

Jenny excels at depicting small-town life, and this novel showcases her talent. But even in the charm of small-town living, there are those who want more. Jenny excels in showing that, too, in this sweet heart-warmer.

— LINDA W. YEZAK, AWARD-WINNING  
AUTHOR OF CHRISTIAN FICTION

Jenny Carlisle weaves romance, suspense, and faith into a heartwarming tapestry. From the beginning I was captivated by John K. and Faith's challenges, wondering "how will they find their happily-ever-after?" What a wonderful reminder that God really does work all things together for our good

— DEBBI MIGHT, AWARD-WINNING AUTHOR  
OF THE JUSTICE, MONTANA SERIES



FAITH  
MOVES MOUNTAINS  
CROSSROADS BOOK TWO



JENNY CARLISLE



Scrivenings  
PRESS

Quench your thirst for story.

[www.ScriveningsPress.com](http://www.ScriveningsPress.com)

©2023 Jenny Carlisle

Published by Scrivenings Press LLC  
15 Lucky Lane  
Morrilton, Arkansas 72110  
<https://ScriveningsPress.com>

Printed in the United States of America

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—for example, electronic, photocopy and recording— without the prior written permission of the publisher. The only exception is brief quotation in printed reviews.

Paperback ISBN 978-1-64917-266-2

eBook ISBN 978-1-64917-267-9

Editors: Amy R. Anguish and K. Banks

Cover by Linda Fulkerson, [www.bookmarketinggraphics.com](http://www.bookmarketinggraphics.com).

All characters are fictional, and any resemblance to real people, either factual or historical, is purely coincidental.

*To James, my best friend and forever hero.*



## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow.

My husband, James has never been in the military, or had the desire to be a firefighter. He is, however, the type who can't sit still. He is not afraid of tackling any project or finding the person who will perform it to his standards. I think John K. Billings would eventually be the guy in the neighborhood that everyone comes to with the smallest or largest problem, just like my wonderful hubby. I thank God every day for sending him my way.

Social media, when used properly, can be the spark that keeps my mind active. Thanks to Facebook friend Kim Zweygardt for sharing a story about a huge piece of farm equipment that got my wheels turning, and ultimately exploding (LOL).

This book would not exist without my God-sent critique partner, Julane Hiebert. Her constant prodding mixed with encouragement helped Faith and John K. come to life and cross the finish line just in time. She is a full-circle friend, since I met her in my childhood hometown of Pittsburg, Kansas.

Thanks to Megan Poole for her rodeo queen expertise, Tonya Ashley for insights into rural firefighter life, and Candace West Posey for help with traveling combine crews.

I never expected the "local celebrity" treatment after my first novel was released. Thanks to Elisha Morrison at the Saline Courier, Shelli Poole and Krystal Goodman at

MySaline.com and Alan Robinette at the Saline County Library for making a little girl's starry-eyed dreams come true.

Always, hugs to my six(counting spouses) kids and eight grandkids for keeping my perspective young. Granny loves those weekly video calls!



# 1



John K. Billings bumped the back door open with his shoulder. He stomped most of the loose mud from his running shoes, then kicked them off on a doormat. His sweaty T-shirt plopped into the hamper. The men in the family laughed when Mom called this little space the mud room. His youngest brother Cody always said nobody told the mud to stay in its room, especially in the rainy month of May in Arkansas. Didn't stop Mom from trying, though.

After padding through the larger living area he stepped into the tiny bathroom between the two bedrooms, rubbing his stubbly cheek. A shave would feel great. Many of his army buddies skipped this grooming step when they came home, but it was good to be able to recognize himself when he looked in the mirror. Relatively short hair, clean face. Yep. Almost like the old John Kennedy Billings. At least on the outside.

He whistled a little tune as he searched under the sink for the shaving cream and reached with his right hand to open the hot water spigot. Nice to have these little creature comforts,

even in a hunting cabin. Wait. Where was the new razor he'd bought on his last trip to town? Outside in the truck, of course. He turned the water off. Should he find a clean pair of shoes for the short trip outside? Wouldn't take too long to get that razor. He sprinted to the front door and down the steps to the driver's side of his old pickup.

With the door open, he reached across the seat for the plastic bag he'd left there. A deafening boom rocked the vehicle. Jumping down from the driver's side, he ran without looking back. No more sounds came from the house, but he kept going, instinctively feeling for his cell phone in the pocket of his shorts.

Sharp rocks jabbed the soles of his stockinged feet, but he scrambled up the hill toward a dilapidated shack that had provided shelter for random hunters for longer than anyone could remember. The last few yards to the top of the hill demanded a slower pace, but he climbed on, never looking back until he reached the crumbling front stoop.

What just happened? He tried to collect his thoughts while looking around for the rest of his army unit. Were they okay? Was anyone hurt in the explosion?

He sat down on the concrete stoop. His heart pounded. Cradling his head in his hands, he willed his mind to clear. Flashing images of smoke and flames bombarded his brain. Screams and confused shouts echoed in his ears. He fought the urge to get up and run again, as a gentle gust of wind through the pines reminded him this was Arkansas, not Afghanistan.

Instead of the blazing inferno he expected, a pile of rubble had replaced most of the rooms of the cabin. The hot water tank-turned-missile rested on the gravel driveway next to an azalea bush Mom had planted when they were kids.

His hands shook as he pushed Send on his cell phone to call the last person he had spoken to.

“What’s up?” His brother, O.D., picked up on the first ring.

“You driving?” John K. heard engine noise in the background. No use causing another accident.

“I’ll pull over. You okay?” O.D.’s voice responded with his usual calm tone.

A damp breeze brushed the back of his neck, raising goosebumps on his bare chest. More than the weather caused him to tremble. He shook his head to dispel images of that other explosion.

“Yeah. I ran.”

“You ran? From what?”

Of course, his brother thought he was talking about today. He was talking about today, right? Not that other time?

“The hot water heater. It exploded. Like through the stinkin’ roof!”

“What? You’re kidding. Did you call 9-1-1?”

“There’s no fire. And who hears those calls way out here anyway?” John K. stood, surprised his legs held his weight. Maybe he could collect himself now.

“Well. You got me. I guess you’re calling from the old shack, right?”

The squirt knew him well.

“Yeah.”

“Call nine-one-one anyway. Somebody needs to come check it out. Dad and I will be out there as soon as we can.” O.D.’s general manager voice sounded more natural these days.

“Okay. Thanks.” His brother was younger, but he had tons more common sense. John K. was through trying to argue with O.D.’s instincts to take the lead in the family’s continuing crises. “Oh, and Dee. Bring me some clothes. I’m out here in my shorts and no shoes. Might need to look through the stuff I left at the house or borrow something from Dad or Cody. Your shrimpy stuff won’t fit me.”

“Huh? You’ve always got to get in those digs. Yeah. I’ll bring you some clothes. Try to take care of yourself for a few minutes, soldier boy.”

John K. sank back to the stoop. The returning hero image was a little tarnished today. Attacked by an exploding water heater. Things could be worse, and they had been. He pushed himself to his feet and used his cell again to call for help.

“Nine-one-one, what is your emergency?” There was a hint of excitement in the young voice. She probably didn’t get a lot of calls.

“This is John K. Billings. We have a cabin on the old logging road. My hot water heater just blew through my roof.” No easier way to say it.

“Excuse me?” The girl hesitated. “So, is anyone hurt?”

“No.” He had tried to tell O.D. there was no need to call the fire department. “And no fire. At least not that I can see.”

“Just a moment. I want to connect you to the chief.” She was gone before he could say ‘never mind.’

John K. wobbled from one foot to the other. He wanted to go see how much damage the cabin suffered, but there was usually no phone reception down there. His inspection would have to wait a few more minutes.

“Chief MacDonald.” A gruff voice came on the line.

“Good morning, sir. This is John K. Billings ...” Might as well repeat the whole story again.

“Yeah, Davis’s oldest. So, you’ve had a little water heater problem today?” John K. was grateful the chief had heard at least the first part of the tale.

“Yes, sir. I don’t think there’s any danger, but I haven’t had a chance to really inspect things, yet.” His feet flinched as he paced on the rocks in front of the stoop.

“I’m your nearest neighbor, but I’m in town right now. Someone will be there shortly.”

“Yes, sir.”

“For now, just cut off the power at the breaker box. Wouldn’t want a spark to ignite anything else.”

“Thanks.” John K. peered down toward the house. No need to worry about the breaker box. The wall it used to be attached to was in splinters on the ground.

He began the rocky trek down the hill, wondering how he had made it up here so quickly a few minutes ago. Pure adrenalin. It’s what had kept his baby brother Cody climbing on to the backs of those snorting, heaving bulls he rode. It’s also the explanation for the distance he, himself, had covered after the blast on the other side of the world. Adrenalin had pushed him too far before he even turned around to check on anything or anyone. If only he could summon some now to get him through the aftermath.

At the bottom of the hill, he stopped short. There was now only one way to get into the cabin, and one, two, three pine trees that had stood too close to the house lay on the ground. His heart sank as he noticed one huge tree stretched firmly across the cab of his vintage pickup truck, where he’d stood only a few minutes ago. A larger one had crushed the front porch roof, blocking the door. There was not much of the small parking area in front of the house that wasn’t covered with debris.

“Sorry, old buddy.” Didn’t everyone talk to their trucks? Made as much sense as talking to horses or dogs, right?

As he reached what was left of the front steps, he heard the distant wail of a siren. Then, another joined. The whole Big River County emergency crew most likely wanted to see this sight. Unsure of the security of the rest of the structure, he decided to wait before venturing inside.

“Wow, you weren’t kidding.” Chief MacDonald stepped out of his truck as the siren wore down with a feeble whine.

“Not the kind of thing you make up.” John K. shook his hand. “I couldn’t locate the breaker box.”

“No problem. Just lucky you didn’t store anything flammable next to the water heater.” The chief walked toward the damaged side of the house, kicking aside tin roofing and splintered two by fours.

“Oh, man. Your truck.” The big man removed his baseball cap with proper respect.

“Hopefully, we can fix it up.” John K. liked this guy. No one was injured, so he recognized the important damage that had been done.

A fire truck that looked about as old as his GMC skidded to a stop, followed by two more pickups and a black and white from the sheriff’s office. Vehicles filled the driveway and stretched out into the nearby gravel road. He was glad for the response, but none of them could really help him. Was O.D. on his way with his boots?

The new arrivals walked around the side of the house, stopping to shake their heads as they passed by the pickup. A gleaming bronze club-cab pickup slid in behind the police cars, the passenger side opening and slamming shut.

“John K.! Are you all right?” Faith Caldwell’s long blue-jean-clad legs covered the ground between them quickly.

“Yeah.” Had he expected the Caldwell sisters to be here? Well, after years of their families being connected, he probably should have. “I’m good.” He wished once more for some decent clothes. At least a shirt. Most of the times he had seen Faith lately, she was completely focused on a barrel race, or looking in a mirror to check her flowing blonde hair. “How did you hear about this so fast?”

“You know, these days when you call O.D., you pretty much get Hope too. I was in the truck with her when she heard from

him, so we dashed through Amy Lou's new drive-through and here we are." Faith tucked her hands in her pockets and turned to look at the cabin. "Sheesh. What a mess."

"I've been thinking of doing a little remodeling." John K. attempted a joke. "Gotta love demo day."

"Dee is on his way with some clothes." Hope walked up with her super-sized white paper bag bulging. "I thought you and the first responders might need some breakfast."

"My brother snagged himself an angel." John K. hugged Hope with one arm as she placed a paper wrapped sausage biscuit sandwich in the other.

"How did you get out of this?" Faith walked around toward the front door.

"I wasn't exactly inside. I had run out to the truck for a minute. I wish I'd grabbed a shirt, and maybe put my shoes on." John K. rubbed his bare arms.

"I'm glad you didn't take the time. You can always get more shoes and a shirt." Faith glanced in his direction and quickly looked away, picking up a piece of splintered wood.

He'd heard that God protected fools and children. At twenty-four, he supposed he only qualified for the first category. He closed his eyes for a quick prayer. Credit where credit was due.

"Ma'am." Chief MacDonald walked closer to the three. "Please stay away from the damage. I am sure the insurance inspector will want to see it just as it is."

"Sure." Faith stepped back and reached toward Hope to offer the chief a sausage sandwich. "Would you like one?"

"No thanks. I had breakfast earlier." He stood next to John K. as they both faced the forlorn pickup truck. "Have you called your insurance agent?"

"Haven't given it a thought, yet." John K. searched through

his phone for a number. There was a business card somewhere in his wallet, in the house, which he couldn't enter right now.

"Hey, Mac. What's this boy of mine been up to today?" John K.'s dad slapped the chief on the shoulder as he walked up from O.D.'s truck.

"Luckily, staying alive." Mac shook Dad's hand vigorously.

"Son?" Dad wrapped John K. in a hug. "Did things get too boring out here in the woods?"

"You know me, always looking for excitement." Teasing was their usual M.O. It was good to have his family's support. Lesser folks would have told him to shove off by now. Especially if they knew he wasn't the hero they thought he was.

"Here. These were still in the closet. I've got some jeans and a few more things in the truck." O.D. handed over a pair of tennis shoes, along with a Razorbacks hoodie. Tastes of home. The prodigal couldn't have been happier to get his freshly slaughtered fatted calf.

O.D. pulled Hope into a quick hug. "I should have known you'd beat me here, and with food."

"No problem." Hope squeezed O.D.'s arm.

How long would this newlywed attitude last for these two? He leaned against the fire truck for support to pull on the shoes, then shrugged into the red sweatshirt.

"Yeah, thanks for assisting in the rescue." He smiled at the two sisters. Neither of these girls resembled the tom-boyish next-door neighbors they once were. Hope had stepped into the role of organized mother figure, and Faith was playing up the rodeo queen image for all it was worth. He laughed as she used the dilapidated mirror on his crushed truck to search for something that might be stuck in her teeth.

"We were on the way to return those two big chandeliers



O.D. rented for the wedding reception.” Faith collected paper wrappers from the fire-fighters and dropped them in a bag.

“Aww. I hoped y’all would leave those in the new barn. They were downright elegant.” John K. elbowed O.D.

“Nope. They were just a part of the magic of that fantastic day.” O.D. winked at Hope.

“And I would have been the one to have to clean the crazy things.” Hope tossed her truck keys from one hand to the other. “They’re headed back to Paris, to wait for the next wedding.”

“Yeah, and we need to get them up there. It looks like it might rain before we get back home. At least we didn’t rent them from the real Paris.” Faith walked back to Hope’s new truck.

O.D. looked up at the clouds. “I could have gotten someone else to return them.” He brushed his finger across Hope’s cheek.

“We both kind of wanted to go to Emma’s Wedding Shop again. Every now and then, every girl likes to feel like a princess.” Faith waved from the running board of the truck. “Hey, John K. I’m glad you’re okay.”

“Yeah, me too.” Hope held O.D.’s hand as they strolled toward her vehicle.

John K. smiled at their retreating backs. If you looked up the word “smitten” on a search engine, you’d see their picture. Their wedding had marked the successful restoration of his grandparent’s old house on top of the hill between the Billings and Caldwell ranches. John K. had enjoyed helping with that process. It provided a welcome break from caring for his little brother. No one assumed the road back from a spinal injury would be easy, but Cody’s continued struggles were taking a toll on all of them.

“The insurance adjuster should be here this afternoon.”

Dad's voice refocused his attention to the scene in front of him. "What do you think happened here, Mac?"

"Usually, when a water tank blows, it had a faulty valve, or one that wasn't repaired the right way." The chief walked toward the offending tank, being careful not to touch anything.

"When John K. called about the leak, I called a new plumber who works up this way. He assured me it was an easy fix." Dad ran his fingers through his hair. "I guess he made it too easy."

"Meanwhile, you don't need to go back inside, son." Mac waved as the emergency crews began to leave.

"I guess you'll be coming home for a bit." Dad wasn't trying to hide the hopeful tone in his voice.

"Thanks, but I'd rather stay out here. My camping stuff is in the back of the truck." John K. glanced to the tarp that covered his gear.

"That won't be comfortable for long." Mac looked up at the sky. "This is the rainy season. Sometimes there are some ugly storms in May."

"Yeah. That's crazy. You can stay at home until the work starts here." Dad sounded out of patience.

"Tell you what. I have an old travel trailer that nobody's using right now. You're welcome to set it up here." Mac walked toward the power pole. "You'd have lights, water, a way to cook."

"Hey, that would be great." John K. was still amazed at the kindness of the folks who lived around here. He hadn't really appreciated them so much until he went away for a while.

"We'll pay you rent," Dad spoke up.

"I'll pay the rent. I've picked up some odd jobs." Would his parents never let him grow up? Even after serving in the army?

“We can work something out.” Mac extended his leather glove for a contract-sealing handshake.

“Always. Things just have a way of working out, don’t they?” John K. shook the chief’s hand. But how long would his luck continue? Would God soon get tired of rescuing him from his constant messes?