



He had everything under control until he met her.

*Bound* TO THE  
**BOUNTY HUNTER**  
BOUND SERIES

HAYSON MANNING

*He had everything under control until he met her.*

Harlan Franco, Colorado's busiest bounty hunter, and security expert, lives by his rules: be in control, be detached, and never touch the asset. These rules are tested when the asset he's being paid to secretly guard is none other than his rival, sexy, unpredictable, pain in the butt, Sophie Callaghan—a woman determined to stay away from him. If she finds out he's in her life on an assignment, he'll never get the info he needs. But those lips, those curves, that attitude, he bets he'll have her for one night where she'll play by his rules.

He didn't expect his heart to have an opinion.

Freedom loving private investigator Sophie Callaghan is on a mission. The daughter of a con-artist is not going to be used by a man again. What she doesn't need is hot, broody and controlling Harlan barging into her life and digging into her past. Her brain may say no, but her body craves this bad boy. After a night where both live their darkest desires, Sophie must fight their explosive chemistry because one wrong move could destroy her. She bets he has to stay far, far away.

As the stakes ramp up and secrets explode around them, both are determined to win the bet.

But there can only ever be one winner.

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*To Ben*  
*It had to be you*



## Chapter Three

Sophie pulled on the hem of the barely thicker-than-dental-floss black skirt of her new uniform. The faded wood and carpet at Pipe's had soaked up beer, whiskey, and Marlboro cigarettes, giving the room a smoky scent that blended with the smell of leather and sweat.

In a whirlwind, she'd signed forms, received a plastic supermarket bag containing a uniform, and been directed toward a cubicle curtained off with a sheet covered in smiling purple dinosaurs.

*Barney at a biker bar. Who knew?*

She bent an inch to the left and the dental floss hiked up.

*Awesome.*

Yep, she'd flash a room filled with bikers her sensibly priced underwear.

To top off her night, she'd be starting work with damp underwear thanks to Harlan. The humiliation prickled her face.

*He's not into me. He's playing me and I totally fell for it again.*

Sophie tugged on the hem of the skirt. "Are you sure about the skirt? There isn't another size?"

"Very sure." The gorgeous brunette who'd hired her, Gemma, looked up from strapping a black stiletto shoe to her foot, the heel so high and thin it could be used as a weapon. Warm, startling golden eyes danced in her heart-shaped face. She had a body that every woman craved: petite, curvy, with a generous serving of natural boobs.

Sophie tugged on the hem again to no avail. A black tank top five sizes too small with the word "Pipe's" spelled out in diamantes pulled tight across her breasts.

"You might want to get a pushup bra." Gemma surveyed her with a critical eye. "Get those puppies on display. You'll bring in more tips."

Sophie pulled at the strap of her comes-in-a-multipack bra. Her small puppies were staying right where they were. There was far too much of her already on display.

"Dudes are going to blow their loads when they see you in stilettos. Be sexy, flirty, and unavailable."

A cold weight settled in her chest and expanded outward. She had to walk around a crowded bar full of men and feel the full weight of their smirks and laughter at her attempt at being sexy or flirty.

*I can't do this.*

She needed this job. Her car wasn't going to be thumped into submission forever, and she couldn't afford to keep taking it to mechanics who'd promised they'd fixed it, only to have them scratching their heads when she returned. Every Thursday she cooked for her neighbors, Sally and Titus

Carroll, and since it was the best meal they got all week, she cooked up a storm, with enough leftovers for two to three days of lunches and dinners. Sadly, her invoices sat at the bottom of her clients' "to be paid" pile, gathering cobwebs.

*You can do this, Buttercup.*

She choked back a bitter laugh at the name her father used to call her. It still seeped into her thoughts at unexpected moments when she needed strength—his sweet, happy, Buttercup.

She pushed him out of her head.

*I need this job.*

Tonight, hopefully, she'd pay the overdue gas bill, and Melissa Gibson from Wichita, Kansas would be receiving a crisp hundred-dollar bill in a card with a bogus return address signed with the name Josiah O'Connor and the word "Sorry" scrawled across it. Another name scratched from her father's journal.

Gemma squeezed her shoulder. "Hey, what's up? If you're worried about the guys, don't be. This may be a biker bar and yeah, some of them are badass, but if one of them lays a hand on you, Pipe will remove his balls and deep fry them. I hired you because I know you'll be able to take shit from a guy and send it back twofold."

She gnawed her lip, staring at Gemma's shoes. Another dilemma. She'd never mastered the trainer heels that progressed to gliding in killer stilettos. She'd attempted to wear high shoes once. She and her drink had face-planted into her date's lap, not bringing him the happy ending he'd been hoping for.

Sophie waved her hand. "I...um can't do the sexy thing."

"You are sooooo sexy. Seriously. The boots are hot. With

your long legs you rock it.” Gemma cocked her head to one side. “Are you sure about the whole no makeup and hair up thing?”

Sophie frowned and thought back to her interview last week. She’d stood in a long line of hopeful applicants at ten in the morning. The on-call position suited her perfectly. She’d arrived with her resume wondering if she’d read the ad wrong. The women were dressed in clothes that showed leg to their butt or cleavage spilling out of tops they must have stolen from their tween sisters, hair either keratin-straight or in big, bouncy curls down their backs, fuck-me heels strapped to their feet, and with enough makeup and cologne to start their own beauty supply warehouse. When Sophie had joined the line, a few had smirked at her, then turned back to their pack. She’d been less than thrilled to overhear about one woman’s now-hairless vagina and deeply unhappy to hear about the procedure to achieve lifelong baldness.

The slamming of a door had brought her head up. Gemma had walked in, stopped, and scanned the room. Her eyes had locked on Sophie. She’d smiled, made a beeline to her, and announced to the room that the position had been filled. Gemma had taken her to a surprisingly tidy office and explained the job. She didn’t glance at Sophie’s carefully typed resume. Turned out the primary qualification was a waitress who wouldn’t take shit or want to bang the clientele, would turn up on time, do her job, and go home.

Ticked boxes all around.

Gemma continued, “Your hair is awesome. So thick and wavy. And you’ve got killer bee-stung lips.”

Sophie touched her still-tingling, normally completely average lips. Harlan Franco’s mouth had made them swollen

and sensitive and for some weird reason, red.

“I’ve got an eye shadow that would make your eyes pop. Want me to go get it? Give me fifteen minutes with my flat iron on your hair.”

“No,” Sophie barked.

Gemma flinched. That came out sharper than Sophie intended. Being homeschooled, the whole girlfriend thing was lost to her. She’d never had a best friend, a sleepover, or done the girly things girls apparently did.

Sophie went to reach out a hand, leaving it quavering in no-man’s-land.

“Sorry, this is all new to me. Thanks for the offer and for your help.”

Gemma stared at her for a long second. She pulled her cell from her bag, checked the time, and shot Sophie a quick smile. “No problem. I’m training you tonight. It’s pretty easy. Stick with me and you’ll be good.” Sophie stowed her phone and bag in a locker, her mind in a washing machine spin.

*I wonder if Harlan’s already ordering a submissive blonde around.*

Her fingers flexed and her muscles tightened at the thought of him with another woman.

*Brain, this is your body. We don’t care what Harlan does. He can fulfill his Groupon promise.*

She tugged on the hem of her skirt one more time, squared her shoulders, and followed Gemma out into the packed bar. Five huge flat-screen TVs hung from the ceiling showing cage fighting, drag racing, or what could be the Miss Hot Boobs USA pageant. To her left sat a long row of pool tables at which denim-clad men and women stood in groups. The chink of ceramic balls could be heard above three girls

singing.

“Unskinny Bop” indeed.

Gemma stood beside a man ripped straight out of every girl’s California surfer wet dream. Cali Surfer towered above Sophie’s five-foot-nine frame. His dirty-blond hair flopped on his forehead. Muscular body outlined under a black T-shirt and low-slung faded denim. Sparkly, navy-blue eyes, strong chin, a slightly off-center nose, a dusting of dark stubble on his cheeks. She bet it got him laid, often. He oozed sex appeal and charm and had an easy air about him, but her sixth sense told her that if he were pushed, underneath his playful puppy exterior, a pissed off pit bull would emerge.

Gemma threw her arm around his waist. “Sophie, this is Cope. He tends bar while working his way through every available woman in Colorado. The man is a walking petri dish. If I didn’t love his whorey ass so much, I’d report him to the CDC.”

Warm blue eyes focused on her. “Sophie, nice to meet you. If you have any problem with any guy here, hold up your hand and I’ll be over. The girls are not allowed to be touched. They might test a new girl, but don’t take their shit.” He pulled Gemma tight to his side. “Don’t believe a word she says. I’m Catholic schooled. If I ever touched my impressively sized penis other than to attend to bathroom duties, there is the high possibility I’d go blind. The only work I could find would be as a eunuch where I’d work in a sheik’s harem, surrounded by beautiful naked women giving each other facials.”

Sophie couldn’t help but smile. His warmth and charm were infectious.

Gemma elbowed him in the ribs and rolled her eyes.

Cope held up his hands in surrender.

Gemma laughed, shook her head and tugged on Sophie's arm.

An hour into her shift, Sophie found her rhythm. She and Gemma had allocated sections. She'd write customers' orders, which didn't change much from beer or spirits, and take their money. Cope or Dave, another bartender she'd only briefly met, would hand over the drinks, she'd serve the orders, return their change, calculating it in her head walking back, and then move to the next table. Rinse and repeat.

Her biceps and triceps had been stretched beyond their limits. The burn in her muscles had turned into a long-standing ache, which had morphed into a quivering numbness. She'd kept her back ramrod straight so as not to flash the bar her underwear. The vision of Miss Newly Lasered flew into her brain and stayed a second longer than necessary. Her shoulders had sent out protest notices an hour ago and would be a no-show tomorrow.

Her tank top had taken a hit when she'd spilled beer on herself after one of the scariest men she'd ever seen materialized in her path. Massive, with hams for arms, dump trucks for legs, and a plaited gray beard that landed at the button of threadbare jeans that looked like he'd been born in. Tattoos snaked up his neck and possibly spelled out something on his bald head. She wasn't about to get a stepladder and find out.

Man Mountain didn't say a word. His eyes dropped to her boobs, her boots, then back to her face. He'd crossed his arms across his mountain range of a chest and stared at her.

She tapped her foot and arched a brow at Mr. Probably Whacks People for a Living.

After a standoff lasting forever, he'd smiled, revealing three teeth, told her to call him Boris, and welcomed her to Pipe's.

On her way back to the bar, a man blocked her path.

*Is this a tag-team test or something?*

"Sweetheart, I'm Mick, and baby, you'll want my dick. You want to take a ride with me after your shift. Have my Harley throb between your legs, then have *me* throbbing between your legs." He grabbed her hips, pressing his hips against hers, and gyrated.

Beer, onions, and "I'm allergic to deodorant" wafted over Sophie.

She moved back out of his reach and arched a brow. "Touch me again, I'll snap off that dick of yours, turn it into an itty-bitty sandwich, and serve it back to you with a single fry."

His eyes narrowed, and he took a step toward her.

She held her ground.

"You're not woman enough for me anyway." His eyes wandered over her.

Sophie the PI shot forward. "Baby, we both know you're not man enough for me."

His eyes hardened. "I expect you've got a dick there in your skirt."

"Yep, and it's bigger than yours."

He loomed over her, a vicious look on his face. He raised his hand to slap her. She jumped left and caught his arm, scissor-kicking his legs. He dropped to the ground with a heavy grunt. Sophie landed on his back and grabbed his wrists.

A hand landed gently on her shoulder.

“I’ve got this, Soph.”

With her heart hammering at locomotive speed, she looked up at Cope, whose narrowed gaze was directed at Mick. He held out a hand and she stood, her legs shaking. Cope hauled Mick to his feet.

Mick’s flinty eyes narrowed, his face heart-attack red. “You’ll regret that, bitch.”

She smiled down at him. “Don’t choke on your dick sandwich.”

Applause and laughter rippled across the bar. She smoothed a hand across her hair, gave a tight smile, and walked back toward Gemma. She caught the eye of a few patrons. One man saluted her. Boris openly grinned at her, and a biker chick gave her a thumbs-up.

“Look at you, girlfriend.” Gemma grinned at her.

Sophie took an order for a round of Wild Turkey when the door flew open and a gorgeous, tall, blond woman walked in wearing designer shoes so high Sophie wondered if she had to alert air traffic control when she put them on. A floor-length silver sheath hugged every part of her perfect, curvy body. She wove through the bikers, greeting some, smacking others playfully on the shoulder, and headed toward the bar.

“I think Cinderella got lost coming home from the ball,” Sophie said to Gemma, who passed her holding a tray filled with glasses of Coors.

“That’s Annie, my bestie. Her date mustn’t have gone well.” Gemma’s lips thinned. “None of her dates go well. Let me get this tray, then come meet her.”

Sophie opened her mouth to protest but shut it at Gemma’s questioning look.

Five minutes later, she stood next to Gemma. Annie sat

at the bar, two empty shot glasses in front of her. Cope filled a third. Seemed Annie's idea of having hot and horny sex in the back of a limo while it cruised around town hadn't been met with a positive reaction. Her thick honey-colored hair curled down her back, almond-shaped eyes the color of emeralds, sun-kissed skin, sparkly pink lips, and a body that could grace covers of magazines, and she'd been turned down?

"I don't understand," Sophie blurted out. "He turned *you* down? Is there something wrong with the universe?"

Shrewd eyes appraised her. "He wanted a relationship. I want fun." A manicured hand with blood-red nails waved. "He'll fake it that he only wants fun, but then he'll get clingy and possessive. Neither rocks my boat."

Gemma shook her head and made introductions.

Annie smiled, her questioning gaze landing on Sophie's boots.

Sophie crossed her arms across her chest and stepped back. "I...um...don't do heels."

Annie stared at her until Sophie started to squirm.

"There's a shoe shop out by me that does fabulous shoes in all size heels. My motto is a girl can never have enough shoes. The next time I'm going, want to swing by with me?"

Sophie opened her mouth, her lips forming the word "no."

Annie held up her hand. "Not that I'm saying the boots don't rock, because they totally do, just saying there's a special pair of shoes out there for everyone." She held up her shot glass, twirled it, then flipped the amber content into her mouth without her eyes watering. "Mother's milk."

"I'm not paying you to stand around gassing." A man

who looked like he'd been living rough since the Vietnam War walked to the bar, shrugging off a leather jacket. Denim-clad, biker boots. Piercing blue eyes locked on Sophie, then narrowed. "Who's this?"

"Keep your hair on." Gemma rolled her eyes. "We're taking a two-minute break, and this is your new waitress who, incidentally, the patrons of your fine establishment find hot."

Eyebrows hit the biker's hairline, and scary eyes turned to Gemma, who didn't seem to pick up on the arctic glare directed her way.

"No it isn't. I told you to hire someone men will want in their station and who'll come back because she's in their station. That ain't her."

That was her. Too tall, too plain.

Gemma's hands landed on her hips.

"She's good, Pipe. She didn't take Boris's shit, stared him down, and tapped her foot until he smiled. She had Mick on the ground when he went to slap her after she told him she'd cut off his dick and serve it to him in a sandwich with a fry. She's quick and does her job well. I'm fairly certain she isn't out for a quick fuck with a biker."

Sophie felt her eyes widen.

"I'm tired of working shifts on my own because you hire girls who are only here to get a glory fuck by a biker before they walk up the aisle in their WASP dress and marry their missionary position boyfriend." Gemma poked Pipe in the chest. "She's better than good."

Her heart threw in a double beat. "Thanks," she murmured to Gemma, who reached over to squeeze her hand.

“Besides, I think the boot thing is hot. I’m guessing half the guys tonight will go home and jack off thinking of her mile-long legs wrapped around their hips.”

Sophie pulled on the hem of her skirt, her cheeks burning.

“No stilettos, no job,” Pipe barked. He turned to Cope. “No one touches the girls. Mick’s banned.”

Sophie pressed her lips together. Not like there was an HR department. Lodging an official complaint about sexism in the workplace would fall on deaf ears. She could either inform him that it was sexist to make women wear ridiculously high shoes and he must be breaking some UN Women’s Rights legislation, or tell him to stick his job, get changed, and never come back.

She mentally calculated the tips she’d received so far. She’d already paid the overdue gas bill *and* Melissa Gibson. Next up she’d be paying the electricity. She liked electricity. Electricity cleaned clothes, granted her access to *The Young and the Restless*, and provided hot water. If this kept up, Michelle P from South Florida would be receiving two hundred dollars.

*Another name paid back.*

Gemma moved into Pipe’s space, hands on her hips again.

“If she goes, I go.”

Pipe stared at Gemma for half a second before his icy glance cut to Sophie.

“You’re only here because of her. Give me a reason to get rid of you, and you’re gone.”

At three a.m. when she started swaying with fatigue, the bar emptied out. Sophie hauled herself around, each step feeling like she'd dunked her boots in another layer of cement. Finally, Dave, the other bartender, closed the door. The four of them delivered empty glasses to the kitchen area, stacked empty bottles in the keg room. Gemma had tossed her a cloth, and they'd sprayed the tables in artificial lemon and wiped them down. Much to her horror, Pipe insisted on walking her to her car, leaving Cope to escort Gemma to her Beetle.

After insisting she was fine, five times, Pipe ignored her and walked by her side.

*Well this isn't awkward.*

"For the time you're working at the bar, if you need a place, for whatever reason, you can come here," Pipe said, looking straight ahead.

If they weren't the only two in the parking lot, she'd have thought he was talking to someone else. He didn't turn his head to address her, instead aimed for the only car left in the lot. She'd parked under a light with what looked like drunk moths slamming into the glass.

"Right," she said. Having as little as possible to do with the man seemed the best way to keep her job.

As for turning up here?

*As much chance of that as being flogged naked by Babic in a room full of nuns.*

"I mean it." He stood beside her door.

"Um, thanks." She hoisted her bag higher on her shoulder. She unlocked the car and willed him to walk away.

Pipe hadn't said a word when the car took five turnovers to fire or when she tapped the check engine light until it

shifted from a steady glow to a flicker. He'd stood under the fading neon until she turned the corner.

On the way home she checked her rearview mirror. The plan of detouring to the park was nixed when a sedan came out of a side street and sat on her tail a few cars back.

*Is it me being paranoid or am I being followed?*

She shouldn't chance it. If there was something on that recording, she couldn't risk losing what Babic had said. In a few hours she'd go back to collect it, taking public transport, changing her route if she was being followed, or she'd join *Paranoids Anonymous*.

She made it through her front door just as Pongo lumbered through the dog door. She lavished praise on her dog and gave him a treat. After she washed her face and brushed her teeth, she slapped on supermarket moisturizer. She kicked her uniform to the floor, changing into pj's she'd grabbed from under her pillow, then crawled into bed, whispering her prayers as she went.

Sophie's phone danced out her favorite ringtone, and Pongo's face flashed on the screen announcing an incoming call, pulling her from a deep sleep.

She groaned. The soft light of dawn filled her room with pale tangerine streaks and watery shadows. Birds were up and doing their rounds, judging by their happy songs.

*Why can't they sing the blues for once?*

Pongo pushed open her door looking like he'd starve to death if food didn't arrive in his bowl. She went to stretch her shoulders and groaned. Seems her brain had received the

memo that they weren't turning up today. It wasn't just her shoulders. Every muscle in her body protested movement.

"Hello," she answered in a rusty voice.

"This is Franco. We need to meet. How long would it take you to get to my office?"

"I'm not meeting you. Go away." She ended the call and flopped back on the bed.

Her sluggish brain started to jog into life. Did he know about the recording? Had *he* followed her last night?

*Crap.*

Fully awake, she threw back the covers and stumbled to the bathroom where she had a shower, a quick shampoo, and an even quicker condition. She slapped on her favorite raspberry-scented body butter, brushed her teeth, then pulled her wet hair into a band.

Her home phone roared to life.

She ignored it for ten rings but, worried it might be Titus in trouble, she picked up the receiver, keeping silent.

"Did you hang up on me?" Harlan's clipped voice made her smile.

"New experience I gather."

"How long would it take you to get to my office or I'll come to you."

She clutched the cordless phone while dashing around the room, pulling on her boots. "It's illegal to obtain an unlisted number. I could have you charged and arrested."

His voice purred. "The strangest thing, I found your number on a piece of paper you left for me last night at Hostage."

Her blood started a slow boil. "I swear to God, if you were standing in this room I'd squeeze the life out of you,

and no jury would convict me.”

Amusement softened his sexy voice. “You’re into dirty talking this early in the morning? Interesting.”

She pulled on her jacket and grabbed her keys, calculating how long it would take to make it to the park, grab the recording, make it back home, and hide it in her safe. There was no way he’d be coming here. This small, barely two-bedroom house was her sanctuary. Her first home.

The last thing she wanted to do was serve him coffee out of a Goodwill cup. Have him smirk at her snow globe collection. He only knew Sophie the PI. He didn’t know Sophie Callaghan, and he never would.

“I can be there in two hours. I have an appointment this morning,” she lied, having no intention of going anywhere near Harlan Franco ever again.

“I know what you have.”

She opened her mouth to protest but his words, wrapped in stone, stopped her.

“And if you’re not here in two hours, I’ll find you.”

“I don’t know what you’re talking about.” Amazingly, she sounded crisp and formal.

“You do have something I’m *going* to have.” His voice, like molasses, flowed through her to one spot in particular.

She squirmed at the throbbing between her legs, the tightness of her nipples, the shiver of remembrance of when he’d kissed her.

Scrap that. Harlan didn’t kiss. He devoured. Demanded. *Owned.*

She shook her head.

*Nope, he played with her. He was a big tabby cat, and she was the little mouse.*

Well, this little mouse was done with his games.

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