

Bad Boys Do (The Donovan Family)

By Victoria Dahl

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Jamie Donovan doesn't mean to be bad. Sure, the wild streak in his wicked green eyes has lured the ladies before. Now it's time to grow up. He's even ready for a serious romance. But how can that be when Olivia, the only right woman he has ever met, already has him pegged as wrong?

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Editorial Review

Review

"Sparkling, special and oh so sexy-Victoria Dahl is a special treat!"

-New York Times bestselling author Carly Phillips on Talk Me Down

"Sassy and smokingly sexy, Talk Me Down is one delicious joyride of a book."

-New York Times bestselling author Connie Brockway

"Dahl smartly wraps up a winning tale full of endearing oddballs, light mystery and plenty of innuendo and passion." -Publishers Weekly on Talk Me Down

"[A] hands-down winner, a sensual story filled with memorable characters."

-Booklist on Start Me Up

About the Author

Victoria Dahl lives with her family in a small town high in the mountains. Her first novel debuted in 2007, and she's gone on to write seventeen books and novellas in historical, contemporary, and paranormal romance. Victoria's contemporary romance, Talk Me Down, was nominated for both a RWA Rita Award and the National Readers' Choice Award. Since then, her books have been nominated for two more Rita Awards, and she hit the USA Today Bestseller list with the anthology Midnight Kiss.

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This wasn't a book club; it was a manhunt.

Olivia couldn't believe she'd fallen for it. Actually...she couldn't believe she'd thrown herself headfirst into it. She'd read the assigned book. Twice. She'd downloaded important discussion points. Made detailed notes. Marked up the pages. And finally, before walking into the brewery, she'd sat in her car for ten minutes, pumping herself up for this first foray into a girls-only gathering.

They're just women like me, she'd assured herself. No need to be intimidated. You'll fit right in because you'll all have the book in common.

Now here she was, sitting in the barroom of Donovan Brothers Brewery, listening to seven women discuss their current dating lives and sexual adventures. And Olivia, having no dating life or adventurous sex to contribute, sat there like a bump on a log, the book club selection clutched tight in her tense fingers.

It wasn't that she'd never had girlfriends. She'd had a best friend in high school. And one in college. And then...then she'd had her husband. Her ex was as close as she'd gotten to a best friend in the past ten years, and he'd failed pretty spectacularly at that.

She needed girlfriends, and she needed them fast.

When Gwen Abbey had invited her to join her book club, Olivia had felt honored and relieved.

She should've known better. Gwen wasn't exactly the type to opine about literature. Oh, she was smart enough, but her attention flitted about like a hummingbird after a shot of espresso. She might read a book, but Olivia couldn't imagine her spending two hours talking about it afterward.

"I'm so glad you came!" Gwen whispered, putting an arm around Olivia's shoulders for a quick squeeze. "Isn't this fun?"

"Yes!" Olivia answered, feeling her fingers go numb against the slick cover of the book. She really, really wished she hadn't posted so many sticky notes in the pages. They fluttered like tiny blue banners under the breeze of the ceiling fan.

"Can you even believe how adorable he is?"

Olivia glanced automatically toward the bar, where a very young, very handsome man filled glasses at the tap. He was Jamie Donovan, she'd been informed, and his welcoming wave had set the whole table tittering a few moments ago. The tittering had been followed by promises—or threats—of what the women would do if they got Jamie Donovan alone for an hour. "Find out exactly what's under that kilt," had been a common refrain.

"So," Olivia ventured, leaning closer to Gwen, "is he the reason you guys meet at this place?"

"Heck, yeah. No reason not to have a nice view while we hang out. Plus, Marie, Alyx and Carrie are all married, so this is a nice safe way for them to get a little flirtation in. They get to drool over Jamie, fantasize a little, and then their husbands benefit when they get home. Everyone is happy!"

"Great!" Olivia responded with fake enthusiasm.

But even she was tired of fake enthusiasm. Why couldn't she just be enthusiastic? Granted, it wasn't what she'd expected, and Olivia liked to know what she was getting into. She made plans. And lists. She believed that in life, you measured twice and cut once. But all the measuring in the world hadn't managed to make a good marriage. She needed to loosen up.

And in all honesty, she felt better knowing that some of the women were married. If it was just about having fun and not about picking up a man, she could get into it. Or she could try.

"Here he comes," Gwen whispered. "And it looks like we're in luck..."

"Jamie!" one of the women called. "You wore the kilt for us!"

The cute bartender with the messy dark gold hair winked at them. At *all* of them. "First Wednesday of the month. You ladies didn't think I'd forget book club, did you?"

If giggles could be raucous, these certainly were. As subtly as she could, Olivia tipped her head to the side to see past the other women. She finally caught a glimpse of the infamous kilt, and she couldn't deny that it looked good on him. Between the bottom edge of the dark kilt and the top of his work boots, a lovely expanse of tanned leg was revealed, dusted with the faint glint of golden hair. The kilt wasn't plaid. It looked like it was made from black canvas. His wide chest was covered by a faded brown T-shirt with a faintly visible Donovan Brothers logo stretched across it.

The man was gorgeous. Olivia couldn't deny that.

He continued past their large table to deliver beer to a group farther on. There was no hooting from that side

of the room. The men there were focused on the baseball game on the wide-screen TV. They didn't even glance at Jamie Donovan's bare legs. The women of the book club table, on the other hand, craned their necks shamelessly. Olivia sank down a little in her chair.

"How long have you been meeting here?" she asked Gwen.

"About a year. Before that we used to meet at Starbucks. Frankly, the club was about to die. Nobody had the free time to read and then get together for meetings. But now we have one hundred percent attendance."

"And the reading?" Olivia pressed. But she didn't get an answer to that, because Jamie Donovan had reappeared, a wide smile already in place. His hair looked darker now, but the lights of the ceiling fan behind him limned it with gold.

"Happy Wednesday, ladies."

Gwen grinned. "Don't you mean happy hump day?"

"Aw, come on, Gwen. I'm a nice boy. You should be ashamed of yourself."

"I'd like to be. Wanna help?"

For a split second, Olivia thought Gwen had gone too far. She'd offended this man. He was just doing his job. Olivia touched Gwen's arm, trying to prompt her to apologize, but suddenly his face cracked and he burst into loud laughter.

"Good one," he chuckled. "You been saving that up for me?"

"Maybe," Gwen said.

"I'm honored. So do you want the usual? A pitcher of India Pale and a pitcher of amber?"

Everybody agreed, but as he started to turn away, Olivia cleared her throat. "Pardon me. Could I get a water?"

"Absolutely," he said, swinging back around. When his eyes lighted on her, he stood straighter. "Oh, hello. A new member of the club?"

Now that the smile was directed at her, Olivia found herself mute. Her lips parted. Nothing came out.

"This is Olivia," Gwen volunteered.

"Hello, Olivia."

Good Lord. How did he make the few syllables of her name sound like a kiss? A deep, slow kiss. Olivia actually shivered.

Jamie Donovan's eyes drifted down. His eyebrows rose. "Well, look at that."

Outrage rushed through her at his words. Where did he get off looking at her breasts like—

He gestured. "You actually know something about how a book club is supposed to work. The rest of you should take note. Or *notes*."

Heat flashed over her face as she looked down to her marked-up copy of *The Last of the Mohicans*. The other women booed and tossed crumpled napkins at Jamie, and Olivia was thankful for the distraction. Of course he hadn't been checking out her body. He didn't even look at her again before heading back to the bar. Olivia leaned over and slipped the book into her purse.

"I watched the movie," the woman next to her said. "It was amazing. A really great story."

"It was. I'm honestly glad I read it. Even if we're not going to discuss it tonight." She slid her eyes to Gwen. "So why did you tell me we were reading *The Last of the Mohicans*?"

Gwen shrugged. "Because you wouldn't have come if I'd told you we were just going to drink and hang out. Right?"

She wanted to be outraged that she'd been lied to, but Gwen was right. She wouldn't have come if it hadn't been a book club. The point of a book club was that it gave Olivia something to talk about. It helped smooth over those awkward conversations she usually had with other women. But now she was here, and this was exactly what she'd been trying to work up to.

"You're right," she said. "So thank you."

The discussion of *The Last of the Mohicans* led to talk of movies with hot men in them, and even Olivia could contribute to that. She'd been married, but she hadn't been blind. And when Jamie returned to the table with their beer, she wasn't blind then, either. His forearms alone were enough to draw her attention. They were strong and tan and undeniably male. She was still staring at his arms when a glass of water appeared in front of her.

"Your water, Miss Olivia," he said, addressing her as if she were a teacher. Which she was. Just a coincidence, or did the scent of dry-erase marker cling to her? "And a pint glass, too, I presume?" He slid an empty glass to sit next to the water.

She didn't like beer, but now she was fully invested.

"Absolutely," she answered, and his green eyes twinkled. God, could he just do that on demand? What a terrible and deadly skill. She averted her gaze in self-defense and kept her eyes down until he was gone. The man was constructed of nothing but charm and beauty. *Indiscriminate* charm. Fun to enjoy for a girls' night out, but definitely not something to feel flattered by. She knew that from painful experience.

But Olivia *was* flattered that Gwen had gone to the trouble of tricking her into this. That alone made her smile as she sipped at the lightest of the two beers. But the lightness belied its bitter taste, and she had to hide a grimace. Maybe she could talk the group into going out for martinis one time. But as the evening wore on, she felt the easiness of the brewery. This wasn't like a bar, where men swarmed like scavengers. Instead, it was safe and homey, and Olivia found herself loving it. She even managed to make it through half a glass of that awful beer, and by the time she excused herself to use the bathroom, her head buzzed pleasantly.

This was going to be part of her new life. A book club with no books. Women who wanted her company. And gorgeous men to wait on them hand and foot. Or one gorgeous man, at least.

Standing before the mirror, Olivia dabbed gloss on her lips, blinked several times to remoisten her contacts, and smoothed down her sleek new bob. She'd been tempted to try a new color, but she was glad she hadn't now. Because tonight she looked like herself, only better. Older, wiser and more self-assured. *Slightly* more self-assured. But not quite so confident that she didn't startle like a scared rabbit when she stepped out of the bathroom and straight into the path of Jamie Donovan.

"Oh, sorry!" She reached out a hand as if to help steady the keg balanced on his shoulder, but Jamie stepped smoothly around her and set the keg gently onto the floor behind the bar.

"Need a refill?" he asked.

"No!" she said too emphatically. His eyebrows rose. "I mean...I'm fine. Thanks."

"You don't like beer, do you?"

Olivia cringed. "No. I'm sorry. I don't mean to denigrate your life's work or anything..."

"Oh, I think my self-worth will survive." This time his smile was a little more natural, though no less dazzling.

"It's just too bitter for me. I've never liked it. No matter how light I try to go."

His eyes slid to the book club table. "Which one did you try?"

"The pale one?"

"India Pale Ale. There's your mistake. Light isn't always mild. India Pale Ale is notoriously hoppy. Extra hops were added to preserve it during shipment to India, hence the name."

"Oh, sure," she said, nodding as if she understood. But the truth was that she'd tried plenty of beer in her life and she hadn't liked any of it.

"Try the amber," he suggested.

"Okay." She started to turn away, but he raised a finger to stop her.

"Here." He filled a slim glass that appeared to be an overgrown cousin of a shot glass. She eyed the dark gold liquid with trepidation. She'd had no intention of trying the amber ale, but maybe he'd realized it. "Go ahead. I promise it's milder than the pale ale."

With a shrug of resignation, Olivia took the glass from him and tried a sip. She was already grimacing when she realized it wasn't so bad. "Oh."

"See? Told you." His eyes crinkled with pleasure, and Olivia told herself that the warmth pooling inside her was the beer. "Even our porter is pretty mild, though you're going to want to steer clear of the Blackjack Stout."

"Oh, no," she protested when she saw him drawing a glass of chocolate-brown beer. "No way."

"Don't you trust me?"

That couldn't be a serious question. Who the hell would trust this man and his sparkling green eyes? In fact, it was a little insulting that he'd flirt with her as if he meant it. Like she'd buy that this boy would be attracted to a thirty-five-year-old woman like her. Did he think she was so desperate she'd believe it?

Olivia raised her chin and took the glass from his hand, ignoring the slide of his skin over hers. "I wouldn't trust you in a million years," she answered, but she took a generous sip of the beer anyway, amazed that it didn't make her eyes water. It was actually kind of...smooth. "All right. Not bad."

"Have I ever lied to you?"

Users Review

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