

## Rescue Me

### Episode 1 by Mina Khan

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Everything looked different at three a.m. in the morning. The town square—with its empty streets and darkened shop windows, turn of the century stone buildings, and old-fashioned street lamps—looked like a photograph frozen in time.

Jenna, bone-weary from her shift at the Lonesome Cowboy, slowed the truck to a roll. No cars lined up behind her, no one to rush home to. She rolled down her window to dispel the smell of smoke and beer clinging to her and moseyed along.

She could almost taste a change in the crisp October air.

The old truss bridge loomed ahead. The metal latticework, lit brilliant white against the dark sky, made it look like something out of a steampunk story.

As she drew closer, she noticed a black truck parked in the middle of the bridge. Worse, a figure balanced on the left top rail. The man's white shirt fluttered in the wind over faded jeans. He stared down into the darkness.

Jenna knew Sweet River churned below, the waters running over great mounds of rock inching in from both shores. He wouldn't survive a fall.

She parked behind the truck and slid out, leaving her door open so as not to startle him. Her heart jackhammered. As she hurried across the asphalt, Jenna realized she should have called 9-1-1. Too late.

Gravel crunched under her feet, and the man glanced over. Oh God. Devin Parker. His sharp face with its broken nose and dimpled chin was familiar. She'd wasted enough hours in high school dreaming of it. When had he returned to town?

His ice-blue gaze didn't register her. Nothing new. Except back then, she'd hidden behind a crowd of cheerleaders. Now it was just the two of them on a deserted bridge. Was he on drugs?

He cocked his head as if listening. The muted roar of the rushing water underneath called out like laughing, whispering voices.

"Devin?"

He started, swayed back and forth for a gut-sickening moment. Jenna lunged forward and grabbed a fistful of his shirt. He toppled on top of her. She hit the asphalt with a yelp.

He blinked. "What? Where am I?"

She breathed in his warm, spicy scent. "You okay, Devin?"

"You know me?"

"Yeah. Could you get off me?"

A dark red stain spread across his high cheekbones. "Sorry." He scrambled up. "What am I doing here?"

Jenna stood and dusted off her jeans. Her ass felt bruised and her nipples peaked. Shit.

"You tell me."

He shrugged. "I-I don't know."

The man might look delicious, but he'd sure turned out strange. "Can you get yourself home?"

"I'm not sure."

She sighed. Given where she'd found him, Jenna didn't want to leave him alone. "Why don't you park in front of the library? I'll drive you home."

She parked next to Devin.

He climbed in and buckled up. "Thanks."

Jenna nodded and pulled back on the road.

"You know where I live?"

"Yeah." Everyone in Parkerville knew where the Parkers lived.

He shifted in his seat, ran a finger along her dusty dashboard, and then cleared his throat. "Um, sorry, I don't know your name."

Of course. "Jenna Winters."

**Episode 2 by Chanta Rand**  
<http://www.chantarand.com/>

Jenna Winters. Yeah, he thought that was her. Graduation was twelve years ago, but she hadn't changed one bit. Same alluring hazel eyes. Same shampoo-model auburn locks. Same athletic-slim shape. It was too dark to see if she still had the same sun-kissed skin and sprinkling of freckles on her nose. For a year, he'd sat catty-corner from her in chemistry class. Instead of memorizing the periodic table, he'd stared at her profile and fantasized about her nubile body sprawled naked beneath him.

Time had been good to her.

Devin wished he could say the same for himself.

He stared out the window just in time to see an electric whip of lightning crack the night sky. A storm was coming. Anyone else might have been fascinated by the bold display of neon patterns zigzagging in the dark. Some might even find the intensity of each wicked streak, and its thundering companion, beautiful. He'd stopped seeing the beauty of nature long ago.

Right now, he had bigger problems.

"You're lucky I saw you," Jenna said, as she tugged on the stick shift of the battered pickup truck. "If I'd gotten off work at my normal time—three hours ago—I would be tucked in bed by now."

His gaze landed on a koozie emblazoned with a silhouette of a man on a bucking horse. Some of the peeling white lettering hung for dear life from the foam sleeve, but he could still make out the words. 'Find Action and Satisfaction at the Lonesome Cowboy.' He couldn't picture her stripping for a living. Not that she didn't have the body for it. He still remembered how she looked in her cheerleading outfit. The short skirt barely covered her assets. Many nights he'd lain in bed stroking himself and thinking about how it would feel to fondle her palm-sized breasts or have her slender calves wrapped around him.

But she wasn't that type of girl. And his family would've had a shit fit if he'd brought home anyone who wasn't in their social stratosphere. So, he'd kept his distance.

"You work there?" he asked, pointing at the koozie.

She nodded. "I wait tables."

Relief oozed into every pore of his body. He wasn't sure why it mattered, but he was pleased she hadn't stooped that low. On the other hand, how had she gone from small-town cheerleader to waitress? With her looks and can-do attitude, she could have escaped this podunk town and made something spectacular of herself.

He rubbed the day-old stubble on his jaw. *Shit, I'm one to talk.*

He'd gotten away for a while, but then he'd fucked up and had to come crawling back in defeat. After what he'd done, it was a wonder anybody in this town spoke to him, much less cared enough to give him a ride home.

Jenna reminded him of a simpler time in his life. A time when he hadn't let greed and ego smash his moral compass.

Another flash of lightning struck, illuminating the worn interior of the truck. A miniature stuffed giraffe peeked from the crevice between her seat and the gearshift.

“Do you have a kid?” he asked.

Was she married? He glanced at her slender fingers gripping the wheel. No wedding ring. Irony was a sadistic son-of-a-bitch. She wasn't good enough for him in high school. He wasn't good enough for her now. Talk about a modern day Heathcliff and Catherine. She slid him a sideways glance. “You're in my truck, buddy. I'll ask the questions. Now, are you going to tell me what you were doing on that bridge?”

**Episode 3 by Angie Daniels**  
<http://www.chantarand.com/>

“Thinking.”

“Thinking?”

The hint of disbelief in Jenna’s tone caused Devin’s head to whip around. “Yep, thinking, or maybe even dreaming. I don’t know. There’s something mystical about that bridge that always, in some strange way, calms me whenever I’m aching to punch someone.” Unfortunately, it had been a bit too late for that. “Why... what did you think I was doing?” he asked curiously.

“I thought you were getting ready to jump.”

“Jump?” He erupted with laughter. “My life is bad but it isn't that fucked up.”

“Well, that's a relief,” Jenna said, and he caught her eyeing him suspiciously. “So what’s got you so pissed?”

Wind swept through the window tearing at his hair. With a sigh, Devin combed a strand off his forehead as he said in a deep gravely voice, “Business is bad.”

Jenna tore her eyes from the road. “*Parker Toys*? I heard rumors that some of the employees had been given pink slips, but I didn’t want to believe it. How is that possible? That company has been in this town for decades.”

And that's what hurt.

Hundreds of employees would lose their jobs, and possibly their pensions, if he didn't find all that missing money. And as far as the town was concerned, it was all Devin’s fault.

How could he have been so stupid that he hadn't seen what his younger brother had been doing all these years? Devin scowled because as much as it pained him to admit it, he knew the answer.

He hadn’t cared.

Instead of taking the reins of Parker Toys, he’d jetted off around the world, partying, womanizing, and staying too drunk to even think straight. It wasn’t until three days ago, he’d realized something wasn’t right after discovering his checking account was overdrawn. Following a lengthy phone call to the senior accountant, Devin realized there was barely enough money to float Parker Toys another quarter. His first response had been to hop on a plane and confront his brother. Unfortunately, the heated argument had ended in a fight with security hauling him away. Nursing his wounds, Devin had headed to the nearest bar and tied one over until the bartender refused to serve him another drink. After that, the rest was a blur. Despite what he’d told Jenna, Devin had no idea how he’d ended up on that bridge. No, it wasn’t suicide; it was definitely something strange and powerful, but at the moment, he was too intoxicated to clearly understand.

*What would your father say if he saw you now?*

Devin drew a long breath. He's probably rolling over in his grave.

“Now that you’ve had time to think, how are you planning to save Parker Toys?” Jenna asked, breaking into his thoughts. “The Devin I remember was invincible.”

Devin turned to Jenna and those deep-set eyes pinned him. “And what do you remember?” he asked curiously.

Jenna paused just a heartbeat. “Confident, cocky, class clown. You were a take-charge kinda guy.”

“So you noticed me back then?”

In the darkness, she smiled slightly as if enjoying a new thought. “How could I not?” she said softly. “You always made sure everyone knew Devin Parker had entered the building.”

She giggled, and the impact shot right down his body and lodged into a hard tight knot. She was all curves. His eyes traveled along her slender long legs, and again he imagined them wrapped tightly around his waist as he pumped steadily inside her. Jenna Winters was better than a shot of tequila, and he was certain she was capable of making him forget all his problems.

Well, at least some of them.

**Episode 4 by Valerie Twombly**  
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Jenna maneuvered the truck down a long winding drive to the Parker ranch that sat a quarter mile from the road. When they'd come to a fork, Devin pointed to the right. "This way, I'm staying in one of the guest houses."

She nodded and followed the path to a quaint cottage tucked among a stand of tall pines. Shoving the truck into neutral, she killed the engine. "Here we are." Why did she suddenly have a case of butterflies—no, make that birds—and they were dive-bombing in her gut.

"Yep." He reached for the handle then hesitated, his gaze coming back to land on her. "I could use some coffee. Join me and we can catch up?"

She knew she should decline and be on her way. For one, it was late, and instinct told her that going inside with him, alone, was a bad idea. "I'd like that." Apparently, her mouth had other plans. Like wondering what kind of kisser he was. *Crap!*

He gave her a wide smile that set her nether regions on fire and flung open his door. She quickly followed behind him and was soon ushered inside. Her eyes adjusted to the dim light that cast a seductive glow across a quaint living room.

"Kitchen's this way." Devin wobbled a bit, led her around a maze of oversized dark leather furniture, and through a small dining area. He flipped a light switch to reveal a spotless kitchen of stainless steel and caramel ceramic. Jenna figured he must eat out a lot.

"What's your flavor?" He pointed to the carousel of K-cups.

"Mocha please."

He nodded and placed a cup to catch the steaming goodness while she leaned against the counter and stared at an ass that would bring any woman to her knees. He hadn't changed much. If nothing, age had only made improvements.

"So, tell me about your plans to save Parker toys."

He turned to face her. "I don't want to talk about that right now." His eyes became hooded. "There's something I've wanted to do since high school."

She swallowed. "What's that?"

In two strides, he was in front of her. Resting his hands on either side of her, he gripped the counter and boxed her in. "Kiss you."

She moistened her lips. She should shove him away and run like hell, but she'd waited what seemed like an eternity for the chance to taste him. She wasn't going to chicken out now. Before she could reply, he lowered his head.

She placed her hands on his chest and leaned in.

He slanted his mouth over hers, and she parted her lips, allowing his tongue to slow dance across hers. He tasted of whisky and sin, both of which heated her core and caused her to moan. The world spun around her as he deepened the kiss. Her pulse raced, and she knew she had to make a choice.

Break it off and walk away. Or finally admit that her feelings for him ran deep. Had since high school when he'd stolen her heart.

**Episode 5 by Anne Lange**  
<http://authorannelange.com/>

Devin almost dropped to his knees in relief when Jenna uttered a sexy little whimper and finally relaxed against his chest. He smiled as she settled into the kiss with a soft sigh. Good Lord, the woman tasted like a combination of fine wine and sinful delight. He could do this all night.

He stepped closer, eliminating the remaining distance between them and pushed her back against the counter. Letting go of the edge he'd been gripping tight enough to stress his knuckles, he placed his hands on her hips, his fingers tingling with anticipation at having the opportunity to, at long last, feel her silky flesh beneath his.

Her breasts pressed tight to his chest, her nipples two rigid points that teased him when she wiggled—a sensual shimmy side-to-side. He shuddered, and she gasped into his mouth when she no doubt felt an erection, he had no hope of hiding, caress her lower belly. He ached to bury himself deep between her thighs.

Devin groaned and changed the angle of the kiss, desperate to devour more of her, as her flavor seeped into his pores, where he knew she'd stay forever and ruin him for any other woman.

Ready to take this interlude to the next level, Devin gripped Jenna around the waist, his fingers slipping beneath the soft cotton of her tee shirt to graze her skin. He lifted her to sit on the counter, putting her at the perfect height. She giggled. He loved the sound of her laughter and wanted to hear it again and again.

Playing the part of a man obsessed with taking his woman right here, right now, he swept his right arm along the counter, inadvertently shoving her purse out of the way. It toppled to the floor with a thud.

“Oh, shit. I'm sorry.” He glanced down and noticed the contents had spilled out across the tiled floor. “Damn. Just give me a second.”

“No. That's okay. I can get it.”

He frowned at the tinge of alarm in her voice. “You just stay there, Jenna. I'm not finished with you yet.” He winked, hoping to keep the mood going.

Bending to the floor, Devin gathered her things into a pile and began shoving everything back into her purse. Why did women weigh themselves down with so much stuff?

Besides her wallet, a portable brush and some Advil, she had two packs of tissue, three tubes of lip gloss, a child's toy truck, pens, what looked like a small baggie of fish-shaped crackers, gum and a small book.

“Devin, please, I can do that myself.” She'd jumped to the floor beside him, scrambling to pick up her things with one hand, while she tried to wrestle her purse out of his hold with the other.

“Don't be silly,” he said. “Once I get this cleaned up, I'm anxious to get back to tasting your mouth.” He tipped his head to the side and glanced at her. “And every other part of you.”



But she didn't catch his grin. Her wide panic-filled gaze focused on the something he was holding. He looked down at the book, which he realized was actually a small photo album. It was opened to the image of a smiling little boy of about two, sitting in a red wagon.

Recognition slammed into him. Devin knew that mischievous smile and those sharp eyes. He brought the image closer, peering intently at the child as furious jealousy sliced through his gut.

"Devin, please, give me that."

What the hell?

"I can explain."

Yeah, he definitely wanted that. In fact, he'd demand it.

"Jenna, why does this little boy look *just* like my brother?"

**Episode 6 by Aubrey Wynne**  
<http://aubreywynneauthor.com/>

The purse fell from her fingers; the contents spilling back onto the kitchen floor. *Why would his own brother refuse to tell him?* Tears blurred her vision. She had never tried to keep her son a secret or hide the identity of his father. Jenna had always owned up to her mistakes. Scott Parker was one of her bigger blunders, but he had given her Jacob. She blinked to focus on the picture again, his blue eyes and dark hair giving her strength. The disappointment in her belly surprised her.

Devin was a high school crush for god's sake. Yet, she had dreamt of that kiss for over twelve years.

"Stop stalling and tell me what's going on." His voice grated against her nerves, and anger replaced the shame. Her face reddened as her temper took over.

"I'm not stalling, I need to choose my words. It's not like we've kept in touch, and *I've* hidden this from you," she answered, her eyes narrowing. "You never even acknowledged me in high school. The entire town followed your adventures around the world, while you left your brother to run the family business. Now you return like the prodigal son, and demand to know about the intimate details of my life?"

"I—"

"You don't have the right to know anything unless I choose to share it." Jenna bent her head to hide the tears and scooped up the contents of her purse once again. Getting control of her emotions, she stood and held out her hand for the book. "May I have that back, please?"

His head jerked up, and she saw the remorse in his eyes. Worse, she saw defeat. She jumped at a crack of lightning and a deep rumble overhead. Heavy rain beat against the roof, making it hard to hear his quiet words.

"I'm sorry. You're right, it's none of my business." He hesitated then continued, "Unless I'm related to that little boy... What's his name?"

"Jacob. And yes, he's your nephew. But I am not in a relationship with your brother, though he is persistent." She let out a long breath. "Look, I'd love to chat about old times but it's late, and I'm exhausted."

"At least drink your coffee first. Like you said, you're tired. The caffeine will do you good on the way home." Devin handed her the cup, still steaming. Their fingers touched, and she drew in her breath.

"I know I seem like an irresponsible ass, but I came home to try to set things straight with the company."

She heard the sincerity in his voice and suddenly felt sorry for him. *This is funny. I'm feeling bad for one of the Parker boys.* "If your company goes under, it will devastate this town. What the hell happened?"

"Now who is demanding?" A smirk formed on his perfect lips. "But you're right, I have to fix this. How well do you know my brother?"

"I see him every other weekend when he picks up my son, occasional dinners during the week. Why wouldn't Scott tell you?"

"How old is he?"

"He's four now—" Another flare of lightning brightened the darkened windows, then lights blinked and went out.

"Shit!" She heard more cursing and a drawer slide open. A flashlight clicked on, casting shadows as it moved. "Let's go in the living room and I'll start a fire. It will give us more light."

"I really need to get home." Did she? Her parents had Jacob for the night.

"Sorry, I can't let you drive in this storm. I don't want my nephew's mother getting in an accident... Besides, now that I know you're kind of family, maybe you could help."

## Episode 7 by Chanta Rand

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“Help? How can I help?”

Devin pointed toward the kitchen table, indicating for her to have a seat. “I need help getting this company back in the black. If I’m going to do this right, I’ll need a partner. You’re the only one I can trust.”

She scoffed. “Trust me? You barely know me.”

“Sure I do. I went to high school with you.”

She smirked, as she slid into a cherry wood chair. “I stand corrected. Just because you sit in class with someone staring at their tits all day means you can trust them?”

He grinned. “You noticed?”

“It was kinda hard not to.”

“Your boobs weren’t the only things I noticed. I recognized how smart you were.”

“Obviously, I wasn’t smart enough to avoid a one-night stand with your brother.”

“Yep, you tangled with the wrong brother, but I’m giving you a chance to remedy that.”

She pursed her lips. “So, you want to fuck me, too?”

His jaw dropped. “God no! I mean yes, of course.” He shook his head. “Dammit, Jenna. You know I’m attracted to you. And I know you’re attracted to me. I make no apologies for that. But, I think we could have a deeper relationship. A partnership. We can work together to bring this company back.”

She sipped from her cup of coffee, dipping her nose into the steaming tendrils. “Thanks for the offer,” she replied. “But one Parker brother is all I can handle right now. And I’m not doing a terribly good job of that.”

He nodded. “You said Scott was persistent. He wants to be with you, but you don’t want to be with him? Why not? He could offer you a secure future, take care of all your needs.”

“You Parkers are all the same. You think money is the answer to everything. So, I should sell myself to the highest bidder, huh?”

He reached across the table and covered her hand with his palm. “I’m sorry, Jenna. I didn’t mean it like that. I only wanted to know what happened between you and Scott.”

She blew out a long, slow breath of resignation. “I wanted it to be you,” she admitted.

“When his hands fumbled their way around my body, I imagined your fingers caressing my skin. Instead of battling his wet, sloppy kisses, I pretended your tongue was dancing with mine. He was drunk. I was feeling sorry for myself after being fired twice in one week.” She shrugged. “We were two fools with more time than common sense.”

Devin hated to think of Scott with his lecherous hands on her. That jerk didn’t deserve a woman like Jenna. If Devin had been around, he would have been a shoulder for her to cry on.

“He was a lame substitute for you,” Jenna continued. “But he gave me a beautiful child. Jacob is the best thing that ever happened to me.”

“Sounds like Scott is happy to have a son.”

She pulled her hand back and wrapped it around her coffee cup. "He wasn't at first. When I told him I was pregnant, he accused me of trying to trap him. Called me damn near every gold digging name in the book. Said he never wanted to be a daddy."

Devin's fist clenched. His brother was a sorry bastard. Jenna deserved so much better. That was why Devin had never dated her. He hadn't wanted to drag her into the sticky web of the Parker Empire. But, she'd found a way to get ensnared anyway.

"After the baby was born he came sniffing around my skirts," Jenna said. "When he found out I'd given Jacob my last name instead of the Parker name; he made a full-time job of hounding me. Yeah, he's all sunshine and roses now, but I still remember Tropical Storm Scott. I could never give my heart to anyone like that. Plain and simple."

She said it so matter-of-factly, but Devin witnessed the flicker of anger that burned like the hot blue flame of a welder's torch. Jenna was more pissed than she led on. A quiet anger that she'd learned to hide bubbled below the surface of her exquisitely tanned skin.

"I would have never done that to you, Jenna."

"Nice to know. But I'm a big girl. I can take care of myself."

"I know you can. That's why I want you on my side. I want to stand for something greater than myself. I want to bring life back to this town, and make a difference in people's lives. And I want to start with you."

"Why?"

"I believe you would be a formidable ally."

"And?"

"And it'll be a chance for you to pay Scott back for what he did to you."

She shook her head. "I'm not mad at him. I told you he gave me my son."

"Are you getting child support from him?"

"You know I'm not!"

Devin almost smiled. The spark in her eyes was back. "You hate him as much as I do. Can you imagine how powerful we could be if we merged our energies together? We could accomplish so much."

"What do you have against your brother?"

"Like you said, he has two faces. I've been a victim of his manipulative ways on more than one occasion. The last time we bumped heads, he made it his personal mission to try to ruin me financially. I can't let him do the same thing to Parker Toys."

She sipped her coffee again. She took her time before responding. "How can I be sure you're not just using me to get back at him?"

"I've got plenty of faults, Jenna. Lying is not one of them. I have no reason to deceive you. The question is do you want to be my partner or not?"

"What's in it for me?"

"What do you want? Money? Jewelry? Stock?"

"College tuition."

"You want to enroll in college?"

"Not me. Jacob. I want him to have a full ride at Yale. Put the money into a trust for him, along with two hundred and fifty thousand dollars to give him a proper start in life."

"I have an even better idea. He can work here at Parker Toys. He can take over this place one day."

Jenna crossed her arms. "Forgive me for not jumping all over that like a dog on bone. But, cold hard cash will alleviate all my suspicions."

Devin chuckled. "Okay. I agree to your terms. Are you in?"

Her eyebrows knitted together. "Wait. I thought you were broke. Where will you get the money to pay me?"

"I'll take out a loan against my mortgage in L.A. I'll pay you with that. Do we have a deal?"

"Yes."

She extended her hand and they shook on the deal.

Hope blossomed in Devin's chest. He was going to breathe life back into the company, and Jenna would help him. For the first time in months, he felt tiny teeth of optimism nibbling at him. He didn't have a plan yet. He wasn't even sure how he would proceed. And he didn't know where this partnership would take him. He only knew one thing. There was no one else he wanted to take the journey with more than Jenna. The only problem would be not falling in love with her along the way.

THE END

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