



*Hunting for a Lost Brother and Other Villains*

## JD Breaks His Silence

Part 2 of The Seven Brothers Saga



Buck looked over at his youngest brother with new respect. When he first met the kid, he had judged JD to be innocent, younger than his years. He was too eager to do things. Sure, he showed a bit of a temper in the grocery store, but he quickly got over his anger. Since returning to Boston, he had, for the most part, been cheerful as he packed up his things. Out on the ranch, he had been like a puppy running all over the place, showing up everywhere wanting to lend a hand. He was eager to do anything asked of him, smiling and laughing as he worked. He didn't even bat an eye when told to clean the stalls. He grabbed a pitchfork and began working without complaint. Ezra had said something in French. Buck couldn't remember his college French well enough to translate it all, and Ezra spoke only to himself and did not expect a reply. Later, when he had a few quiet minutes, Buck remembered enough of his French to translate Ezra's words. He had said the kid had the *joie de vivre*. He had said it after the kid had spent the evening trying to coax Jack into shaking his hand, rewarding him with a piece of cheese every time the dog let him pick up a massive paw. It wasn't any time before Jack had JD well-trained.

Ezra had been right; the kid was full of life. His attitude came from being young. But it wasn't his youth alone that gifted him with the vitality and willingness to take on life with a smile. Much of JD's '*joie de la vie*' came from a genuinely happy nature and a kind heart. His eyes had been sparkling with good humor when he came out of the skyscraper after quitting his job on the

fifteenth floor; JD kept a straight face for a whole block, but then the excitement got to him and he walked backwards the rest of the way to the parking garage, chattering excitedly about the look on Mr. Chatham's face when he handed him his resignation.

Even packing up the few belongings he wanted to keep and arranging for Goodwill to pick up his bargain basement furniture, the kid had been happy; cheerfully explaining the stories behind the mementos and things he wanted sent to the ranch. He dug through a box of unframed pictures (Buck decided then and there that one thing the kid was getting for Christmas was a photo album.), looking for a picture of his Mom before the chemo had robbed her of her hair. On the way to the graveyard, he quietly talked about his mother, and he became unashamedly tearful when he went to the unmarked grave and introduced his mother to his brother Buck, but then, so had Buck.



JD had been a little ticked when Buck insisted that he sell his Hyundai and not drive it cross country back to Nevada, but Buck's explanation that the car was not made for ranch work made sense. He had perked right up when Buck promised to help him find something decent and help him fix up. He had been even more excited when Buck negotiated with the saleswoman at the used car dealership. He did what JD always heard was not a good thing to do when negotiating and told the saleslady their Dad had recently passed, and that JD was moving to live with his brothers in Nevada. He needed to unload the car at once. JD had almost hit Buck upside the head so he could take over the negotiations, but was glad he hadn't when the woman made an offer for the car, which was two hundred dollars more than he expected to get.

He almost strangled Buck when Buck turned her offer down. Buck then started some serious flirting, combining the flirting with serious bargaining. She ended up offering JD enough money to pay off his car loan, with enough left over for a down payment on something when he returned to Four Corners.

JD profusely thanked his big brother. Buck blushed a bit. Then, he grinned widely, saying he had been buying and selling cars for almost as long as JD had been alive. Besides, that was what being a big brother was about.

JD had been so thankful that Buck had not laughed at him when he took him to visit his mother. He had almost not taken him, but he couldn't leave Boston without saying goodbye to his mother, and he sure couldn't think of a polite way to leave him at home.

So, they took a taxi and stood in the cold to say goodbye. Buck had not laughed or sneaked. Instead, he promised Jenna Dunne he would look after her son and not to worry, but if she wanted to drop in and check on him, that would be just fine; thing was Buck was serious when he had said those things and when they left, JD could have sworn Buck brushed away tears.

That night, Buck sat on the sofa and told JD what he remembered about Jenna. He told JD that at times she seemed so old and mature, and then other times she had gotten out and played like a kid with him, Chris, and Nathan, tossing the football around. He said she was so tiny and delicate-looking; she always took them by surprise when she tossed the football across the yard. When JD dug around in his box of photos and found some of his Mom, Buck told him she looked beautiful.



"Listen to me, Chris Larabee. I don't know what you did, but I do know you are responsible for Ezra's leaving," JD spoke angrily into the phone's receiver.

He listened, his eyes flashing, and replied, "I don't care what he said. He, sure as hell, did not want to leave."

"No, he would not have left on his own. He was trying to figure out how to ask the rest of us for help."

"Yes, I said help."

“He was worried the man who beat him up was going to hurt his mother.” JD glared at Buck. His brother was listening to a one-sided conversation, but certainly he could figure out what Chris had done and wipe that stupid grin off his face.

“Well, maybe if you asked him if there was a problem, then he would have told you,” he redirected his anger towards the man on the other side of the line.

“Look, he’s gone. Get him back. I am not going to start losing brothers before I know ...what their middle names are,” JD slammed the phone down and turned to glare at Buck, daring him to say a word.

Buck held his hands up in surrender and backed away from his brother. “Remind me not to get you pissed at me.” He smiled, wanting JD to see the humor of the littlest and the youngest of the sons of Landon Larabee taking on the mean old wolf named Chris.

JD was not amused and pushed past Buck, “I’m going to get a Coke.” He didn’t wait for an answer and stormed out of the hotel room, leaving his jacket behind.

Buck shook his head as his youngest brother stomped out of the room and into the night, letting the wind blow in. Hopefully, he’d get cold and be back in a minute, preferably before Chris called back, as there were a few questions to which only JD had the answers.

Buck chuckled. He missed calling that one right. They had been moving at warp speed ever since the plane landed Sunday night, and Buck thought he had gained a lot of insight into the way the mind of his youngest brother worked during the past few days. He had been dead wrong. The phone call had proved it. He had pegged his brother as a happy puppy, a youth, not quite a man. It was a good thing he had not mentioned his impression of his brother to anyone; it would have been too embarrassing for words to have anyone know how wrong he was.

His brother wasn’t a puppy; JD was a full-grown yard dog, blessed or cursed with a temper to rival Chris’s own. He hoped Nathan had gotten his phone out and taken a video of Chris Larabee’s face when JD reached through the phone connection and traveled several thousand miles to show his temper.

“Don’t worry, JD. Chris will get everything straightened out,” Buck said when a very dejected John David Dunne walked back in, a can of Dr. Pepper dangling from his hand.

“I just can’t believe he let him go. Didn’t he realize Ezra was worried about what Moore might do to his Mother?” JD flopped down on the other bed in their motel room, his energy depleted.

Buck got up and walked over to the ice bucket. In the mirror, he could see JD lying on his bed, staring up at the ceiling. Quietly, he filled the two plastic glasses with bourbon. He walked back to JD, handed him a glass, pretending not to see the shiny eyes.

“I’m not much of a drinker, Buck. A beer is about all I can handle.”

“Drink it. We’ll go to bed early, finish in the morning, and see if we can’t catch a red eye to Denver. We’ll be back at the ranch by Friday morning.”

“Yeah, like that’s going to do much good now,” but JD sat up and took the glass. “I just don’t understand Chris not seeing that Ezra saying he missed Vegas was a ruse. I just can’t believe he let him go.”

Buck shrugged, thinking-- you and me too, kid; there is more to the story than Chris is letting on. He sat across from JD, wishing he could do or say something to ease JD’s evident pain. He knew JD had not been around Ezra long enough to forge a deep bond, but it didn’t matter. The kid was still reeling from the loss of his mother; he didn’t need to lose anyone else, even a brother he had known for only a few days.

“Chris doesn’t like making people do what they don’t want to do.” he tried that explanation on for size, knowing it for the lie it was, but hoping JD didn’t.

“He made Ezra come out to the ranch,” JD pointed out. Chris made Ezra move to the ranch when Ezra had been intent on heading to Vegas. So why did he let him go now?

“That was because we had just heard Dad’s Will and Chris wanted everyone doing what Dad wanted us to do,” Buck explained even as he asked: So, what happened, Chris? This isn’t like you letting go so easily. It must have been one hell of an argument. Please, please, Chris, do not let me find out you were drinking and hit him. You’ve been doing a good job of staying out of the bottle these last few weeks. I don’t know if I have the strength to pull you out if you have climbed back into a bottle and are drinking again.

Draining his glass and smiling at the irony, Buck stood up to pour himself another drink. “Listen, JD, Chris will call back in a few minutes. I’m sure. He’s giving you some time to cool off, but I’ll guarantee you, he’s sitting at the kitchen table thinking about what you said, and he’ll call any minute. Want to tell me what you know?”

With a rush of words pouring out of his mouth, JD began sharing what he knew. “I wasn’t trying to eavesdrop. But I was sitting in the corner behind the filing cabinets when Ezra came in and picked up the phone. I was on the floor looking through a book, so he didn’t see me, and I didn’t hear him come in. Honest. I was thumbing through a photo album I found, and I must have been daydreaming because the next thing I know, I hear Ezra saying, ‘Mother, I know you are there. Pick up the phone.’ I know I should have stood up, but I couldn’t think how without looking like I was snooping.”

“No one’s mad.”

“I know Buck, I just don’t want anyone thinking I make a practice of peeking through key holes,” he took a sip of the bourbon, grimacing at the taste. “I thought he was going to hang up; he was taking such a long time to say anything. Finally, he said, ‘Good to hear your voice too, Mother.’ Then he said, ‘No, he wasn’t fine; he had been beaten by her friend Moore. Then his voice got all flat or something, and he said, ‘No, he was not exaggerating, and maybe she should reconsider the quality of men she was taking to her bed.’ Can you believe he said that to his mother?” JD frowned at the thought. He wasn’t sure which bothered him more; Ezra had said that or that Maude had been sleeping with the man responsible for beating Ezra. “I thought she had hung up on him because he was quiet for so long. When he started talking again, he sounded upset. He said Moore wanted all the money he lost returned to him. Ezra said he didn’t have any more to give him. He said Moore took everything he had and demanded that the money she had won be given to him, too. If she didn’t return it, he’d come after her and hurt her. She must have hung up the phone without saying goodbye or anything because Ezra hung up, and he whispered he would take care of things.”

Buck stayed quiet, digesting the things JD revealed. He thought about Maude’s reaction, or lack thereof. Even if she truly didn’t believe Moore would hurt her, what kind of mother was not concerned about her son’s health? Had Ezra cried wolf one time too many, and somewhere along the line, Maude had quit listening to her son, or did she not care that her son had been beaten?

JD got up and poured the remaining ice in his cup into the sink before turning to look at Buck. “I should have said something to someone.”

Buck didn’t have a satisfactory answer to give JD; he shrugged his shoulders in reply. Maybe JD should have said something, but he didn’t think it would have made too much of a difference. From what he could tell about Ezra, after knowing him for only a few days, he doubted whether the man would have admitted to having any problems with this Moore guy. Damn Ezra, anyway. Couldn’t he see he was not invincible? Moore hurt him badly a week ago. Did the idiot think he had to handle this problem alone? He had brothers now. Letting brothers help handle problems was why they were there.

JD grabbed a towel from the stack on the counter and headed into the bathroom, shutting the door behind him. Buck could hear the shower start at about the same time the phone began ringing.