



A DESPERATE MAN: Bonus Prologue

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Also by Tia Fielding and Lisa Henry

PREFACE

This is a bonus prologue to the novel A Desperate Man.

We hope that you enjoy it.

You can buy A Desperate Man at [JMS Books](#), or find it here on Amazon.

A DESPERATE MAN - BONUS PROLOGUE

“Holy shit!” Charlie Kyle’s long red hair fell like a curtain in front of her face as she leaned out the window of Aaron Larsen’s bedroom. “Is that Jimmy Macgregor? Did you invite the Macgregor boys to your party?”

“No! Of course not!” Aaron pulled her away from the window and peered out into the gathering dusk. And shit, yeah, that was Jimmy Macgregor slouching along the street, his hands in the kangaroo pocket of his hoodie and his mouth pulled into a customary sneer. And whenever you saw Jimmy Macgregor...

Aaron stared at the boy walking along a few paces behind Jimmy.

Whenever you saw Jimmy Macgregor, his cousin Quinn Macgregor wasn’t far behind. Quinn was a year younger than Jimmy, and was in a bunch of Aaron’s classes at school. That wasn’t any real surprise. The school at Spruce Creek was only small, and didn’t have a lot of classes. Aaron had been with most of the same kids since first grade and now, in the summer before their sophomore year, he and those other kids liked to pretend they were a lot more grown up than they really were. Which led to parties like this one, where everyone drank too much and made out and did stupid things because it turned out they really couldn’t handle their alcohol at all. What the hell else was there to do in small town Nevada on a Saturday night?

Except Aaron hadn’t invited the Macgregor boys, because Aaron’s

dad was the sheriff, and the Macgregor boys were, well, Macgregors. And while Dad might have turned a blind eye to the fact that Aaron was having a party this weekend while he and Mom were away in Carson City—he'd adopted a don't ask, don't tell policy—there was no way in hell he'd let it slide if he found out there'd been Macgregors in his house. Quinn's dad Robert Macgregor was the closest thing Spruce Creek had to a crime boss. From stolen property to producing and selling drugs, there was nothing Robert Macgregor didn't have a hand in. He was in and out of prison all the time, but Aaron's dad said the police could never get him on most the stuff he did. Sheriff Paul Larsen wouldn't be happy at all to know that Quinn and Jimmy had been in his house.

"They're not coming here, surely," Aaron said, panic rising up in his gut.

Charlie threw him a sidelong look. "It's Spruce Creek, Aaron. Where the hell else would they be going tonight? It's not like there's anything else happening."

Downstairs, the music was already thumping. Someone's big brother had got them a keg, and a sheriff's department cruiser had already driven slowly by several times. Aaron had no doubt they were keeping an eye on him too. He thought that Uncle Will—not his real uncle, but close enough—was working tonight, so that was no surprise. As long as there was no trouble, Aaron knew the party wouldn't get shut down. Except the Macgregors were nothing but trouble.

Aaron stood back from the window and dragged his hands through his messy blond hair. "Dad's gonna kill me!"

"He is not," Charlie said. She rolled her eyes. "Look, I know Jimmy's mostly an asshole, but Quinn doesn't usually cause trouble. They're probably not here to start anything anyway. You know Jimmy's trying to get into Cindy Harper's pants, so that's probably all he's interested in."

Aaron risked another glance out the window, and saw that Jimmy and Quinn had both turned onto the long ramp that led up from the sidewalk to the front door. "Shit. They're really coming here!"

Aaron's bedroom door opened with a squeak.

"Hey, you guys." Brody stuck his head around the door. "Um, Cassie said the Macgregor boys are coming up the street? Is that gonna be a problem?"

Brody Gresham had turned seventeen last weekend, and he was a stoner. He'd been a stoner since junior high, and showed no signs of stopping now. His parents ran the junkyard on the south side of town, and Brody didn't give a fuck what anyone said about that. He didn't give a fuck about anything much at all. He just smiled and nodded, and went back to rolling his joints. He was friends with all the kids in school not because he thought cliques were bullshit, even the tiny cliques they had at Spruce Creek High, but because he was usually too spaced out to notice them at all.

"Who invited them?" Aaron asked, his gaze darting toward Charlie anxiously.

"I dunno," Brody said with a lazy shrug. "It's not like tonight was a secret."

"It's fine," Charlie said, sweeping her hair back over her shoulder and pulling it into an elastic. "Look, they'll probably leave as soon as they realize how lame our parties are." She wrinkled her nose. "Compared to theirs, I mean. You guys know that Bella had sex with two seniors at once in Jimmy's parents' hot tub, right? And then she blew Jimmy in his car?"

"Gross," Aaron said. "Who is even spreading that rumor?"

Charlie shrugged. "Bella is. She thinks it's cool to tell everyone she's already having sex or whatever. The point is, it's hardly the last days of Rome at our party, is it? So they'll get bored and they'll leave, and we'll drink beer and play Risk because we're giant nerds."

"Cool," Brody said, grinning. "I love Risk." He blinked slowly at Aaron and Charlie. "What were you guys doing hiding up here anyway? Are you guys hooking up or something?"

"Kissing Aaron would be like kissing my brother," Charlie said, "if I

had a brother. I left my jacket at home, so I'm borrowing one of Aaron's hoodies."

Right. That's what they'd come upstairs for. Aaron crossed to his closet and tugged the doors open. He grabbed his favorite green hoodie off the hanger, balled it up, and tossed it in Charlie's direction.

She caught it and tugged it on over her T-shirt. It was baggy on her, since Aaron had somehow had a growth spurt over the last few months, and he'd widened a lot across the shoulders. He'd gotten taller too. It was weird, since he still felt like the same skinny, scrawny kid he'd been for most of his life, and some days it felt like he was suddenly occupying way too much space or something. He tripped over his own feet sometimes, and knocked into walls. His parents thought it was hilarious.

Charlie was filling out nowadays too, in the way that girls did. Aaron sometimes caught himself staring at her boobs, which he knew was creepy, but it surprised him sometimes to see that she looked more like a woman than a girl lately. Aaron wasn't attracted to Charlie at all—he'd known since he was eleven that he was gay even if he still hadn't come out to anyone—but he was kind of curious as to what boobs felt like.

Charlie must have caught his stare. She narrowed her eyes at him and crossed her arms over her chest, and Aaron gave a guilty start.

"Okay," he said. "I'm just going to go down there and ask them to leave."

Brody blinked slowly. "You're going to ask *Jimmy Macgregor* to leave?"

"Yeah," Aaron said, projecting more certainty into his voice than he felt. Maybe he should call Uncle Will? Except then Dad would definitely find out. No, he needed to deal with this himself. "I'm going to ask him to leave."

He squared his shoulders and pushed passed Brody in the doorway, stepping outside into the narrow hall to go downstairs. The stairs creaked as he moved down them. Downstairs, in the wide open living area, a bunch of kids were drinking beer from red cups and moving

awkwardly to the music. Charlie was right; their parties were pretty lame. Aaron looked around the familiar faces of his classmates, searching for the Macgregors.

Cassie, a freckle-faced girl with glasses who was crushing on Brody, darted forward. "Did you invite the—"

"No," Aaron said. "I didn't invite them."

"Oh, okay." She sipped her beer. "I think they already left anyway. Cindy went with them."

Aaron felt a strange mixture of relief and disappointment. The Macgregors hadn't been gatecrashing, they'd just turned up to collect Cindy because Jimmy Macgregor wanted to get into her pants, and he'd been trying for so long that maybe Cindy figured tonight was the night and gone off with him. Still, after psyching himself up for a confrontation in the short walk down the stairs, Aaron felt a little let down that he didn't have to do anything after all.

He needed a beer.

He headed for the kitchen, where the keg was set up on the counter. There was a kid leaning down in front of it, filling a cup, and Aaron's heart beat faster as he recognized that long dark hair that fell down his back like a wave.

Quinn Macgregor.

Quinn straightened up and turned, eyes widening slightly as he saw Aaron, before his features settled back into a guarded expression Aaron couldn't read. He dipped his chin in a nod. "Hey."

"Hey," Aaron said, trying to play it cool and ruining the second the rest of the words tumbled from his mouth: "You can't be here."

Quinn's mouth lifted in a faint smile, and he shrugged. "Well, I am."

"Where's Jimmy?"

"He left," Quinn said.

"You need to leave too."

"Come on, man, I just poured this." Quinn held up his beer.

"You can take it with you."

Quinn looked at him like he was crazy. "What the hell is wrong with you? I thought this was supposed to be a party."

"You weren't invited," Aaron said, his heart beating faster.

Quinn tilted his head. "Do you even know how parties work?"

"Just go," Aaron said. He crossed to the back door and opened it. "Just get out."

"Dear Trip Advisor," Quinn said, rolling his eyes. "Zero stars. The owner was rude and unwelcoming and wouldn't even let me finish my beer."

Aaron felt his face burn. "I'm serious."

Quinn's mouth curled up again. "Are you?"

Quinn lifted his arm to take a sip of beer, and Aaron stepped forward and grabbed him by the elbow. Beer sloshed over the edges of the red cup and splashed onto the kitchen floor.

"Just get the hell out of my house!" Aaron knew there was no way in hell he'd be this brave if Jimmy was still here, but he thought he could handle Quinn. Maybe. He pushed him toward the open back door, and more beer spilled.

"Dude! My beer!" Quinn exclaimed.

Aaron tried to push him out the door, but somehow Quinn's free hand had tangled in his shirt, and they both stumbled over the threshold onto the back path.

It was dark out here, the air sharper now that the daylight had vanished and the warmth of the day had bled away.

Aaron pushed at Quinn again, and Quinn stumbled, grabbing on harder to Aaron's shirt. His red cup fell to the ground, and beer soaked Aaron's shoes.

"What the hell is wrong with you?" Quinn demanded, his other hand coming up to grab Aaron's shirt too as he fought for balance. He swung around, and suddenly Aaron was the one struggling to keep his footing as shuffled in their awkward little dance on the cracked cement path.

Aaron had never been in a fight before, but even he knew this one

was pretty pathetic. It took Quinn all of three second to regain his balance and get the upper hand, and then he was dragging Aaron close by the front of his shirt, and Aaron figured he was going to get punched now.

“Angry little rabbit, ain’t cha?” Quinn asked, his mouth tugging into a grin before he suddenly leaned forward and pressed his lips to Aaron’s.

Aaron felt as though all the breath had been sucked from his lungs as Quinn shoved him up against the back wall of the house beside the kitchen door and pressed into him. A knee nudged at him, and Aaron spread his legs instinctively, and then Quinn’s thigh was pushing between his, and Aaron’s dick was hard and aching in his jeans. He reached up and slid his fingers through Quinn’s long hair. Quinn moaned, and pushed his tongue against the seam of Aaron’s lips until Aaron opened his mouth. Then Quinn’s tongue was inside his mouth, and Aaron felt like every bone in his body was dissolving into mush. He put his other hand on Quinn’s shoulder, feeling the muscles shift under the skin as Quinn pushed into him. One on Quinn’s hands settled on his hip, fingers digging in and thumb hooking around the empty belt loop of his jeans.

What the *fuck* was going on? Weren’t they supposed to be fighting? Aaron had no idea how this had happened—did Quinn know?—but he never wanted it to end.

“Jesus,” Quinn murmured, his breath hot against Aaron’s lips. “Fuck, Aaron.”

He said Aaron’s name like it was a revelation, like it was something amazing, something sacred and profane at the same time, and Aaron’s stomach flipped. He’d never heard anyone say his name like that before. He wanted to hear it again and again.

He panted for breath, staring wildly into Quinn’s dark eyes.

Quinn raised his free hand and slid his thumb along Aaron’s bottom lip, and the touch was so bold, so intimate, that Aaron shivered and

almost came.

“Aaron,” Quinn said again, and leaned in for another kiss.

Aaron moaned as their tongues touched again.

“Aaron!” The screen door slammed against the back of the house, loud as a gunshot. “Are you—*shit!*”

Aaron stared at Charlie’s shocked expression as she barged outside. He expected Quinn to pull away from him, even though it was too late, to put some space between them. To laugh or sneer. Except Quinn didn’t step away at all. He kept holding Aaron’s hip, kept pressing into him. Kept breathing in Aaron’s air, their mouths only inches apart.

Charlie’s eyes were as round as saucers.

Quinn’s mouth quirked. “I’ll see you around, Aaron.”

And then, right in front of Charlie, he stole another kiss, this one sweet and gentle. Only then did he peel himself off Aaron. He winked at Charlie and wandered back inside the house.

Aaron sagged against the wall.

“What the fuck was that?” Charlie asked in a loud whisper. “You and Quinn, seriously?”

“I have no idea how that happened,” Aaron said, blinking into the darkness.

“That makes two of us,” Charlie said. “Holy shit, Aaron! Your summer just got a hell of a lot more interesting, didn’t it?”

Aaron laughed, because what the hell else could he do when his whole world had just tipped on its axis like that? “I guess it did.”

Except when his laughter faded, threads of panic took their place, because now Charlie knew he was gay, and that was a big enough thing all on its own without having anything to do with Quinn Macgregor. And Quinn... Quinn was a whole other big thing—a *massive* thing—that Aaron had no idea how to process. In the space of a few minutes the whole world had gone batshit insane, and Aaron hadn’t figured out how to catch his breath yet.

“I...” He swallowed. “Charlie, I...”

Charlie threw him a knowing look. "I've got your back, Aaron. Best friends forever, right?"

Aaron fist bumped her, relief washing over him. "Forever."

Jesus. He'd just kissed Quinn Macgregor. Three times. And Quinn had said he'd see him around. This was going to be the craziest summer ever.

ABOUT A DESPERATE MAN

When they were teenagers, Quinn MacGregor and Aaron Larsen fell in love over the course of one magical summer. It ended in bloodshed and tragedy.

Now, ten years later, Quinn is back in Spruce Creek, Nevada, to inherit his family's criminal cartel. His cousin Jimmy has been making friends -- and enemies -- in dangerous places, but that doesn't mean he's happy to hand over leadership to Quinn. And Jimmy might not be the only one who wants Quinn out of the way for good, especially if Quinn's secret comes out.

Aaron Larsen is back in Spruce Creek to sell his former family home. Aaron lost a leg in Afghanistan, and he's drinking too much and battling depression and PTSD. The last thing he needs is for Quinn MacGregor to drop back into his miserable life. But when Quinn is shaken by the news that he left more behind in Spruce Creek than his bad memories, he turns to Aaron like it's old times, and Aaron doesn't know how to say no.

The events of ten years ago cast a long shadow, and in a town where they can't trust anyone else, Quinn and Aaron just might have to learn to trust each other again.

ALSO BY TIA FIELDING AND LISA HENRY

Family Recipe
Recipe for Two