that tugs at my attention and keeps me locked on her photo. It's hidden in the depths of those clear eyes. Sadness maybe. Or resigned acceptance.

I don't see the heiress I expected. Or the asset assigned to me.

I see the woman I need to protect. *Now.*

I can't explain why my primal instincts are roaring to keep her safe, or why this feels different than a job. Christ, I haven't even met this woman. She could be exactly what I feared. Spoiled. Entitled.

My reaction doesn't make sense, so I lock it down and focus on Gray. "What happened to change the timeline?"

His eyes flick over me, as if seeing something he didn't expect in me. Then he taps his phone, and a message plays.

"Mr. Calhoun... This... this is Floyd Whitaker." His voice trembles, and I hear him drag in a shaky breath. "Camille is gone. She... she might have run, but I don't think so. A chair was turned over, and she left the... anyway, I need your man here sooner. Maybe a couple of men. I need to know my daughter is safe. Even if she fled. I'm afraid he... No. He wouldn't. He's getting what he wants." Whitaker's voice grows softer on the last line. He clears his throat and says in a stronger voice, "Find her. Make sure she's okay and bring her back. I'll deal with the rest."

The rambling message is half incoherent. Two phrases separate and park in my chest, engines idling. Waiting for me to take action.

*Camille is gone.*

*Find her.*

"When?" The word comes out half feral.

Gray doesn't even blink at my odd reaction. "Half an hour ago. Midland is over three hours away."

"I've called for a lift—"

"No time. The trail's already growing cold. I'll find her faster if I'm mobile." I don't add what he already knows—I work best when I make plans on the fly. It's the only way I can guarantee the safety of those I protect. The military taught me that in the harshest manner possible.

I snap the folder closed and am halfway to the door when Gray says, "I chose you for this job because you won't fail her. Bring her home, King."

My hand curls around the doorjamb, his words making me pause. When I find her, she'll go back to her family and her fiancé. That's the assignment.

Something twists in my gut—like a possessive snarl trying to surface. I don't acknowledge it. I can't.

Without a backward glance, I stride to my truck and head for Midland.

\*\*\*

**Read the book here: <https://geni.us/ASH-Taming>**