

Train Wreck

By J. Drew Brumbaugh

Chapter 1

Johanna Tom strode purposefully across the flat stretch of sagebrush covered dessert. Scarlet dust clouds puffed up around her shoes. She carried her quiver of arrows and her bow in her right hand and the riddled target in her left. As usual when she went shooting, she did it east of the rez settlement out in a dry-wash where no one would notice. Too many people didn't think it proper for her to be so athletic. Tough, she thought, and smiled as she walked. It had been a good morning, hitting bull's-eyes with nearly every shot even at a hundred yards. And now it was home, get cleaned up and go see Tommy.

Ah, Tommy. She thought about how things had changed since Finkle Creek. Before that he'd pushed her away, refused to spend time with her, never let her run with him on his morning workouts. Things had changed. He seemed happy to have her around, an attitude that was just fine with her. She knew Tommy used to see her as nothing more than Earl's little sister. Now, well, Johanna wondered just how Tommy did see her.

She crossed the last stretch of dusty, red ground and reached the blacktop road to her house that sat at the farthest east corner of the settlement. She jogged the last few yards to her front door, opened the storm door and propped it with her shoulder while she opened the inner door and went in.

Her brother's bulk sat in the biggest chair in the living room, game controller in hand, playing something stupid. He looked up as Johanna came in.

“Been shooting?” asked Earl refocusing on the TV screen.

“Yes,” she said. “You should try it sometime instead of sitting in front of those video games.”

“You sound like Tommy.”

“Maybe he’s got a point.” She started past her brother toward her bedroom and stopped. “What’s wrong with Tommy?”

“Nothing. You know I like him. Just he and I don’t have the same interests anymore.”

“Good thing, too,” she said with a smirk. “I’m going over to his house as soon as I get cleaned up and changed.”

Earl put the game controller down. “When are you going to tell him about your bow and arrow practice? Does he even know who you are?”

Johanna thought about it for a minute. There were a lot of things Tommy didn’t know about her. Right now she guessed he was more interested in her body, which had gotten more womanly, though he certainly was slow doing something about it. As for her archery, running, horsemanship, being an Indian warrior-ess, he didn’t need to know any of that yet. She’d had her sights on Tommy for a long time and wasn’t going to take any chances that might spoil things.

“He knows all he needs to know,” she finally said and headed for her bedroom. “When are you going to find a job?” she shouted over her shoulder.

“Why? So you can have Tommy over here all alone?”

“We’re alone at his house now, you idiot. And as slow as he is nothing is going to happen.”

“What?” Now Earl put down the controller and got up. The chair groaned with relief as his weight came off of it. He lumbered to the back hallway and stopped short in front of her closed bedroom door. “You’re going to get both of you in trouble.”

“No, I’m not. I know what I’m doing.”

“If you get pregnant Dad will kill you.”

“I’m not going to get pregnant. And besides, I told you, nothing’s happening.”

Her door opened and she came out carrying a towel and a handful of clean clothes, and headed for the bathroom. Earl moved aside.

“What happened to my baby sister?” was all he managed as he watched her go into the bathroom.

“I’m growing up. You should too.”

The water came on in the shower and Earl returned to his video game. “Sisters,” he grumbled. “Why couldn’t I have had a brother?”

Johanna didn’t hear any of it. She hummed in the shower, washing the dust out of her hair, thinking of being with Tommy later that afternoon. Things were good between them, better than they’d ever been. There were underlying issues. Tommy had a strong case of survivor’s guilt over Jim’s death during the battle at Finkle Creek. And the gunshot wound to Tommy’s left leg had not healed well leaving Tommy less athletic, less the person he’d dreamed of being.

He had mentioned more than once regretting not being the warrior he'd once been.

To Johanna he was more of a warrior than ever. After all if it wasn't for Tommy and his friends, everyone in Finkle Creek would be dead and the terrorists would have gotten away. And Johanna was sure that Tommy's left leg was going to be just fine. She'd seen how much it had healed the last few months, how much better Tommy got around, even jogged better. No, the leg would be fine. His guilt wasn't going to be so easy to cure.