

JANE S. WONDA



VERY
BAD
LIARS

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY
SECOND SEMESTER
SPRING BREAK

Jane S. Wonda

Very Bad Liars

Second semester – Spring break

KINGSTON UNIVERSITY SERIES – PART 1

Translated by Fiona Busfield



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Zomer & Keuning believes it is important to use natural resources in an environmentally friendly and responsible manner. The paper that was used for the edition of this title, is guaranteed to have not resulted in deforestation.

For all those who would rather love a lie
Than feel nothing at all.



What would you do if you weren't afraid?
Unknown

TRIGGER WARNING

If this book has caught your eye, you're either delightfully twisted with a dark imagination or perhaps you're drawn to it like a moth to a flame, unable to turn away and unwilling to believe the depths of human depravity and the shadows that lurk within people's minds.

All that matters is that it entertains you. Relax and enjoy every single trigger that the following words awake in you. Or hurry and shut the book before it devours you. That's the thing about some books. They don't let you go until the very last page. This is one of those books.

This book may contain triggers, including bullying, mobbing, (sexual) harassment, (sexual) violence, psychological torment, murder, and alcohol and drug abuse.





THE TRAP

My heart is pounding in my throat. I'm trapped again, but this time I'm not bound to a chair. There's no audience eager to witness my downfall.

This time it's worse.

So much worse.

I should have known that I'd reach this point if I allowed them near me again, if I fell for them once more. What makes me so weak? My body? My heart? The longing?

Or is it not my fault at all? Would anyone be able to resist the Kings?

Jaxon, Sylvian, Reece, Zayn.

Even Romeo.

They have all captivated me, each in their own way. Every one of them has exerted their charm on me, beguiling me with their words, letting me believe I could take whatever I need.

All along, they were plotting ways to punish me if I listened to them. How they would make me suffer if I took what I wanted.

You should have chosen. Vance's words echo in my mind.

It's true.

I should have chosen.

But I didn't.

Because I couldn't.

They won't forgive me for this mistake... no one will.

Least of all myself.

“What’s going to happen now?” I ask, trembling. Another has joined my tormentors. Vance Buchanan, whose brutality still lingers on my body. He’s more than a mere pawn. He’s as much my adversary as the Kings themselves. I don’t stand a chance. How am I supposed to take them all on by myself?

“Nothing good,” comes the response.

Whatever role I play in their game, I am above all an easy victim. Like a delicate flower by the roadside, ripe for the plucking, its beauty imprisoned in the hands of one who has no qualms about destroying it.

And the Kings have absolutely no qualms.

None whatsoever.

1



JAXON

I ce-cold water is streaming down my drenched shirt as I make my way through the sea toward the beach. I wipe my eyes and rip the sodden fabric from my body, where it is clinging to me like a second skin.

Droplets trickle down my half-frozen face, collecting on my lips.

I'm breathing heavily. My chest rises and falls. As the screams in the background blend with the thunderous roar of the sea and dissolve into nothingness, I only have eyes for the two figures sprawled on the shore.

Could one of them be Amabelle?

As the waves recede to my knees, I can make faster progress. With sand beneath my feet, I'm suddenly free, and I lunge forward.

"Reece!"

He is lying there like a corpse, but he's breathing.

"It's okay," Zayn murmurs, brushing Reece's damp hair away from his face. "I saved him."

"Saved him from what? Where the hell are the others?" I don't even know whose name comes to mind first. Sylvian? Romeo? Amabelle? *Fuck!*

“Dole was whisked away on some boat,” Zayn explains, his tone indifferent. “Sylvian and Romeo? Not a clue.”

I spin around, surveying the shoreline, as yet another section of the water villa collapses like a fragile house of cards. In some places, only the windows hold the skeleton together. More and more students pour over the pier toward the beach, some swimming like us. The crowd forming in front of the wooded area seems paralyzed by the events. As soon as they are safe, the onlookers stare over at the house where lives may be in danger right now, as if watching a film.

Whoever blew up the water villa carried out an attack—one that will be etched in Kingston’s history and send the press into a frenzy like vultures on fresh meat.

I scan the sea impatiently, but I can’t see Sylvian or Romeo.

And what about this boat Zayn was talking about?

“I didn’t see a boat.”

“It appeared out of nowhere in front of us,” Zayn explains, his voice devoid of emotion. He’s still wearing his wet clothes. “They held out their arms to us, helped Dole up, and...”

“Can you *please* start calling her something else?” I snap. “She’s not a Dole anymore. She is not some *random girl*. Get over it and show some respect!”

He gazes up at me, exhausted. “When Reece tried to follow her onto the boat, he was attacked. I was behind him and only caught a glimpse of something being used to hit him. I dove under the water so I wouldn’t get struck, too, and then the boat sped off. I had no idea what was going on. Either way, Reece was almost unconscious.”

“And what about Sylvian?”

Zayn shrugs.

I pace restlessly up and down the beach, scouring the faces of everyone who approaches us. Finally, I hear the wailing of

police sirens, and gradually, hundreds of emergency responders flood the area. I weave through the crowd. It is dark, so no one recognizes me, and everyone is so panicked that I struggle to get a police officer's attention.

"Officer," I say, approaching the one who remains by his squad car, taking calls on the radio. "I'm Jaxon Tyrell."

He flinches. "*The* Tyrell? Tyrell Junior?"

"The Tyrell. How many helicopters are coming? There was a suspicious boat near the beach. One of the students may have been kidnapped—Amabelle Weaver."

He frowns, then nods. "I'll pass it on."

"I hope so," I growl, turning away. More throngs of people stream from the parking lot toward the sea. Spring-break partygoers who have kicked off their vacation in Ocean City, despite the modest temperatures. I bet they're getting the greatest show of their lives.

When I jog back to the beach and see no sign of Sylvian anywhere, I don't hesitate any longer. I strip off my pants and socks and dash back into the sea.

"Fuck, what are you doing?!" Zayn yells after me. Reece is sitting upright again, recovered from the altercation—or whatever just happened—and I keep swimming.

Sylvian.

If I lose him, I'll go down with him.

I've never given a single thought to what would happen if he were gone. Just *thinking* about it seems to fill my lungs with water.

But even though I was sure Romeo would mean less to me, I can't imagine life without him either.

Shit.

I fight against the icy waves as I swim toward the house. It's dark. I can barely see a thing, but that doesn't change the fact that I have to find them both.

What will I do if Sylvian has drowned?

If he's found dead?

A sharp pain pierces my stomach as the water around me threatens to extinguish my hope. I dive deep toward the house, straining to make out bodies in the murky water, before surfacing again.

The water villa is now on fire. A good third of it is engulfed in flames—the perfect way to conceal any evidence.

“SYLVIAN!” I scream into the night. Fuck! “SYLVIAN!”

I swim closer still. A blazing beam crashes into the water beside me, but I don't care. “SYLVIAN!”

“Fuck, Jaxon!” Zayn shouts from the waves behind me. He grabs me, yanking me back. “You'll get yourself killed!”

“I don't give a shit!” I shake him off, about to dive deeper into the water, down into the wreckage of the house. Even if I die trying to find Sylvian. But I can't look for him because fucking Zayn is pulling me back firmly by the arm.

“They're on the beach!” he yells to me over the turbulent water. “They're on the beach! Come on, dammit!”

“Really?” I ask him, absolutely convinced he's lying. “Sylvian? Romeo?”

“Yes!” Zayn looks at me in panic. The fire is reflected in his blue eyes. “It's fucking dangerous here! Let's swim back!”

I have to trust him. But if he's lying, I'll lose it.

We swim sluggishly back to the beach. I breathe a sigh of relief when I emerge from the water and see Sylvian sitting in the sand next to Reece. Without a moment's hesitation, I jog over to him, wrapping my arm around his head. “You fucking asshole, stay behind me next time.”

He's breathing heavily and doesn't answer.

“What happened?” I ask.

His gaze slides to Romeo, who is standing over us, dripping wet and statue-like.

“Where were you?” I’m going to lose the last of my patience any second now.

“More importantly,” Sylvian rasps in front of me. “Where is she?”

I look at him, and then I see it.

The shit this girl has created between us. Never before have we worried about the same person at the same time, unless it was one of us Kings. On the one hand, that’s a good thing. I can count on Sylvian wanting Amabelle to be safe just as much as I do.

On the other hand, he hurts her.

Every single day.

Because his fucking monster is so damn lost.

“What’s it to you?” I ask him gruffly. “Wherever she is, she’s better off than with us.” *Than with you.*

“Stop freaking out,” Reece says tightly. “Did anyone see what happened at the boat?”

“I didn’t even see the fucking boat,” I mutter. “I thought you were swimming to the shore.” Suddenly, a thought so terrible occurs to me that I immediately charge at Zayn and grab him by the throat. “Is Amabelle really on that fucking boat, or are you lying and you’ve killed her?”

Zayn’s eyes widen. “Dude, let go of me!” he chokes. “You’re insane!”

“Let him go, Jax,” Reece demands, and I listen to him.

I pace restlessly between the four of them, glance over at Romeo to check if he’s okay, then refocus on the essential question.

Amabelle Weaver.

A boat.

What fucking boat took her to what fucking place?

“Zayn, you need to get out of here,” Sylvian says quietly. His voice is a mere shadow of its normal self. “Go.”

Zayn gives Reece a questioning look, but he nods. “No, you know what? Go to the Tesla.” He pulls out his cellphone, unlocks the car, and starts preheating it.

“Yeah, that’s a good idea.” Reece straightens up. He looks at me before he leaves. “Find her.”

No one answers him. We have to wait for the helicopters, the FBI, and all the other organizations that sound the alarm when there’s an attack on the elite classes. How many children of prominent politicians, CEOs, and famous scientists were at the water villa tonight? Aside from the pawns, was there anyone there whose parents wouldn’t turn the entire country upside down if something happened to their darling offspring?

I wonder how my mother will react.

And I wonder if my father will even give a damn.

“We need to call Harper.” I whip out my phone. The waterproofing on these pricey phones has finally paid off. “She definitely wasn’t here tonight, was she?”

Sylvian shakes his head.

“Then where the hell was she?” Zayn asks. “Wasn’t she supposed to show up with Dole?”

“*Call* her something else,” I hiss at him. “They’re all fucking Doles, you got that? Rachel was a Dole, and Brittany, and all those other little sluts. Amabelle is *not* a Dole. But you have a point: Why wasn’t Harper here tonight?”

Sylvian glances up at us, his expression blank. The shadows on his face are a barrier to his innermost thoughts. I can’t stand it anymore. “I don’t know. She didn’t answer my messages.”

He’s lying to me, the sneaky little rat! “Hand over your phone,” I command, holding out my hand.

Sylvian glares at me as if I’d asked him to kiss my feet.

“I’m calling Harper! If she sees your number, she’ll pick up, for sure! Now give me your fucking phone!”

“I’ll call her.” The moment he pulls out his phone and dials her number, I seize it. He jumps up, but I take a few steps back. Harper answers before he can snatch his phone back.

“What’s up?” she asks, her voice sounds hurried, clipped. “Is there a problem?”

“What?” I ask, baffled.

“Sylvian?”

“No,” I say, drawing out the word. “So when your fiancé calls you at night on spring break, the first question that comes to mind is ‘Is there a problem?’”

“What do you want, Jaxon?” she asks coolly.

“I have no idea what you’re up to, where you are, or how you could possibly have missed the chaos unfolding on social media right now, but the villa where the party was being held collapsed. We’re looking for Amabelle. You need to get your family on the line and have them do a goddamn thorough search for her. She was taken away on some motorboat. Do you need more info, or can you handle it?”

“Mable?” she asks, distraught, as if it were the only word she understood.

“Seriously, *where* are you?!” I bark at her impatiently through the phone.

“Fine, I’ll call my uncle! Is Sylvian there with you?”

“I’m calling from his phone, so yeah.”

“Is he okay?”

“Would I really be talking to you about Amabelle if something was wrong with Sylvian?!”

“I don’t know!” she yells into the phone. “Do you need my help?! Or should I just tell my uncle about Mable?”

“Amabelle will suffice, thanks.” I hang up before she can piss me off anymore. “You sure she’s not cheating on you, Silvano? She sounded pretty rushed.”

“Whatever,” he mutters, shrugging as he snatches the phone from my hand and stashes it away.

Zayn looks at me questioningly while Romeo just stands there, frozen still as if he were made of stone.

“What do we do now?” Zayn asks, and I wish I had an answer for him.

“Who the hell was that?” asks Sylvian, looking thoughtfully toward the water villa.

“Who?” Zayn repeats. “Not ‘what?’”

“Someone must have blown up the stilts,” I think out loud. “An attack on the heirs of the elite.” *Whoever has the balls to do that almost deserves my respect.*

“Seems so,” Sylvian muses.

“Why isn’t Mable with you guys?”

I lift my head. That shithead Vance Buchanan is standing in front of us. Without him, we might not have escaped the mansion in time, so I tolerate his question. “Someone pulled her onto a boat and took off with her. Did you see what happened?”

Vance’s brows shoot up. “A boat? What kind of boat?”

Why hadn’t he seen anything, either? “Right, we’re fanning out,” I order. “We’ll search the beaches. Zayn, go through the crowd and look for her. Examine every single face and check every ambulance that drives away.”

He seems reluctant, but he gives a curt nod.

“I..” Romeo begins. His gaze is vacant, yet he shifts his focus from Vance to Sylvian, as if silently pleading for them to speak for him. “I can barely stand.” When he takes a step forward, his legs tremble. “I’m going to Reece.”

None of us says a word as we let him pass.

“What’s his problem?” Zayn inquires, bewildered.

“I’ll tell you guys later.” Sylvian forces himself up. “Where’ve you been, Vance? You were right behind me.”

Vance's dark face grows even more shadowed. "I wanted to make sure none of the other scholarship students were drowning in the wreckage."

"You risked your life for them?" I ask skeptically.

"Yeah," he grunts. "And your point is?"

"Turns out you've got a bit of a hero streak after all. Who knew?" I reply sarcastically, before yanking my soaking wet pants back on to avoid looking like a lunatic. I set off down the beach in search of a girl whose heartbeat suddenly means everything to me.

Even if it's wrong, Belle. Completely and undeniably wrong.

Because even if I find you, you can never be certain that I won't be the one to shove you into the sea next time and leave you there.



IT WOULDN'T BE
A GAME IF WE SIMPLY TOLD YOU
THAT YOU DON'T HAVE TO CHOOSE
BETWEEN US. . .

Mable had wanted to use spring break to prepare for her exams, but the FBI floods the campus to learn more about the attack on the elite students. The game of desire and lust seems to take a dark and deadly turn. Will the Kings protect their Lady? Or are they still plotting her downfall?

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