

“We don't like strangers.”

The voice emerges from somewhere over my shoulder. It's cold and distant. A warning even more menacing than that of the growling¹ dog.

I pivot to face the speaker and stop myself from stumbling backward. I'm caught between the German Shepherd I just saw lumber² to its feet out of the corner of my eye and a woman with a rifle aimed at my kneecap I can't see her face under the brim of her dusty baseball cap. She's wearing overalls and a flannel shirt, and her hair is one long dark braid dangling³ over her shoulder.

“We?” I cautiously ask. Maybe she already found a farmhand⁴.

“Me and Silas.” She gestures to what the German Shepherd. [...] “Who are you and why are you here? [...]

“I saw the ad in the feedstore.” I drop my hand because she's obviously not going to shake it.

She gives me a head-to-toe perusal. “You don't look like you can handle this kind of work. Have you ever done manual labor a day in your life?”

Baseball is manual labor. People might think professional sports are glorified manual labor, but if I can hack hours of training, I can hack whatever this job is. I've spent my whole life doing manual labor.”

Her lips curl into a sneer⁵. “Your jeans and flannel might be faded, but they're designer label. And you're not even wearing steel-toed boots. You're dressed like someone who's trying to blend in, not someone who belongs.”

“I'm not afraid of hard work.”

“You wouldn't last a day. I eat boys like you for breakfast.”

Andrea Jenelle, *No Excuses*, Willow Creek, Book 6, 2024

¹ qui grogne

² move heavily

³ hang loosely

⁴ travailleur agricole

⁵ sourire moqueur