

# Jackal Highway



**Iris Pinson**

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*A sensual, edge-of-your-seat novel about control, desire, and the dangerous illusion of connection.*

Sanny is sweet, innocent, and yearning for love, trust, and a place to belong. When she meets Boris at the glittering Summer Party on the Beach, it feels like the start of something extraordinary. He's striking, confident, and impossible to resist. But behind his magnetic charm lies a world darker and more dangerous than Sanny could ever imagine. What begins as a fleeting encounter spirals into a seductive game of power and control.

Determined to reclaim her life, Sanny starts fresh at a bold new tech startup in Rotterdam. She finds strength she thought she'd lost and forms profound bonds with her colleague Quinn and her newly discovered cousin Esmee.

But just when everything seems to fall back into place, Lorenzo appears: enigmatic, intoxicating, and dangerously irresistible. His arrival is like a sudden blackout, threatening to pull Sanny into a shadowy world where she risks losing herself completely.

As Quinn and Esmee search for her, they stumble upon a place where identity is fluid and love is nothing more than an algorithm. In this unsettling realm, the line between longing and reality dissolves. Can Sanny still be saved, or has she already surrendered to a system that has rewritten her?

## **Part I – Unchain My Heart**

## *Chapter 1*

'Baby, I love you. When can I be with you again? Please, just give me a sign,' Sanny whispered into Boris's voicemail for what felt like the hundredth time, her voice a velvet plea.

She missed Boris, the love of her life. The moment she heard his voice, she sank into endless daydreams of love. But lately, there had been almost nothing from him. A rushed text: 'Busy now. I'll call later'. That was five days ago. Since then, silence.

With growing frustration, Sanny stared at her phone. 'Unavailable,' she muttered, drumming her fingers against the counter.

A knot of worry twisted in her stomach. Did Boris still care for her at all? He made so little effort to reach out. Did he even feel anything for her anymore? What was he so busy with? The thought that he might be seeing another woman gnawed at her, though she refused to believe Boris was that type. He was all business, emotionally distant, yet somehow, that detachment had always carried a strange, alluring charm. Still, right now it was as if he had vanished off the face of the earth.

Not long ago, Sanny had driven over to his apartment on impulse. When she rang the bell, a stranger opened the door. His blunt reply: Boris wasn't home. And when she asked if he was a colleague, the man refused to answer and shut the door in her face. Crestfallen, she drove home, wondering if Boris even lived at the address written on that white envelope she'd once seen slip from his pocket.

Sanny felt trapped in a pillowcase woven of love, unable to fight her way free. Where Boris stood in all this, she had no idea. From the very start she had followed his lead, willing to embrace every initiative, even though Boris inevitably veered off on his path again. His emotions, she thought, were like a sack of dried beans: bland, lifeless, with no imagination.

And yet, here she was, still trying to figure out whether to treasure the trance he had left in her heart or break free from a relationship that might be doomed. Why wouldn't Boris let her flood his heart with the emotions she so desperately offered? Was this a red flag, or simply the

cold, businesslike nature that was just... him? Should she accept it or cut her losses? It didn't seem to matter much to Boris. And yet, she wondered, did he still admire her quietly, from a distance?

Boris was a story in himself.

It had all begun at the Summer Party on the Beach, the night she was supposed to go with her half-sister Nanny—who, true to form, cancelled at the last minute.

Sanny had dressed to kill for the sultry summer evening ahead. The thrill of the party already coursed through her veins, only to be cut short when her phone lit up. Nanny.

'What excuse is it this time?' Sanny asked sharply when she picked up.

There was a pause before Nanny's lazy voice drifted through.

'I promised a friend I'd help her with acrylic nails; she's practicing for her course.'

'You can do that tomorrow. Come on, Nanny,' Sanny snapped. 'I just got ready for the Summer Party on the Beach. The forecast is perfect—it's going to be a fantastic night.'

'I don't feel great,' Nanny sighed. 'Honestly, I can't deal with a packed bus full of sweaty people, then hiking all that way, only to get lost in the crowd again. Ugh. Just thinking about it exhausts me.'

'You're lying. You've got some new guy, don't you? And now you're ditching me again. You're such a bitch,' Sanny shot back and ended the call before Nanny could answer.

It was always the same with her half-sister. Cancelling plans, dragging her feet, and flaking at the last second—that was Nanny's sport.

Back when they both lived at home, if Sanny spent time dressing up for a party, Nanny never failed to tear her down. With that fat body in those clothes, you look like an idiot, she would sneer. But the moment they walked into a venue together, Nanny would beam in front of others and gush, Doesn't Sanny look great tonight? The hypocrisy made Sanny's skin crawl. And when she tried cracking a light-hearted joke over a glass of wine, if people didn't laugh, Nanny would announce loudly that of course nobody got it, since Sanny wasn't smart enough to make it past high school anyway.

Always the same snide digs. Always the same poison. Maybe Sanny should be relieved Nanny had cancelled yet again.

Fine. I'll go alone. That was Sanny's motto.

She grabbed her purse and walked to the bus stop where the transfer buses to the beach departed. Ten minutes later, the BeachHub pulled up, already crammed with partygoers. Sanny squeezed herself inside, pressing into the narrow aisle among the standing crowd.

When the bus pulled up at the beach, Sanny stepped out and let herself be carried along by the tide of people heading to the Summer Party on the Beach. From a distance, waves of music crashed over her irresistible mixes from headlining DJs thundering across the sand. With the dunes rising ahead and the surf breaking just beyond, Sanny breathed in the atmosphere. This was precisely what she needed.

The pulsing music, the grit of sand between her toes, the salt-laced night air. It all blended into perfection. Laughter, dancing, and a promise of unforgettable memories until dawn. Sanny was ready to lose herself in it.

She bought a Breezer from a beach bar and strolled through the crowd, sipping from the bottle. At a food truck she picked up skewered watermelon, nibbling pieces and chasing them with the cool sweetness of her drink. Wandering slowly from one stage to the next, she felt the summer vibe pour into her veins like liquid freedom.

With one hand she smoothed her dress tight against her hips. The heady mix of freedom and recklessness lit her up. She felt sexy in that black Lexi dress and clearly, others noticed. Men's eyes lingered; a few even threw her playful winks. It felt good to be seen, to bask in the attention without once thinking of Nanny or her demanding job at Cognities. Tonight, she was the center of her story.

She'd worked hard for this moment. For weeks, she'd combed through influencer advice for the perfect look. One favorite had suggested a Lexi dress, sending glossy photos and a link to order. 'Keep it casual,' the influencer had advised. 'It's a beach party. Pair it with sandals; keep it light.' When Sanny had asked about the right color for her pear-shaped body, the response was immediate: black, with a print on top to balance your figure.

The advice was perfect. The price tag, three hundred euros, not so much. Sanny wasn't about to throw that kind of money at a dress. After hunting online, she scored a cheaper version from a budget site, complete with matching sandals and a handbag. When the package arrived, she twirled in front of the mirror. The fit was flawless. The influencer had been right; the cut flattered her curves exactly as promised. No wonder men's eyes followed her tonight. Still, in the sea of faces, she hadn't yet spotted the right one.

Like a born party girl, Sanny dove into the crowd. The festival was buzzing with live music, dazzling fire shows, and fireworks bursting into the night sky. She stopped to watch a troupe of dancers in neon body paint, their movements wild under UV lights. Not far off, a crowd gathered around a jump rope competition, dozens leaping in sync. Even a Thai temple had been set up for a midnight yoga retreat. Sanny drank in the eclectic chaos, floating from bar to bar, show to show.

When she ducked into another beach hut for a Breezer, a man sidled up beside her. He smiled deliberately, angling closer.

'Hey,' he said, locking eyes. 'What brings you here?'

Sanny laughed lightly. 'The same thing that brings you here.'

He held her gaze. 'I would rather not sound cliché, but... I swear we've met before.'

The line fell flat. Sanny's interest fizzled. With a polite shrug, she murmured, 'Not me,' then slipped away into the next party zone, this one glowing with an all-white dress code.

In her sleek black dress, she was bold, cutting straight through the sea of ivory-clad revelers toward the bar. Even the staff shimmered in head-to-toe white. The music thundered, the crowd surged, and Sanny let herself melt into it. Breezer in hand, she swayed through dance circles, her hips moving to the beat as she hunted for the next scene.

She was intoxicated not from alcohol, but from the pure, giddy rush of it all. At one point, swept into the frenzy of a dance floor, she hiked her dress up, twirling half-bare in her black thong, free and reckless in the neon glow.

Then.

A light tap on her shoulder.

Sanny turned.

And found herself staring into a pair of blue eyes.

The stranger's smile was devastating, his confidence radiating like heat from the fire pits nearby.

'Can I get you another Breezer?' he asked, his tone smooth and playful. Sanny's lips curved into a smile of her own. She nodded. Together they moved to the bar, sparks crackling in the space between them. A thrill prickled along her skin. Adventure hung in the air like electricity before a storm.

His name was Lex. He was magnetic, funny, and knew just how to make her laugh. They talked, they danced—but something about him nagged at her. Now and then, his gaze flickered away, scanning the crowd, as though he were waiting for someone.

Sanny ignored it. Why overthink? The night was young, the music was pounding, and for once, she wanted to just be swept away.

But later, as they strolled across the sand, she noticed a small group of men standing in the distance, their eyes fixed in her direction. The hair on her arms prickled. Lex pulled her closer, his whisper hot against her ear.

'Sexy girl, I like what I see.'

Still, he steered her subtly toward those men. A current of unease coursed through her. This wasn't the kind of adventure she was after.

She stopped. Smiled faintly. Then pulled back.

'Goodnight,' she said lightly, turning on her heel.

And walked alone, back toward the safety of the crowd, back to the neon glow and pounding beats of the party.

Relieved she'd shaken Lex off, Sanny slipped back into the crowd, weaving between the beach bars where lines of partygoers waited for cocktails. The terraces overflowed with people laughing, glasses in hand, soaking in the atmosphere.

As she passed the next beach bar, the pounding beat of reggaeton stopped her in her tracks. Yes, she knew that song. Mi Gente. Her all-time favorite by J Balvin.

She turned toward the terrace, her heart skipping.

And froze.

No. It couldn't be.

But there he was, standing in the middle of a group of friends, beer in hand, talking and laughing. The resemblance was uncanny. The same Mediterranean looks, the lean, lithe body, the buzz-cut black hair. The fine goatee, the slim mustache. Even the chunky gold chain hanging bold against a black T-shirt.

Sanny's pulse quickened. She drifted closer, inching back and forth between terraces just to keep him in view. He was gesturing, laughing, his presence magnetic. Every nerve in her body screamed at her to do something reckless, something completely out of character. For once. What if she just... went for it?

The thought alone sent a hot rush through her chest. It wasn't like her, this raw, impulsive attraction. But maybe that's what made it so intoxicating. Before she could stop herself, she stepped forward.

There were no women in the group, just him and his friends. That sealed it. With a daring breath, she slid right into their circle, locked eyes with the J Balvin look-alike, and, hands slick with sweat, asked boldly:

'So... you ready for this?'

He blinked at her, then grinned. Without hesitation he grabbed her hand, pulled her hard against him, and whispered huskily, 'Sexy girl.'

The music pulsed, and suddenly they were grinding together to the rhythm, his body pressing into hers. His lips brushed her ear.

'You smell astonishing.'

Before she could even catch her breath, his mouth was on hers, hungry and insistent. A warm hand slid against her back, firm but teasing. Her skin lit up where he touched her, sparking a craving she hadn't felt in years.

She gasped, then surrendered to the kiss.

'What's your name?' she whispered, her voice shaky with need.

He paused, eyes glittering, his smile edged with mischief.

'Just call me... JB.'

Sanny let out a startled laugh. 'Seriously?'

He leaned closer, his lips grazing her ear.

'Maybe I'm even better than J Balvin.'

The low timbre of his voice, the heat of his breath—it was almost too much. Her body burned with response, her mind spiraling. Should she give in? Should she finally let herself go, no rules, no fear? She'd lived

too long in the shadow of others, Nanny, her mother, and all their constant judgment. Maybe tonight she could choose herself.

His eyes locked on hers, intense and unrelenting. Words became useless; everything was already written in the electricity between them. His hands slid to her waist, pulling her closer, bodies moving as one. Then his lips found hers again, softer this time, but full of promise. For the first time in forever, Sanny felt whole. No doubt. No fear. Just this moment, this man, this fire.

That night, she completely unraveled.

The party, the Breezers, the music—it all fused into a fever she couldn't control. She devoured the J Balvin double, shamelessly, as though her body had been starving for him. His scent, the way he claimed her—it was irresistible.

By sunrise, as light broke over the dunes, he smirked at her with effortless confidence.

'Give me your number before you leave. I know you want to.'

Her head spinning with alcohol and adrenaline, Sanny keyed in her digits. Then, daringly, she tilted her head and purred, 'And yours?'

He waved it off with a sly smile.

'That'll come later.'

Later, as she climbed into the BeachHub bus, his words echoed in her head, sticky as honey: Are you as wild as me? Are you a freak too? No man had ever said that to her. The thought made her shiver with anticipation.

She replayed his laugh, the way his hand had claimed her back, and the unshakable self-assurance that left her dizzy. Was it just the alcohol? Or was he really that raw, that dangerous, with a soft core hidden beneath? Back home, her phone pinged with a message from her mother, Gerda: another spat with Nanny. Always the same toxic cycle, and somehow Nanny still managed to twist things so she ended up on their mother's side. Sanny sighed. She couldn't count on anyone but herself.

She glanced at her phone screen, hoping, waiting, willing Boris JB to text. Nothing.

With another deep sigh, she set it aside.

Work would have to be her focus now. Maybe tomorrow would bring something unexpected. Something worth holding onto. Something, or someone like Boris.



*The tale of the lonely road,  
A highway no one knows.  
Jackals lurking at every turn,  
Striking fast, unseen, they burn.  
Once you go, you can't come back,  
You lose yourself along the track.  
It's final, sealed for good,  
No matter your fight, your fire, or your hood.*

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