



More Than Friends

A NOVEL

BESTSELLING AUTHOR

DENISE
HUNTER

Praise for Denise Hunter

“A second story bookshop leads to a second chance at love in this tenderly told tale of old wounds, forgiveness, and redemption. Book lovers, book clubs, and anyone who’s ever dreamed of owning a bookstore will adore this cleverly interwoven story in which the business of books steers the business of life toward a beautiful new beginning.”

—Lisa Wingate, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Shelterwood*, on
The Second Story Bookshop

“Hunter’s latest is a healing and empowering journey of love. Told in Hunter’s classic style, *The Summer of You and Me* will stay with readers long after the end.”

—Rachel Hauck, *New York Times* bestselling author

“Yummy romance with a dash of mystery, this friends-to-lovers novel, *The Summer of You and Me*, is wonderful! Hunter’s deft hand mixes grief with new beginnings to make a delicious read!”

—Colleen Coble, *USA TODAY* and *Publishers Weekly* bestselling author

“Poignant and powerful, *The Summer of You and Me* is an exquisite ‘out-of-the-box’ romance that will rack your mind and ratchet your pulse! The amazing Denise Hunter has done it again with a truly riveting read that’s short on sleep but long on hope.”

—Julie Lessman, award-winning author of *The Daughters of Boston*, *Winds of Change*, and the *Isle of Hope* series

“This story pulled at my heartstrings from the first chapter right through to the last. I longed for Maggie and Josh to find their happily-ever-after, despite the emotional roller coaster they were on. Denise Hunter has written a beautiful story filled with the complexities that come with loving others, especially members of our own families.”

—Robin Lee Hatcher, Christy Award-winning author of *Wishing for Mistletoe* and *To Capture a Mountain Man*, for *The Summer of You and Me*

“Denise Hunter made me cry again. Wow—what a breathtaking, heart-tugging story! *The Summer of You and Me* has so many great surprises, twists, and turns that my head is reeling, and I could not stop reading. You will not be sorry you read this book.”

—Hannah Alexander, author of *A Woman Worth Knowing* and *One Strong Man*

“*Love, Unscripted* has it all—the funniest meet-cute ever, unique characters, and a charming beach town setting. If you love sweet romance with a lot of heart, this one has ‘Hallmark movie’ written all over it. Highly recommended!”

—Colleen Coble, *USA TODAY* and *Publishers Weekly* bestselling author

“Hunter (*Bookshop by the Sea*) opens this heartwarming romance with Queens, N.Y., western writer Sadie Goodwin learning that her publisher wants her to switch genres to romance . . . Hunter’s charismatic and complex characters effortlessly propel the story. Readers won’t want to put this down.”

—*Publishers Weekly* for *A Novel Proposal*

“A heartwarming tale written by an undisputed queen of the genre, *A Novel Proposal* is a love letter to readers, to writers, and, above all, to romance. As Sadie and Sam were forced out of their comfort zones, I sank deeper and deeper into my reading happy place. This cozy, clever, captivating love story is the perfect beach read and an absolute must for fans of happily ever afters. Denise Hunter charmed my socks right off with this one!”

—Bethany Turner, author of *Plot Twist* and *The Do-Over*

“A tragic accident gives a divorced couple a second chance at love in the warmhearted third installment of Hunter’s Riverbend Romance series (after *Mulberry Hollow*) . . . Readers looking for an uplifting Christian romance will appreciate how Laurel and Gavin’s faith helps dispel their

deep-rooted fears so they can find a way to love again. Inspirational fans will find this hard to resist.”

—*Publishers Weekly* for *Harvest Moon*

“Denise Hunter has a way of bringing depth and an aching beauty into her stories, and *Harvest Moon* is no different. *Harvest Moon* is a beautiful tale of second chances, self-sacrifice, and renewed romance that addresses hard topics such as child death and dissolved marriages. In a beautiful turn of events, Hunter brings unexpected healing out of a devastating situation, subtly reminding the reader that God can create beauty out of the most painful of circumstances and love from the most broken stories.”

—Pepper Basham, author of *The Heart of the Mountains* and *Authentically, Izzy*

“A poignant romance that’s perfect for fans of emotional love stories that capture your heart from the very first page. With her signature style, Denise Hunter whisks readers into a world where broken hearts are mended, lives are changed, and love really does conquer all!”

—Courtney Walsh, *New York Times* bestselling author, for *Mulberry Hollow*

“Hunter delivers a touching story of how family dynamics and personal priorities shift when love takes precedence. Hunter’s fans will love this.”

—*Publishers Weekly* for *Riverbend Gap*

“Denise Hunter has never failed to pen a novel that whispers messages of hope and brings a smile to my face. *Bookshop by the Sea* is no different! With a warmhearted community, a small beachside town, a second-chance romance worth rooting for, and cozy bookshop vibes, this is a story you’ll want to snuggle into like a warm blanket.”

—Melissa Ferguson, author of *Meet Me in the Margins*

“Sophie and Aiden had me hooked from page one, and I was holding my breath until the very end. Denise nails second-chance romance in *Bookshop by the Sea*. I adored this story! Five giant stars!”

—Jenny Hale, *USA TODAY* bestselling author

“*Autumn Skies* is the perfect roundup to the Bluebell Inn series. The tension and attraction between Grace and Wyatt is done so well, and the mystery kept me wondering what was going to happen next. Prepare to be swept away to the beautiful Blue Ridge Mountains in a flurry of turning pages.”

—Nancy Naigle, *USA TODAY* bestselling author of *Christmas Angels*

“*Carolina Breeze* is filled with surprises, enchantment, and a wonderful depth of romance. Denise Hunter gets better with every novel she writes, and that trend has hit a high point with this wonderful story.”

—Hannah Alexander, author of *The Wedding Kiss*

“*Summer by the Tides* is a perfect blend of romance and women’s fiction.”

—Sherryl Woods, #1 *New York Times* bestselling author

“Denise Hunter once again proves she’s the queen of romantic drama. *Summer by the Tides* is both a perfect beach romance and a dramatic story of second chances. If you like Robyn Carr, you’ll love Denise Hunter.”

—Colleen Coble, *Publishers Weekly* and *USA TODAY* bestselling author

“I have never read a romance by Denise Hunter that didn’t sweep me away into a happily ever after. Treat yourself!”

—Robin Lee Hatcher, bestselling author of *Cross My Heart*, for *On Magnolia Lane*

“*Sweetbriar Cottage* is a story to fall in love with. True-to-life characters, high stakes, and powerful chemistry blend to tell an emotional story of reconciliation.”

—Brenda Novak, *New York Times* bestselling author

“*Sweetbriar Cottage* is a wonderful story, full of emotional tension and evocative prose. You’ll feel involved in these characters’ lives and carried along by their story as tension ratchets up to a climactic and satisfying conclusion. Terrific read. I thoroughly enjoyed it.”

—Francine Rivers, *New York Times* bestselling author

“*Falling Like Snowflakes* is charming and fun with a twist of mystery and intrigue. A story that’s sure to endure as a classic reader favorite.”

—Rachel Hauck, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Fifth Avenue Story Society*

“*Barefoot Summer* is a satisfying tale of hope, healing, and a love that’s meant to be.”

—Lisa Wingate, national bestselling author of *Before We Were Yours*



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Mulberry Hollow
Harvest Moon
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BLUEBELL INN ROMANCES

Lake Season
Carolina Breeze
Autumn Skies

BLUE RIDGE ROMANCES

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Love, Unscripted
Before We Were Us
The Summer of You and Me

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This Time Around, *Smitten*,
Secretly Smitten, and *Smitten*
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*More
Than
Friends*

A Novel

DENISE
HUNTER



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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Chapter 1

When Jenna Greene's boyfriend got down on bended knee in the middle of their favorite upscale restaurant, she frowned in confusion. "Jason . . ." Wow, so many ways to finish that sentence.

Didn't we talk about this?

Please don't do this.

Everyone is watching.

Because, yes, as luck would have it, every table at The Bradley was full. The ambient noise of muted chatter and clanking silverware was outdone only by Frank Sinatra, who crooned "Fly Me to the Moon." Which incidentally sounded like a lovely idea right now.

The clamor hushed as their audience caught on to the moment. Jason gazed up at Jenna, his hazel eyes gleaming behind clear-framed glasses. "Jenna, when you first walked in the door at Fleming Orthodontics I knew you were the one—and not just for the office position."

Jenna's heart threatened to burst from her chest. As he continued talking, her thoughts spun like a top. She should've seen this coming! It was the second anniversary of their first date. It was Valentine's Day. And hadn't he just brought up marriage (again) last week?

But why was he proposing when she'd told him (again) she wasn't ready for that? Well, maybe not *told*, but certainly intimidated! She was in no hurry. She was only twenty-seven. They had the rest of their

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lives to take the next step.

Jason continued regaling her with what she could only assume were romantic sentiments. Her smile felt plastic as her gaze darted around the room. Yep, every eye was locked on them, hopeful anticipation animating each face. Women were practically swooning over the grand gesture. Jenna was practically swooning too, if you went by the literal definition.

She put her fingers to her spinning head. She *had* to say yes, didn't she? It was pretty much a prerequisite of a public proposal. Besides which, friends of his family were likely present. Alexandria, Virginia, wasn't exactly a metropolis, and the Flemings were well-known since his mother was the mayor.

If Jenna said no, word would spread quickly and Jason would be humiliated. His family would hate her. There would be no way for him to save face if she rejected him so publicly.

Maybe that was the whole point.

She shook away the unproductive thought as the rich scent of hot fudge wafted to her nose. The double-chocolate brownie now sat in her stomach like a lead brick. Her cloth dinner napkin slipped from the table, and the room was so quiet she actually heard it hit the wooden floor.

Then Jason reached into his pocket and produced a ring: a shiny gold band set with a flashy oval diamond. So very lovely—if not exactly her style. But what did one expect when one avoided ring shopping with one's boyfriend?

He bought a ring.

She definitely had to say yes. Then once they were alone, she'd gently walk back her answer. It was the kind thing to do—wasn't it?

Or maybe she'd just go along with it. Sure, she'd wanted to wait a while longer. Till she was ready. But she loved Jason. And it *had* been

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two years. Maybe she should just bite the bullet.

She winced at the unromantic thought. But really, she did love the guy. He was a kind man. Great with kids. Handsome in that John Krasinski way. She loved everything about him. Except that he rooted for the Nationals. And, okay, the way he didn't quite *hear* her sometimes. (Case in point.) Also, that teensy problem with his holding grudges. But nobody was perfect!

So she would say yes. Maybe she wouldn't even take it back later. Or maybe she would. She'd have to postpone that decision because Jason was taking a breath, the anticipated question hovering on his lips, and there was nothing she could do to stop it.

"Jenna Mae Greene . . . will you marry me?" Jason's sparkling eyes cheered her on. His lips curved in that about-to-win smirk she saw regularly just before his final checkmate.

It was her turn to talk. But the abrupt silence was like a black hole. A vacuum sucking every thought from her head. Literally everything she'd been thinking . . . gone. Lost. Vanished.

Say something!

How about yes!

Just say yes!

She opened her mouth. But her thick tongue was cemented to the roof of her mouth.

Jason gave a nervous chuckle. "Jenna?"

"I—" she croaked. Then her throat constricted as if she'd suddenly developed a severe allergy to chocolate—or to sudden, unwanted proposals.

Say yes, dummy! Then joy would transform his expression, and he'd slip that ring on her finger and kiss her like she'd just made him the happiest man alive. The entire restaurant would explode with approval, the server would offer their best bottle of champagne, and

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they would toast to the rest of their lives.

But.

A yes would also be the biggest, meanest lie she ever told. Because the cold fingers of dread clamping around her heart told her everything she needed to know.

“Jenna . . . ?” His eyes searched hers, the sparkle extinguishing even as the smile wilted from his lips.

Robbed of her ability to speak, she gave her head a miniscule shake.

His neck mottled with color as his eyes turned hard. Harder than she’d ever seen them. “Are you serious right now?” he whispered. Or maybe it was a hiss.

She opened her mouth, then closed it.

His nostrils flared and a shadow flickered in his jaw as it clenched.

The jewelry box’s loud, sharp *snap* made her jump.

He shot to his feet, dug out his wallet, and flung some bills onto the table. Without another glance he strode away from her and disappeared around the corner.

She had to go after him. Explain. Comfort him.

The room had somehow gotten even quieter, all eyeballs fixed on her like hot lasers. The palpable hatred spurred her into action.

She stood and grabbed her purse from the chair, but it caught. Her hands trembled as she freed it. Then she followed in Jason’s wake, not quite impervious to the glares aimed her way.

When she exited the restaurant she spotted him under a streetlight, heading toward his car. “Jason!” Oh, sure, now her voice worked. “Jason, wait.” She quickened her steps, wobbly in her four-inch heels.

He slowed but only because he neared his car. The lights flashed as he unlocked the door with his key fob.

She caught up to him as he reached for the handle. “Please, Jason,

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let's go somewhere and talk.”

“Oh, now you want to talk.”

The scene in the restaurant flashed in her brain and she winced.

“I'm so sorry. I meant to say yes.”

“You *meant* to say yes? What's that supposed to mean?”

She grimaced. “Well, what did you expect? You caught me off guard. You put me on the spot. We just talked about this. You knew I wasn't ready.”

He waved away her words. “You always say that.”

“Because that's how I feel! I like things the way they are. Why did you have to do that—ask me like that in front of everyone?”

“I thought you could use a little push.”

A little *push*? As if she were a child who didn't know her own mind? “What I could *use* is a little more time.”

He gave a bitter laugh. “It's been two years, Jenna. How much time do you need?” His frosty gaze never left her as he shook his head, the moment lengthening. “What was I thinking? You'll never settle down.”

That wasn't true. Was it? “You're wrong.”

“Really? You're twenty-seven, and this isn't exactly your first serious relationship. In case you haven't noticed, they all seem to end the same way—just like this one.”

End? This one? Her chest tightened as she took his hand. “Jason. Come on. Just because I don't want to get married today doesn't mean I don't want to be with you. I love you. I see a future with you. This doesn't have to change anything.”

His expression tightened as he withdrew his hand. “It changes everything. I'm not wasting any more time with someone who's not interested in a commitment.”

“I am committed to you!”

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“I want marriage, Jenna. And kids. I’m tired of waiting around for you to be *ready*.” He sneered the word.

He was breaking up with her? But things had been fine! Why did he have to go and ruin everything?

A shiver swept over her. The sleeveless dress was no match for the February chill, and she’d left her wrap inside—where it would stay because no way was she going back in there.

“And thank you for the public humiliation. That was a real treat. I’m sure you can manage an Uber.” He reached for the handle and yanked open the door.

She jumped from harm’s way. He was leaving her here? She tried to process his atypical behavior even while her head swam with tonight’s chain of events.

He turned just before he slipped into the car and aimed an icy stare her way. “Oh, and you’re fired.”

With that his door shut, then he started the car and pulled from the curb, leaving her alone on the sidewalk.

Chapter 2

Almost three months later

The unread email sat at the top of Jenna's inbox like a beacon of hope. She perched on a barstool at her kitchen island, forgetting her intention to make lunch, and homed in on the subject: *Office Manager Position*. The line didn't divulge the answer she sought.

She'd been waiting almost a week for this response. The owners of Renew Physical Therapy were new to town, so they didn't know Mayor Fleming and certainly hadn't heard about Jason's untimely proposal back in February. Nor did they know Jenna had become persona non grata citywide. In fact, she'd hit it off with the husband-and-wife owners and had been waiting breathlessly for this very email.

Her fingers hovered over her laptop's tracking pad.

Jenna's BA in business qualified her for many positions, and she'd applied at a variety of local places, including the offices of a CPA, a chiropractor, a dentist, a veterinarian, you name it. But with her recent, ahem, notoriety she'd struggled to land interviews, even though most positions would've been a pay cut. But hey, beggars and choosers.

She'd garnered only three interviews but hadn't been called back or hired. And she knew exactly why: good ol' Jason. She hadn't listed

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him as a reference, but as her most recent employer, they'd probably contacted him anyway. And she highly doubted he'd had anything positive to say. He'd fired her after all. For rejecting his proposal.

She could sue him for wrongful termination, but to what end? She couldn't work in his office anymore and she'd probably done enough damage to his heart.

She pushed away the disturbing thought and stared at the new email. She felt good about this. That terrific interview, their connection over their love for the Braves. They even shared the same alma mater. *I mean, come on!* Bolstered, she clicked on the email.

Dear Ms. Greene,

Thank you for interviewing for the office manager position at Renew. We appreciate your interest in joining our company, and we're pleased that you invested time and effort in applying for one of our positions. Unfortunately, we've decided to move forward with another candidate for this position . . .

A weight sank like an anchor in her stomach. The letter went on but she couldn't bear to read another word. She practically had these form letters memorized anyway. Unable to see those words on her screen for another second, she closed the laptop.

This company had truly been her best shot. If anything, she'd been overqualified even though she'd only held two professional jobs. She'd gotten an internship at Dolman Wellness during her senior year, which had led to her first grown-up job. When the place went belly-up three years later, she'd gotten the office manager position at Fleming.

She'd have to go back to the drawing board. Put in more applica-

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tions. She was all right financially. She had Grandma's trust fund she could fall back on, though she'd hate to use that money on bills. She wanted to utilize it for something special. Perhaps to start her own business.

Her phone buzzed in her pocket and a quick peek at the screen made her smile. Tyson Parker beamed from an old photo she'd taken at his graduation from the fire academy. They'd grown up across the street from each other, and his large, rowdy family had become like her own. Though she'd always been closest to Tyson since he was her age. She accepted the call. "Told ya you should've worn your lucky hat."

"Again, Greene, that only works on home games."

Because, yes, the Braves had lost last night to the Giants in a 9–8 heartbreaker. "It can't hurt though, right? I mean, you could at least do your part."

"I was on a call anyway. I missed the last inning."

The mention of his volunteer position made worry tug at her stomach. She tried not to think about her best friend's dangerous role. "Anything serious?"

"Just Mrs. Ledbetter and her smoke alarms—also her cat. I swear that woman will be the death of us all."

Despite his irritation, warmth filled Jenna at the thought of her community on Chincoteague, a barrier island along the coast of Virginia. She'd been blessed to grow up in a place where neighbors looked out for one another. "And how is little Luna?"

"She's a menace, that's what. But she's safe for the time being. How's the job hunting?"

"Less successful than your rescue mission, I'm afraid. I just got a rejection from that interview I thought went so well."

"Oh, man. I'm sorry. You'll find something soon."

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“Hope so. It’s getting a little discouraging.”

“It’s just a matter of time. You’ll see. You’ve got a lot to offer. I’ll bet it’s your idiot boyfriend’s fault.”

“Ex-boyfriend.”

“Maybe I should come up there and give him a little talking-to.”

His tone made it clear the convincing wouldn’t be verbal. It reminded her fondly of the time he’d slugged Robbie Brown for slapping her on the butt when they were fourteen. They’d both served detention for their actions. “Appreciate the thought, but I really don’t want to have to bail you out of jail.”

“It would make my day. Have you heard from him?”

“Not a single word. And I don’t care to, honestly.” It was pretty horrible what he’d done. And his departure had relieved her of a pressure she hadn’t realized she’d been feeling while they were together. “I should probably thank him for ending things. He wasn’t right for me.”

“You’re definitely better off without him.”

She didn’t even miss him that much. And what did that say about their relationship? She glanced at the email on the screen. Her primary feeling right now was frustration that he was likely blockading her employment opportunities. “Maybe I should extend my job search to DC.” Alexandria was a suburb of the city, after all.

“You’ve never been one for big cities. And there’s the infamous traffic.”

“Fair point. I guess I could put out some feelers back home.” She’d only ended up in Alexandria because of job opportunities, and those seem to have dried up. Along with most of her friendships, which seemed to have gone with Jason in the split.

“Now there’s an idea I could get behind. I’ll keep my ear to the ground and let you know if I hear of anything.”

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“Thanks. How’s your family? I saw the king suite renovation on Instagram. It turned out great.” Once their three boys had left the nest, the Parkers turned their large home into a bed-and-breakfast. Tyson worked there full time when he wasn’t volunteering for the Chincoteague Fire Company.

“Thanks. I’m glad to have it done in time for summer. Hey, uh, have you talked to your mom since she returned from the cruise?”

“No, but she checked in via Messenger a couple times from the Caribbean. Seemed to be having a great time. Did she come back with a nice tan?”

“Um, yeah . . . but that’s not all she came back with. I was over there mowing this morning when she got home. I didn’t think she was returning till tomorrow. A man was with her—and he had a suitcase.”

“*What?* What man? Who was he?”

“Someone she met on the cruise, apparently. Gordon Smith? Does that ring a bell?”

“No . . .” A thread of anxiety wormed through her. “She’s only known him for a matter of days and he’s staying overnight? Are you sure?” That didn’t sound like her mom.

“She didn’t say so directly, but he was unloading his suitcase and hers, and they seemed kind of chummy.”

“Oh no.” Though Jenna’s wonderful dad had passed when she was twelve, her mom hadn’t started dating until Jenna left for college. And only then had she discovered just how naive her mom was where men and dating were concerned.

“Thought you might want to know.”

“Yeah, thanks.” The thought of some strange man staying there tonight alone with her mother—what could she be thinking? A quick call would answer some questions, but her mom was indepen-

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dent and—as Jenna had found out the hard way—not too fond of her daughter’s interference. “I should come home for the weekend.”

“I was hoping you’d say that.” His tone was heavy with relief. “She’d be glad to see you. I’m more than happy to check in on her, but it might be best if she wasn’t alone tonight.”

“I could just say I was depressed about my job situation”—hardly a lie—“And I am missing her.”

“There you go. He’s probably just spending the night on his way home or something.”

Way too risky for Jenna’s liking. “Thanks again for the heads-up. I’ll give my mom a call, pack a few things, and be there by supper-time.”



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

Chapter 3

The wild ponies grunted as Tyson and his best friend, Luke, coaxed them toward the horse trailer. Two rangers from US Fish & Wildlife assisted them in the rescue.

Riptide, a chestnut stallion, reared, kicking up dust. He was wild and beautiful with a flaxen mane, white blaze, and four white boots. He was also among the most spirited of the 150 feral ponies living on Virginia's barrier island Assateague, a wildlife refuge.

Bridge traffic was blocked and the line of cars extended as far as the eye could see. The bridge to Assateague was well traveled during the warmer months. Tourists crossed the channel to see the wild ponies grazing on marsh grass. But today they'd ended up getting quite the show.

Ten minutes later the sun was low in the sky when the men ushered the stallion into the trailer. The mare, Summer, followed docilely. Tyson shut the trailer doors and turned to the rangers. "How'd they get loose?" The ponies had managed to get clear across the long bridge connecting the barrier islands—a feat that had happened only twice before to Tyson's knowledge.

"Best we could tell, some tourists accidentally blocked their escape route. Me and Greg chased 'em on foot half a mile and across the bridge. Thankfully they found some nice grass here and stopped for a spell, or they might've been halfway to the mainland by now."

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Or been tragically hit by a car. The rangers had set up a portable corral to contain the ponies until members of the volunteer fire company could come get them. Though the US government owned Assateague Island, the Virginian herd was tended by the Chincoteague Fire Company who leased grazing rights from them.

“Thanks for your help.” Luke’s wavy hair gleamed copper under the late-afternoon sunlight, contrasting with his pale blue eyes.

Tyson gave a nod. “We’ll get them back home.”

Once the pair returned to the truck, Tyson started it and turned toward the bridge, careful of his load. People waved and honked their horns, no doubt grateful for both the show and its end. “We’ll need to find the break in the fence and fix it. Otherwise we’ll be doing this all over again.”

“Sure didn’t expect all this when I rolled out of bed this morning.”

“Riptide likes to keep the grapevine buzzing. Today’s little jaunt will be one for the record books.”

“He’s a pistol, that one.”

Luke had been Tyson’s best friend since high school, and they’d also graduated from the academy together. Though Tyson was a fourth-generation firefighter, Luke was the first in his family to join the company. He was a hard worker and had earned the respect of their fellow firefighters.

The bridge to Assateague was empty of cars, the traffic having been blocked on the other side as well. Though they were barely into May, the season was getting underway. His home island of Chincoteague was only ten square miles and home to about three thousand residents. But that number swelled during the summer, culminating to as many as forty thousand in late July for the Pony Penning Days, all coordinated by the volunteer fire company.

Luke adjusted the air-conditioning. “How’s that other matter go-

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ing?”

“What matter?”

“Come on, Ty. Maybe I haven’t been through it yet, but it has to be hard, losing someone.”

The image of that seventeen-year-old kid, brown eyes full of fear, flashed in his head for the millionth time. He shook it away. “Part of the job.”

“Sure it is. But that doesn’t make it easy.”

Tyson didn’t want to talk about the incident from four weeks ago, a car accident—vehicle versus tree. He’d give anything to go back and do things differently.

“You’ve hardly missed a call since then.”

“I don’t have a wife and kid like most of the others.” And Ty just wanted to erase that night from his memory.

“It wasn’t your fault, man.”

He gripped the steering wheel. “I know that.”

“We’ve been friends a long time. I can tell it’s eating at you.”

“Don’t want to talk about it.” He felt Luke’s eyes on him.

“Maybe not, but you shouldn’t let it fester.”

It wasn’t festering. Okay, maybe it was. But at least he’d learned something valuable from that terrible night. He’d been burning the candle at both ends since his divorce last fall. Dating had become an Olympic sport, and he made the mistake of getting tangled up with Marissa Moran, one of the two paramedics who operated out of the firehouse.

Stupid.

His idea of casual and hers hadn’t been the same apparently. The dustup had created tension at the station, and there wasn’t a single volunteer unaware of it.

“At least Marissa seems to have settled down,” Luke said. “Not

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that she had any right to get up in your face like that.”

“Maybe I wasn’t clear enough with her.”

“You’d only been on two dates, for crying out loud. And everyone on the island knows you’ve been sowing your wild oats the past six months.”

Tyson rolled his eyes. A bit of an exaggeration. But yeah, the divorce had made him a little unstable. He could see that now. He’d been on a mission of some kind. But that was over now. He’d learned his lesson.

“Trinity Evans was eyeing you the other night at Chatties,” Luke said. “She broke up with her boyfriend a while back. You should ask her out.”

Trinity was the sweetest server at the seafood restaurant. “Why don’t you ask her out? Seems more your type.” Plus, he was pretty sure Luke had a good crush going.

“Beautiful and brunette?” A mottled flush, curse of the redheads, Luke called it, worked its way up from the collar of his tee.

“Sweet and smart. Bet she’d say yes.”

“Aw, she was looking at you, not me.”

“I don’t think so. Anyway, I’m officially on a dating moratorium, and I’m sure she’d warm up to you if you could squeeze two words past those lovelorn lips of yours.”

“Dating moratorium? Since when?”

“Since now.” Tyson had sought distraction after the divorce and he’d gotten one. Or twenty. Time to focus on other things. Like his work at The Sand and Saddle, his parents’ bed-and-breakfast. Now that summer was gearing up, the place was starting to fill up again.

More tourists on the island meant more calls. Scooter accidents, water rescues, runaway campfires. Then in late July, Pony Penning Days.

More Than Friends

There'd be plenty to keep his mind off the divorce he'd never wanted.

For now he just had to get these ponies back to the refuge. Once they were settled with their band, he and Luke would repair the fence, then Ty would go check on Jenna. She'd surely arrived at her mom's by now—and who knew how that would turn out?



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

About the Author



Photo by Salve Ragonton

Denise Hunter is the internationally published, bestselling author of more than forty books, three of which have been adapted into original Hallmark Channel movies. She has won the Holt Medallion Award, the Reader's Choice Award, the Carol Award, and the Foreword Book of the Year Award and is also a RITA finalist. When Denise isn't orchestrating love lives on the written page, she enjoys traveling with her family, drinking chai lattes, and playing drums. Denise makes her home in Indiana, where she and her husband raised three boys and are now enjoying an empty nest and four beautiful grandchildren.



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