

Rocka Bye Baby is about pride, covetousness, lust and redemption.

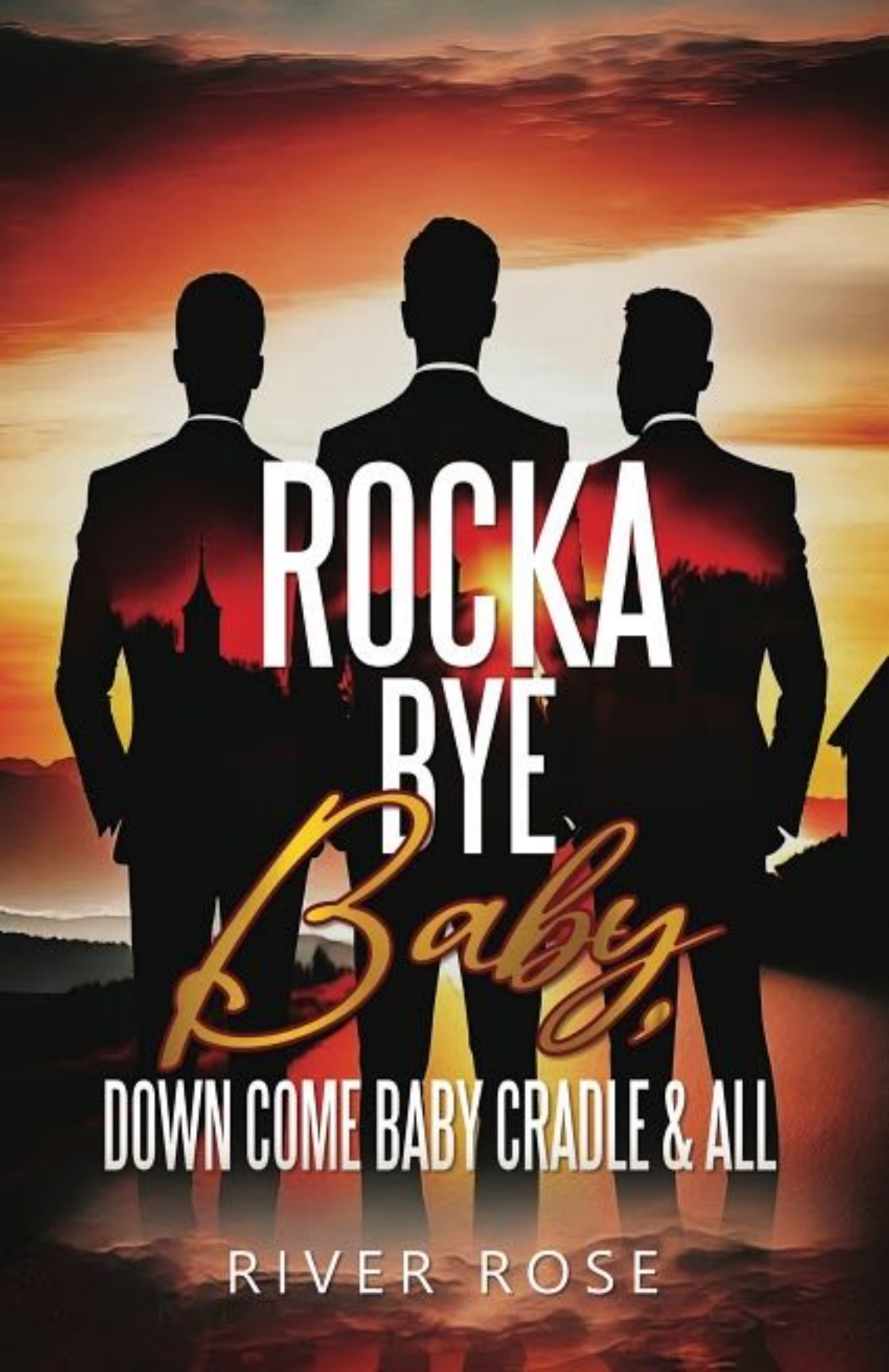
Rocka Bye Baby

By River Rose

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ROCKA
BYE

Baby

DOWN COME BABY CRADLE & ALL

RIVER ROSE

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Chapter 1

Present

It had been exactly two years to the date since Jackie walked out on their marriage, their hopes, and their dreams. Finding the 'Dear John' note on that dreadful morning still pained him. It had caused months, days, and nights of anxiety and depression. Not knowing where his wife was eating him up inside, tearing him apart. The two years had taken a great toll on his life. He had lost weight by the bucket full, reminding people of an under-stuffed scarecrow. Children in the street secretly called him the 'skeleton man.' They thought he hadn't heard, but he heard alright. He heard how they whispered in church behind his back, saying to one another that it was no surprise to them that Jackie James had left her husband in the middle of the night. Everyone in church knew how downright flirtatious she was with all the men in the church except for Luke. It was rumored that she was sleeping around with one of the deacons in the church. The church ladies didn't put it past her. She was a hussy, alright. Luke James was too good for her. The saying goes the wife, or the husband always is the last to know when one of them is cheating. When it came to Jackie, Luke's eyes were shut tight. He may as well have been a dead man walking. He didn't see any discrepancies when it came to Jackie. He was blind to her shameless ways, and the many complaints she had about serving in the ministry and being at

church all the time. The woman had loose lips. She complained to everyone who would listen. No, it was no surprise at all among the church folks about good-old Jackie and her worldly ways. The only thing that surprised them was that she did not leave sooner.

Despite the unhappy rumors that surrounded his wife, Luke had taken months off from his job to look for her. He had even hired a private detective to search for his missing wife. What was the use in living when everything he had loved walked out of his life? Luke tried to make sense of it all, but there was no sanity in justifying his wife's sudden, unexplainable departure, none other than she didn't want to be a Christian like she said in her letter. And even that didn't justify her actions. He had heard it all before from other ministers about how their wives would sometimes feel isolated and left out when it came to their spouses being in the ministry. But she had been right there by his side in the fighting drugs ministry and the homeless ministry. Inseparable, they were by each other's side. So, what happened? The question plagued him day and night. The Silver Rock Police Department was no help. He had reported his wife missing when he read her note the next morning. And only after a few days of investigating, her car was found at the local Food-Mart with the key still in the ignition. A couple of witnesses signed an affidavit confirming seeing Jackie board a Greyhound bus on the same night of her disappearance. The Silver Rock Police Department closed the case and said it was a case of a wife who wanted out of her marriage. That's when he called Silver Rock's finest private detective, Money Wright, hoping that he would come up with

his missing wife and her whereabouts. Only after a few days on the case, Detective Money was true to his reputation of finding anybody and anything in any given situation. It was once said that Money could find a needle in a haystack. Now, Luke embraced and knew without reservation that saying to be true about the detective. He had located his wife in a matter of no time out on the West Coast, shacking up with a man named Harry, twenty years her senior. Harry was also a detective, which explains how she got away without being detected by the Silver Rock Police Department. Detective Harry knew his business and he knew it well, but not as well as Money. Detective Money had informed Luke that his wife would be filing for a divorce. Talking of divorce did not kill the passion that Luke still had reserved only for her. Even afterward, when he got the divorce papers from Jackie's attorney, he contemplated signing the papers for a few weeks, praying that she would come to her senses and come back home where she belonged, back home to him. One evening, Jackie called and pleaded with him to let her go. She explained how she wanted to be free from the life he had to offer. She had pulled her acting career out of the ashes and started getting bit parts at the local community theater where she lived. She wasn't living the grand life, but she was living the life she wanted, at least that's what she told herself. She missed Luke, but not enough to send her packing and back into his life. He signed the papers and mailed them to her attorney, giving Jackie the freedom, she wished for. But the pain still gnawed at his gut and made it sometimes unbearable for him to think straight. He still called her his wife more out of habit than commitment. No matter how many times

he tried covering it, the divorce constantly reminded him how he failed as a husband.

“What’s wrong?” Donna Mitchell asked softly, watching him closely, wondering if he had found someone else to take his stupid wife’s place. The woman was stupid because she left a handsome, successful man like Luke behind. It upset Donna that some women do not realize the treasure that they have in such men as Luke and her son-in-law Billy. With the look on his face, probably not, she thought. She could not help thinking about the poor thing of living all alone and lonely in that big, empty house. She watched the handsome doctor work his magic behind the drug counter. She couldn’t believe a woman in her right mind would leave such a handsome and financially stable man like Dr. Luke James behind. She had to be stupid and out of her mind.

“Nothing is wrong,” Luke smiled at her, concealing his true feelings.

“Sure, nothing wrong? If so, I’m here, I can make it all better,” she replied in a flirtatious tone. Dr. James was just as fine as her son-in-law, Billy Ray. Billy Ray and the James brothers were cast from the same mold. After the men were cast and formed, the mold was thrown into a burning furnace, never to be used again. Donna Mitchell swore on her life that she had never met any finer men in her life than Billy Ray and the James brothers. Even the youngest of the James brothers was something to awe at. Eye candy in the first degree. The thought of her son-in-law made her knees give way underneath her and set her heart racing. Billy had that effect on her. He said once that she wasn’t his type but even the strongest man has a weak

point, and it was up to the woman to find it. She would find Billy's weakness and make him love her if it were the last thing that she did. It was going to take a while, but time was on her side. She wasn't worried about her daughter, Adrienne. Her daughter did not know her head from her toe. Women come a dime a dozen in Billy's life. He was now a big-time pastor over a good-sized congregation in Silver Rock. People in small towns were so forgiving of one another. Billy had somehow schemed himself from a murder suspect to a fire and brimstone preacher. Remembering the first time she set eyes on him brought out the sexual beast that was locked up inside her. A beast that no one could tame, not even her old, lame husband, Eddie. Billy had come to their home looking for Adrienne. He was such a good-looking gentleman. He asked Eddie for permission to take their daughter out on her first date. Donna had thought of herself as always being a faithful wife to her husband and a wholesome mother to her daughter. But seeing Billy made her sacrifice all of that. He brought the dark side out of her. This dark side caused her to forsake and destroy everything that she loved. Watching Dr. James ring up Eddie's Viagra got her thinking about what it would be like to make love to Dr. James, and what a lucky woman Adrienne was to have a man like Billy in her bed every night. She was counting on the day when Adrienne's luck would run out and Billy would be hers.

"Will this be all?" Luke asked, ringing up the total for the prescription, breaking her concentration on her morally wrong thoughts about her son-in-law and the James brothers.

"Yes, that'll be all." She politely answered, opening her purse, and getting her insurance card out for him.

Luke scanned the insurance card across the register. "That'll be twenty dollars," he said, handing Donna back the card.

"Here you are," she replied handing Luke twenty dollars for the prescription. He bagged the pills and handed the bag to her.

"Thanks for the business," he said and then added, "Please come again."

"Sure thing," she answered as she walked away from the drug counter and out of the store with her thoughts still centered on Billy with a fire burning between her legs.

"That there is one fine Mama." Jake Stalling, the store manager, said to Luke as he walked towards him. "Fine as she can be," he added, shaking his head, and grinning like a football player making his first real touchdown. Wishfully thinking, Jake pictured himself making fierce love to Donna Mitchell on the store floor.

"She's okay, I guess," Luke replied, wondering what Jackie was doing. Did she have any more acting parts at the theatre? How was she getting along? Oh, how he missed her.

"I guess. Man, did I hear you right? You guess? Dr. James, I hate to say but you need your eyes examined," Jake said laughing, showing all thirty-two pearly whites. "Even though old home girl got a lot of miles on her, and I do mean a lot," he stretched the word. "She's still a bad woman," he stated while walking away from the counter laughing at Luke and shaking his head like it was the funniest joke he had ever heard.

“What is Jake up to now?” Wanda Bell, the store clerk, asked Luke as she walked behind the drug counter and stood beside him with her hands on her hips.

“You know Jake,” Luke replied.

“Yeah, who don’t?” she said, shooting Jake Stalling a disgusting look as he walked back up the aisle toward the check-out counter. She added, “Jake the snake, too bad his wife doesn’t know him like we do.”

“Ouch, that hurt,” Luke said, retreating a few steps backward while grinning hard at her.

“Well, it’s the truth and you know it.”

“I plead the fifth,” he laughed in an amusing tone.

“Don’t get me wrong, I’m not talking about the man behind his back. I’m just stating what I see, the facts.” She replied, trying to win her case, knowing at the same time Luke would not go along with her. One thing she admired about him was that he didn’t have a hard word to say about anyone. He wasn’t the gossiping type. He was too kindhearted and trusting of people.

“Okay, you can get off of Jake now,” he said with a big smile. He didn’t want her to feel that she couldn’t vent around him. The last thing he wanted was to cut off communication with anyone who had a lot on their mind and just wanted to talk about it. He promised himself that he would be that listening ear. Maybe if he had listened to Jackie more closely, he could have somehow prevented her from walking out and ruining their marriage. “So, what are you doing for dinner?” he asked, breaking the edgy atmosphere that tried to align itself around them.

"Nothing, what do you have in mind?" she asked, seeing that Luke was trying to make her feel at ease. She felt relieved.

"I thought maybe we could grab dinner after work," he answered.

"That'll be great. My treat or yours?" she asked.

"Mine of course," he smiled.

"Well, in that case, you don't have to ask me twice."

"It's official then."

"Is this a date?" she asked.

"No-o-o-o, wait-a-minute," he smiled while throwing both hands up defending his position. He hadn't been out on a date since the day Jackie left him. In his heart, no other woman could take her place. He was still madly in love with Jackie. Luke knew he would take her back with no questions asked. That's how much he loved her. She had captured his heart, and there was no room for any other woman but Jackie. His middle brother Rodney had teased him about staying cooped up in his house like an old maid. He even went as far as setting him up with several blind dates. Even though the women Rodney set him up with were fine, fine in every prospect of life, with fine bodies, fine houses, fine rides, fine jobs, and fine bank accounts, none of these impressed Luke, he was used to all the finest things money could buy. He just wanted his wife back. Although she was living with another man, deep down he still believed Jackie would one day come to her senses, leave the other guy, and walk back into his life as quickly as she had walked out.

"Well, where are we going on this official dinner that is not a date?" she asked, teasing him, and shooting him an entertaining look.

"I was thinking about this new place on the other side of town," he replied.

"What new place?" she said.

"Papa Grill," he answered. "I heard it was great."

"Yeah, I heard that too."

"Silver Rock's Tribune gave it a thumbs up. I thought about checking it out and seeing what all the talk is about."

"Sounds good to me," she replied, glancing at her watch, and rubbing her stomach. "I hope I can hold out that long."

"You have an hour," he answered.

"Yeah, but do you know how long an hour is when you're hungry? A Sistah can get mighty ugly when she's hungry," Wanda replied.

"Yeah, I know. I've seen you in action before, remember?" he laughed.

"Funny," she poked him with her elbow.

"Hey, be careful. You're poking ribs here," he said while grabbing her playfully. The feeling of her soft body overpowered him and caused a chain reaction rippling effect that quickly surged through him. He pushed her away gently, ashamed of the way his body betrayed him. These feelings were only reserved for Jackie. He felt as if he betrayed her by desiring another woman. Turning away from her suddenly, he could see Jackie's unpardonable stare.

"What's the matter? Did I do something?" she asked, walking around him to see his face, unaware of the emotional

disturbance she caused and the conflict that he was going through at that very moment.

"No. Nothing, I just got to get back to work," he said, feeling more guilty of the thoughts that just ran through his mind. He undressed her with his eyes. He wanted to make love to her right there in the store on the counter, but the scripture came to mind, Matthew chapter five and verse twenty-nine. 'If your right eye causes you to stumble, gouge it out and throw it away. It is better for you to lose one part of your body than for your whole body to be thrown into hell.' The word of God sliced deeply into his heart. It reminded him of God's love and the plans he had for his life. "Lord, please forgive me," he whispered under his breath.

"Huh?" She looked confused.

"Nothing." He shrugged his shoulders and lowered his head.

"We're still on for dinner, right?" she asked, wondering why suddenly he was acting so weird.

"Yeah, we're still on," he replied, looking away. He could not trust himself with her. Somehow, he had to get out of this dinner. He was afraid to be alone with her. She had stirred up old emotions he had buried a year and a half ago. He had not had these kinds of emotions since the last time he made love to Jackie. It was the night when she walked out.

"Look, Dr. James," she touched his chin and pulled it gently toward her. "I don't know what just happened a minute ago, but I do know there is something wrong."

"There is nothing wrong," he said, trying to assure her.

“Remember me?” she asked. “Luke, let me ease your conscience; we’re not going out on a date. I’m not trying to take your wife’s place.”

“See, you don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, looking at her.

“I do know that I could kill that ex-wife of yours for doing this to you. She has made you void of loving anyone else.”

“That’s not true,” he replied, agitated that she would blame Jackie for his shortcomings.

“It’s the truth and you know it,” she responded. “And when are you going to get it through your head that your wife is gone, Luke? She left you without any regard for how devastating this would be to you. And it is hard for me to believe that you are still in love with her after all the horrible things she has done!” Wanda rushed in straightforward, not regretting anything she had to say to him. She wanted Luke to feel the sting of her words, hoping that he would wake up and realize that Jackie would not be returning to his life. She was happily doing whatever it was that she was doing.

“You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he said, walking away from her.

“I do know she abandoned you, and I hate her for it,” Wanda said in a defeated tone.

“Let’s just get back to work.” He answered without looking at her.

“She’s not coming back, Luke,” she said, as she followed him down the shelves filled with medicine.

“You don’t know that.” He said while taking a plastic container down from its shelf and carrying it to his station.

"I do know that she has messed you up from having a loving relationship with anyone else."

"Look, I don't know what you're talking about. And I don't want to hear another word about my wife."

"She's no longer your wife. Remember your divorce?" Wanda reminded him.

"Okay, what do you want from me?" Luke asked, looking at her.

"I want you to live," she replied.

"You're crazy." He gave a quick soft laugh.

"Luke, your ex is living with another man, and from what I have heard, she's happy."

"I don't want to hear anything about Jackie anymore. Let's just get back to work, please."

Wanda hated it when he put "please" at the end of his argument. It made it hard for her to keep fighting with him. And she hated Jackie for what she had done to him.

"Okay, I'm finished for now, but we have not come to the end of the road."

"I was afraid you would say that." He shot her an agitated look. "But it is finished for me," he said, counting out twenty pills from the container and dropping them into a slim pill bottle.

"Fine." she threw her hands in the air. "I give up."

"Good," he replied. A half smile tugged at the right corner of his lips.

"I don't see what is so funny," she snapped.

"What? Am I laughing?" he asked, looking puzzled.

"You're smiling," she said, rolling her eyes at him.

"I'm not smiling," he said as he placed the cap on the bottle, printing the bottle's label. He pressed the label onto the bottle, set it on the station table, and walked to her. "Do you see a smile on my face?" he asked, looking down at her.

"Not now," she said softly while picturing herself in his arms.

"So why are you lying to me?" he asked, playfully tugging her cheeks.

"Stop before I call Jake." She warned him with a twinkle in her eye.

"I don't think you're that brave," he said still tugging her.

"Yeah, you're right. The last thing I need is Jake back here undressing me with his eyes."

"C'mon Jake doesn't do anything like that," he replied, thinking only a few minutes ago he had done that very same thing she accused Jake of.

"Yeah right, where have you been? You have seen the way Jake looks at me."

"Well, he is a man," Luke laughed softly.

"So are you, but I don't see you looking at me the way he does," she replied.

"Maybe I do," he uttered.

"Yeah right," she punched him playfully.

"Ouch, girl, that hurt."

"You big softie." She punched him again.

"Wanda, that hurt." He held her arm.

"Why do you do this?"

"Do what?"

"One minute you're playful and the next, I can't reach you. Like you're off somewhere in another world."

"That's crazy," he replied, trying to laugh her question off. "Shouldn't you be helping Jake?"

"I ain't studying Jake and please, don't avoid my question."

"Can this wait? Because I don't know what you're talking about."

"Okay, you want to act dumb. Fine with me." She cocked her head and crossed her arms over her chest.

"Now that hurt." He flashed a sad look her way.

"I wanted it to." She shot back.

"Now can we get back to work?"

"Okay, okay, I'm going. By the way, when does this new assistant arrive?"

"Tomorrow morning, and make her feel welcome, you hear?" he added.

"I will if she doesn't come in here acting brand new like she owns the place."

"Brand new?"

"Yeah, brand new, slang for stuck-up, conceited, haughty, snobbish-like-she-all-that and a bag of chips. You know, the whole shebang."

"I don't think you have to worry about her. I met her twice, and she's nice."

"Yeah, she's nice to you. Both of y'all are doctors, and I'm just a plain old cashier."

"That doesn't matter; a job is a job." He tried to put her self-confidence back intact.

“And I just hope that Miss All-Degrees don’t come in here looking her nose down at me thinking that her butt smells like roses.”

“What do you mean?”

“Everybody’s butt stinks.”

“I want you to behave tomorrow when she gets here.”

“I will.”

“Good.”

“I don’t know why you want me to be on my best behavior; you’re the one who has to work closely with her. You behave yourself.”

“Don’t worry, I will do just that, and I think you better get back to work. Jake is looking back here, and I don’t like how he is looking at you.”

“Yeah, he’s mad because you get all my attention.”

“Maybe you need to work on that.” He smiled and went back to filling his prescription orders, glad that she had gotten off Jackie.

“Yeah right, before he says something and I wind up hurting his feelings, regretting it later.” She walked away from the counter and started straightening up baby formula on the shelves.

“Wanda, c’mere for a sec, I need to show you something,” Jake hollered with a big frown carved on his narrow face.

“See what you’ve done?” Wanda looked back at Luke and whispered loud enough for him to hear her.

“Don’t blame me,” Luke grinned, shrugging his shoulders. He watched her as she made her way to Jake. By now, Jake’s frown had turned into a smile. No doubt he had a thing for her.

As she stood near Jake, Luke couldn't help but watch her curvy hips as she shifted back and forth on her feet. Man, he thought, checking out her voluptuous figure. The girl had curves in all the right places. Watching her standing there brought back that stir again that only a man should share between him and his wife. Besides what was he thinking? Here he is, a Christian with his mind stuck in the gutter over a woman who could never take Jackie's place; a woman he had poured out his heart to when Jackie walked out. Wanda had proven time and time again to be a true friend. Even though he didn't want to admit it, he knew in his heart that Jackie wasn't returning and sooner or later he had to get over her and find himself another wife. He laughed quietly to himself as he thought about his brother Rodney. Luke and Rodney never agreed on anything but agreed that they could disagree. But this was one of those times that his brother was right. If he didn't get a wife soon, he was going to lose his mind. Rodney had spoken these exact words to him two months ago.

Turning his mind over to Rodney, he thought how different night and day they were. Rodney was cool and outgoing. He on the other hand was more laid-back and conventional. Women used to beat paths to Rodney's door and flopped around him by the drove. That is until Connie Ingram came along and changed all of that. And she couldn't have come at a better time. He used to worry about the dangerous life Rodney led hanging out with all kinds of people. Good thing he gave his life to Christ, or it'd be no telling where he'd have wound up.

Luke considers the James Brothers a handsome pair from good stock. Both their parents were medical doctors. Thomas James, the best gynecologist in Silver Rock, and Florence James, a top-notch anesthesiologist. He still remembers the Silver Rock Police Department knocking at his door; it seemed only like yesterday when he had gotten the news that both his parents were killed in an auto accident. It had been drizzling and raining all afternoon when his father was driving south on Highway 36 and hit brakes suddenly to keep from hitting a car that stopped suddenly on the highway in front of them without any warning. This sent his parents' car flipping several times across the highway and into a tree, killing both instantly. Luke felt a little relief when the medical examiner revealed that his parents didn't suffer. It was hard enough to lose both parents, but to think that they suffered if only for a second was such a devastating ordeal. The death of his parents took a deep toll on him, but he prayed to God to give him the strength he needed to go on for his brothers' sake. God had given him a vision that night.

Psalms One hundred and twenty-one, verses one through three, 'I lift my eyes to the mountains- where does my help come from? My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth. He will not let your foot slip- He who watches over you will not slumber.'

The Lord had done exactly what He said that He would do. God had supplied him with the strength he asked for, and he was thankful for it. He was glad he had accepted Christ as his Lord and Savior. It was times like those that he knew God was watching out for him because He kept him going with strength and unlimited peace, no matter what.

After his parents' death, he took in his younger brother Sean. Sean was only ten years old when their parents died. Luke had put plenty of himself into Sean's busy schedule of football practice, baseball practice, and soccer. He wanted him to grow up normally despite his condition of being left an orphan. Luke, at twenty-three years old and a senior in college, had married Jackie Lavon Shaw, a girl he met at 'Gospel Jubilee Church'. After he graduated from college, they had a small wedding and moved into a small apartment so he could continue his education in pharmacy; the same year his parents were killed. At first, Jackie seemed thrilled to have Sean come to live with them, but after a while, things started to change. She became more distant from Sean, resenting the fact that she had taken on more than she could chew, and Luke couldn't blame her for feeling the way she did. They both were still very young. He was twenty-three, and she was twenty-two. Taking on such a responsibility at that caliber would send any young woman packing. He prayed day and night for God to open his wife's heart to accept Sean as one of hers. After a few years, Sean approached him, saying that he was moving in with Rodney. At first, he had rejected the move. Rodney was twenty-five, partied all the time, and lived an undomesticated life. Even though he was a college student and had his apartment, taking care of Sean would be a big responsibility. After Jackie had complained so much over the years about not having enough space for herself, he relented his decision and allowed Sean to move in with their middle brother.

Luke went on to finish pharmacy school and landed a good job at the local drug store in town. Everything seemed to be

going great for Sean and Jackie during those few years he moved in with Rodney. Jackie enrolled in the nearby community college to take drama courses. Sean was happily living with Rodney, and he had become a junior in high school. Luke couldn't have asked for a better life. Then one year later, out of the blue, Jackie dropped a bomb, destroying all his happiness and everything that they had accomplished together.

"You told me to come back in an hour," a small elderly woman said, peering over the counter at Luke.

"Huh," he frowned, breaking his thoughts on his family.

"Are they ready?" she said again. "My pills, are they ready?"

"Oh, yes, Ms. Collins, your pills are ready," he said, as he focused in on her. He looked through the alphabetical wire tray and pulled out her prescription from its slot. "This should make you feel as good as new." He smiled at her before ringing up the total.

"It ought to be as much as it costs. Just highway robbery, that's what I say," she complained.

"That'll be seventy dollars," he said.

"Seventy dollars, what? It only cost me fifty dollars last month. What are y'all doing? Folks can't buy their pills these days. Just highway robbery! It's a shame how everybody is robbing everybody these days. A shame! And God isn't pleased with that either," she said in an angry tone, frowning at Luke.

"Yeah, I know but everything is going up. High cost of living."

"I only have fifty on me," she snapped. "I guess I have to come back." She stepped away from the counter.

"No wait, I have twenty dollars." He extracted the money from his wallet.

"I don't know," she said, "I hate to borrow money from anybody."

"Count it as a gift."

"I don't take charity," she replied, "Never have and never will."

"It is not charity. Just let me help you this time, okay?" he asked, and then added, "Besides, Ms. Collins, you're one of my favorite customers."

"Well, in that case then I thank you," she said and handed him the fifty dollars. He entered the money in the cash register and gave her the medication.

"Thank you, Dr. James," she said, smiling for the first time since she entered the store. "You are an angel."

"My pleasure." He spoke. "Glad to help out," he added.

She took the bag and then said, "May God bless you," and walked away from the counter happier than when she first walked in.

"Thanks, I needed that," he said, as he watched her stroll down the aisle to make her way to the front of the store. He then lowered his head and prayed, "Thank you, Lord, for meeting Ms. Collins' needs, and thank you for allowing me to be a blessing to her. And Lord please help me to move on with my life. I still love Jackie but I need to move on. Only you can help me, Father, only you." Luke glanced at the wall clock and took off his white lab coat. He carried it to his office and hung it on the wooden rack. It was six o'clock, closing time. He and Wanda would be having dinner soon. For once he wished he wasn't

saved so he wouldn't be agonizing over being alone with her now. If he wasn't a Christian, he could have his way with her and not feel guilty about it later. But he indeed was a Christian and he knew he couldn't displease God. No matter how tough it got he had to remind himself who he was and who he represented. Changing into his suit jacket he walked out of his office and toward Wanda.

Chapter 2

"We talked about this before girl," Rodney shot Melinda Davenport an agitated look. "I'm not leaving my wife for you and you need to get that through your thick skull." *Women*, he thought, *they'd bleed out a good thing*. Making non-committal sex the road to a single-family home, a white picket fence and family vacations all rolled up in one. Why don't people just take a side piece for what it is? Sex on the go. No strings attached. No nothing.

"B-b-b-but you said you were gonna leave your wife and we would be together if I quit my job!" The words spilled from her trembling lips.

"Oh, no baby, you aren't pulling that bull-crap on me. I didn't tell you to quit your job. I told you I'd take care of you. Quitting your job is your idea."

"You told me not to worry about my job, that you'd take care of me, and it was only a matter of time before you'd divorce Connie," Melinda's voice rose to a high pitch as she held onto those last words. She tried to choke back the tears, but they filled her eyes and spilled over, running down her smooth, brown skin.

"Girl, I am not leaving my wife for you." He shot her an angry look and then added, "I'm a youth pastor. What would I look like leaving my wife for another woman? That won't go over so well with the good ole church folks. I can see old Deacon Jones now rolling those big ole grey ugly eyes at Pastor Ray,

smirking from ear to ear asking for my resignation. No, that won't go well at all."

"So, sleeping with me every other month will go well with the church folks and that deacon that you're so scared of?" Melinda replied, not backing down from the confrontation.

"What the church folks don't know won't hurt them," Rodney replied. "Besides, we have a good thing going, so why screw it up over some small insignificant things like divorcing Connie which isn't going to happen." He reasoned with her.

"But you said —"

"Shhhh baby, why spoil what we have now on something I've said? Why don't we just take the few hours I have left before my flight and get to explore our bodies over again?" Rodney pulled her into his arms and wiped the tears from her eyes with his hand. "C'mon," he said. Kissing her lips softly, he added, "Let's finish these few hours making love and not war, what do you say?" He whispered in her ear as he slipped out of his dark blue boxers, the ones his wife gave him last year for Father's Day. "Just give me a second," he replied, opening a new pack of condoms.

"But I want to talk now," she said weakly, watching him put on the condom.

"We can talk later, but right now, I want you, baby," he said, turning his focus back on her. He moved in closer and slipped her pink satin negligee over her head. He tossed it to the floor and eased her backward onto the crumpled full-size bed. "I want you," he spoke hoarsely. As his lips found her breasts, a soft moan escaped her lips, reeling Melinda into forgetting all about Rodney and his divorce from Connie. Right

now, the only thing that captivated her was the pleasure she was getting from this man that she truly loved and the satisfaction she would give in return.

“Un-huh, see that’s what I’m talking about,” he groaned. Easing himself gently on her medium-sized frame, he pushed her legs apart and positioned himself between them. A lengthy gasp escaped Melinda as his tongue trailed up and down the length of her naked body, sending it into a burning inferno. “You like that huh?” he asked, not caring whether she liked it or not. She was there for one reason only, and that was for him to get his pleasure. She was like any other woman he had taken under his spell. Love ‘em and leave ‘em were his motto. “You like that huh?” he asked between kissing and planting his head between her ample breasts.

“Yes, yes,” she gasped for breath. She surrendered her mind and body wholeheartedly to him, liking the way he made her feel. She couldn’t explain the feeling he gave her in a million years. It was so special that nothing else mattered. She had to make him see that leaving his wife was the best for both. She had to make him see somehow. The thought of him going back to Georgia in a few hours into Connie’s arms sent chills racing through her. She and Rodney would never be together if Connie stood in the picture. The thought of Connie dying suddenly brought a bit of pleasure to her.

“Who’s your man?” he whispered in her ear.

“You,” she whimpered, “You’re my man, Rodney,” she said, losing herself in him.

“And you better believe it baby,” he said, kissing her softly while they made love. Explosions of sweet gratification ripped through Melinda’s body, sending her into chaos.

“Ooooh,” Melinda grasped, matching the rhythm of his hips to hers. “I, I, love you,” she cried out in pure ecstasy.

“Yeah, baby, yeah, uh yeah baby that’s how I like it.” His breathing came more rapidly and out of control. “Girl, you’re good,” he muttered between breaths. “I don’t want any other man here while I’m gone. You hear me?” Rodney demanded in a raspy tone.

“Mmmh, I hear you,” she moaned loudly.

“And you better see to it that you don’t.” He looked down at her and then suddenly reached full gratification of pleasure. “I won’t,” she cried breathlessly.

“I swear girl you keep me coming back,” he whispered hoarsely as he pushed his wet sweaty body off hers and lay beside her. He took her into his arms and closed his eyes reliving the moment and wondering what Connie and Mia were doing. It was Thursday evening, so Connie probably had their daughter at her ballet class at church. That was one reason he liked Solid Rock Christian Center. It had a lot of activities for children his daughter’s age. When Pastor Ray approached him last summer about being the youth pastor, he jumped at the chance before the good ol’ pastor had a change of heart. The position had proven itself to be a gem. It gave him leadership power in the church and among the single women. They saw him in a different light now that he wore a title. He was a wolf in sheep’s clothing, only this wolf had a little more style. He knew what he was doing with some of the church sisters was

wrong. Besides, it was two stories to the coin. Because the women were just as wrong. But they needed love too, and if they were willing to dish it, then he was willing to serve it. Besides, the Bible says to love everybody and to treat them the way you want to be treated. They wanted sex, and he wanted sex, so what was the big deal? He treated them the way he wanted to be treated.

"I love you so much," she said, writing her imaginary first name with his last name across his chest with her index finger. But there was only silence between them as she waited for an answer.

Raising her head, a little, she looked at him, "I love you, Rodney. I love you so much, it hurts."

"Huh, what's that?" He asked, breaking his focus on the women in the church and their sexual needs.

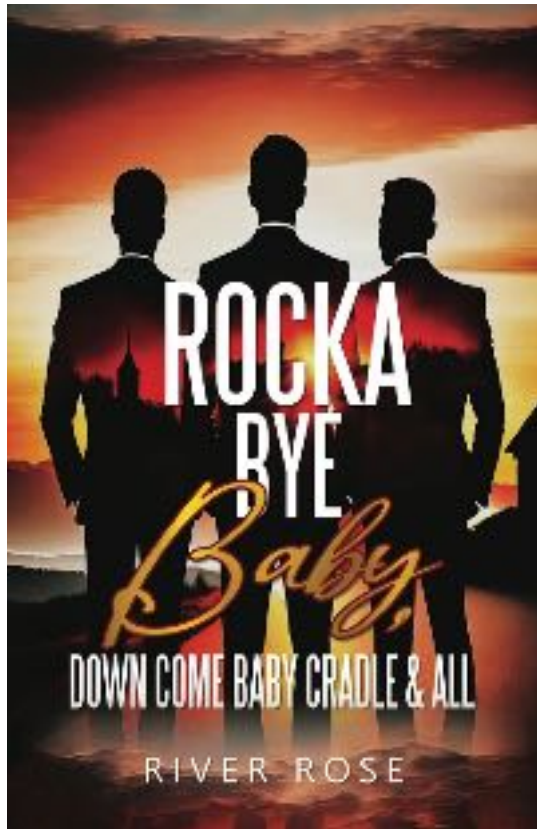
"I said I love you," she spoke softly, pressing her head gently against his chest, resuming writing her name across his chest.

"That's good," he responded, ignoring her confession.

"I love you," she repeated the statement.

"I heard you the first time," he answered sharply, wondering how he got involved with a whining, needy woman like Melinda Davenport.

Rodney continued to ignore her endless confession for him and glanced at the clock on the nightstand. He gently pushed her away from his arms and rose from the full-sized bed. He didn't want to hear any more of her undying love for him, and he sure didn't want to have another discussion with her about leaving Connie because that was out of the question. Why



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