

JD Breaks His Silence

Hunting for a Lost Brother and Other Villains
Part 2 of The Seven Brothers Saga



Shaking his head no at the flight attendant as she walked down the aisle, checking to see if anyone in first class needed something, Buck returned to his examination of the night skies as he considered what he had learned about John David, JD, on this trip. When he first met the kid, he had judged JD to be innocent, younger than his years. He was too eager to take on tasks. Sure, he showed a bit of a temper in the grocery store, but he quickly got over his anger. At 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.

Watching JD laugh, Ezra said something in French. Buck couldn't remember his college French well enough to translate it all, but Ezra spoke only to himself and did not expect a reply. Later, when he had a few quiet minutes, Buck opened his translation app on his phone and checked to see if he had remembered enough of his French to accurately translate Ezra's words. Ezra had said the kid had the 'joie de vivre' 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.

When JD said he needed to return to Boston to pack his things and quit his job, Buck impulsively volunteered to go with him. He said that by working together, it would take them hardly any time to get JD out of Boston. Then, Buck, saying his legs would not survive if they stayed in cramped coach seats, upgraded their tickets to first class. The kid had blanched when Buck did that. He had told the ticketing agent that he would stay in coach, but Buck insisted he join him in first class, saying that since he hated flying, he needed JD to talk to him if they encountered turbulence. For the first part of the trip, it was JD whose nerves needed calming. Then he had fallen asleep, and Buck had the opportunity to consider the roadblocks that JD kept throwing his way.

First, he said that Buck should do some sightseeing. When Buck said he could see Boston on several websites without having to deal with the masses of people. Then JD suggested Buck take a room in a hotel where he would be more comfortable. Buck told him the couch was just fine and that he had fallen asleep many times in one of the recliners after spending the day on horseback. When JD claimed to have a messy apartment. Buck countered by saying that he was not a germaphobe, and the only places he expected to be mess-free were the equipment barn and the tack room. When JD began apologizing for his used Hyundai waiting for them in long-term parking, Buck cut him off,

saying they would sell it so he could buy something suitable for life in a ranching community.

Later, upon seeing the small, cramped apartment JD had rented near the hospital, he kicked himself for upgrading their seats. The apartment wasn't just small. The carpet was stained and worn. The walls were paper-thin. One punch would be all that he needed to put a hole in the wall and say something about how the occupants needed to tend to their baby when it cried. The kitchen was little more than a hot plate, a sink, and an under-the-counter refrigerator that appeared to be on its last legs. Worse, the apartment complex was surrounded by buildings just as tired and bleak-looking as it was. And the sheer volume of non-stop noise made it difficult to forget the number of people using up all the air. He preferred the open land where he could hear the birds talking to each other and the calves bawling as they searched for their mothers in the herd.

Learning their father was rich was one thing. That had come as a surprise to all of them. But learning their father was rich, seeing the roominess of the ranch house, counting the number of vehicles in front of the house, and then comparing all of that to the squalor he lived in...He understood why JD had not wanted him to see it. He made no judgment against Jenna or JD. What he saw saddened him. Landon Larabee had to have realized how difficult it would have been for Jenna to live and raise her son without the benefits an education would have afforded her. His father should have hunted her down, and if she truly did not want to live at the ranch, he should have been sending her money to help with JD. Even if it meant that he might not have had the money to invest with, they would have gotten by. Hell, he had an obligation to Jenna and to her son. With all of his talk about doing the right thing when dealing with people, you would have thought that finding Jenna and financially helping her would have been second nature. There had to be a reason that he had done nothing.

Pulling himself out of the state of melancholy, his thoughts were taking him. Buck shook off his questions; no one was alive who could provide answers, anyway. Ezra had been right; the kid was full of life. Buck originally attributed JD's attitude to his youth. But it wasn't his young age 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. How had he lived this way, knowing he had a father and brothers who had so much more than he did? How had Jenna?

Surely, she had known that his father would take care of her and her son. Why had she chosen to live in a city so far from the mountains she loved? He would probably never know her reasons for living in Boston. JD might not even know. But whatever her reason, there was no question that she had done a great job in raising her son. He wished his dad had lived long enough to meet John David. He would be proud of the man JD had grown into.

Later, he would call Chris to let him know that they had landed safely, but he'd keep quiet about how JD was living. That wasn't his story to share.



The next morning, he accompanied JD, wanting to witness JD handing in his letter of resignation. The kid was more than happy to quit. His eyes had been sparkling with good humor when he said goodbye to the other occupants of the little cubicles on the fifteenth floor. A few of them stood to shake his hand and wish him well. A couple of them had asked him the name of the company he was transferring to. When he had obviously drawn a blank, Buck stepped in and said he would be working for Larabee Holdings. By the time they had made it to Mr. Cheatham's office, several people had pulled up Larabee Holdings on the internet, and he could hear them asking each other what John Dunne had done to get a job with a company primarily known for its work in real estate development and mining in the Southwest.

Cheatham had not exploded when JD handed him a letter that stated: 'I quit, effective immediately.' He had not yelled when he read the letter, but he grouched about how unprofessional it was not to give at least a two-week notice when quitting. JD had winced when his former boss said that, but instead of agreeing to work for two more weeks in the rat's maze (as he later confessed to calling the rows upon rows of cubicles), JD calmly stated an opportunity had come up and he jumped on it. Cheatham then promised that when he failed at his new job, he would not get a letter of recommendation from him. Buck stepped in and, towering over the middle-aged, pompous, lower-management boss (who would advance no further in his career), said, "He won't need one."

As they walked away from the building, 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. He added that for the first time since taking the job, he felt like he could breathe.

After stopping to get boxes at a U-Haul center, they returned to the apartment to begin packing. For the rest of the day, JD made the calls necessary to turn off the lights and water, forward the mail, and break his lease with his landlord. The man had whined about JD leaving him in a bind until Buck wrote him a check to cover the months remaining on the lease. JD had started to object, saying that Buck was spending too much money. Buck had asked with no room for argument in his voice; Haven't you ever heard that family takes care of family? JD silently nodded his head in agreement. Sure, he had heard it, but he had not expected Buck's generosity. Buck knew nothing about him.

As they packed, JD peppered Buck with questions about growing up on the ranch, and Buck shared stories that had tears of laughter rolling down JD's face. When his

stomach growled, JD jumped up, apologizing for not getting dinner. He asked if pizza was ok and sighed when Buck answered, "Everyone likes pizza."

"It's just around the corner. I will be right back." Then he took off.

Stretching as he pulled himself off the floor, Buck headed towards the small table that served as the catch-all for the mail, the home for JD's soon-to-be-considered antiquated computer, and also the dining table. Stacking the mail, Buck cringed at the number of bills from various doctors, as well as the hospital. He knew that treating cancer, or any disease, was expensive, but after counting the sheer number of envelopes, he made a quick call to Orrin and explained the situation, saying that Dad's money should cover the debt.

Getting off the phone, he sat on the couch reflecting on all that he had learned about JD. There was more to JD than his happy nature and willingness to work. He had inherited a mountain of debt and consequently lived in a hovel, yet he had made not one word of complaint about the unfairness of his circumstances.

Buck felt as though he was beginning to understand his brother. He had one more question needing to be answered. Where were JD's friends?

As someone who genuinely loved being around people and who drew energy from his interactions with them, Buck initially judged JD to be a lot like himself. As the packing progressed, Buck kept expecting him to call friends so he could update them on his changed circumstances, give them his new address, and, for a few, make them promise to visit. That hadn't happened. The only calls JD made were those he needed to inform of his move: his landlord, the utility and water companies, and a moving company to arrange for his pitifully few belongings to be sent to the ranch.

Where were JD's friends? He might not have a steady girlfriend, but certainly, JD had friends, even acquaintances, people he could watch a game with or meet for a drink. Didn't he? Not having friends would explain a lot about the eagerness with which JD packed and quit his job. But there was nothing that could explain to his satisfaction, at least, the absence of friends. For an outgoing, vivacious young man like JD, the loneliness must have ripped him into little pieces. Who did he lean on when his mother died? The only way he had survived his father's death was because he had Chris and Nathan to lean on. JD's Chris and Nathan?

Perhaps it was because he could look towards a future that included brothers that JD was able to keep smiling. Even packing the few belongings he wanted to keep and making arrangements 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. The first night at his apartment, JD 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. Finding several, he began talking about his mother and their life in Boston.

By the time JD had returned with the pizza, Buck had made up his mind to ask a question or two.

“Do you have any calls to make?”

Instead of taking offense, JD considered the question before answering. “I think I have called and made all the arrangements I need to. I do need to stop by the post office in the morning and fill out a change of address form.”

“Don’t you have some friends to call?” Buck’s heart sank as he watched the emotions flittering across JD’s face.

“Buck,” JD hesitated, then, in a rush of words, explained. “I had friends in school, but then my mom got sick. She couldn’t work, so I had to get a full-time job. My scholarship covered my books and tuition...My part-time jobs helped with other expenses, but when my mom was diagnosed with cancer, I had to work full-time. Between school, taking care of my mom, and working, there was no time for hanging out with friends...even if there had been time, friends want to go places, and that takes money. There was none to spare.”

“That must have been hard for you,” Buck said, even as he mentally kicked himself. For a man who was supposedly good with words, what he said was inadequate.

JD shook off the sympathy that Buck was trying to send his way. “It was hard on my mom. She wanted me to go out with friends and, maybe, meet someone. She wanted to live long enough to see me married. Me, I just wanted one more day with her. I did not sacrifice anything by helping her. I made the memories that will have to last me a lifetime.” He stopped talking and looked at Buck. His eyes warned his brother not to feel sorry for him. He may not have had much growing up, but he had a mother like no other, and she had loved him. In the end, she taught him to be strong.



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 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 tried to wave it off as not a big deal. He grinned widely, saying he had been buying and selling cars for almost as long as JD had been alive. Besides, he told JD, that was what being a big brother was about.

Having dealt with the car, they took a taxi and stood in the cold to say goodbye to Jenna Dunne. On the way to the graveyard, JD quietly shared more stories about his mother and the sacrifices she made to give him a good life. He became unashamedly tearful when he knelt at the unmarked grave and introduced his mother to his brother Buck, but then, so had Buck.

JD had never taken anyone to visit his mother's grave. Visiting her had been an intensely personal time. Out of the corner of his eye, he studied Buck's face, looking for his reaction. It meant more that he could put into words that Buck took his desire to visit his mother seriously and asked if he could also come. The only other person he had ever considered bringing to her resting place had said he was dwelling too much on his dead mother, that he needed to get out and rejoin the living. He didn't extend the invitation and ended their budding friendship. He didn't bother explaining that for his entire life, it had been just him and his mother. He didn't know anyone who would understand how much her absence hurt.

He had almost asked Buck not to join 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. But mostly, he brought him to see how Buck would act. Buck seemed like a nice guy who, having lost his father so recently, would understand the importance of saying goodbye. They took a taxi and stood in the cold to talk with Jenna. Buck had not laughed and treated the introduction to Jenna with the same solemnity JD took when he made introductions. Without prompting, he promised Jenna Dunne he would look after her son, and she did not need to worry about John David. He assured Jenna that if she wanted to drop in and check on JD, that would be just fine; she would be welcome. The 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 of the house and tossed the football around. He said she was tiny and delicate-looking, but she always took them by surprise when she threw 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 soda.” 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, 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 to do 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 keyholes,” 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.

