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# LOGAN AND RONNIE

Along Came Jones Book Three

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MEGAN MCCOY

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## Chapter 1

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**L**ogan Jones looked around the dimly lit bar. This was a strange place for a job interview, but he didn't really mind that as much as he minded she'd set the time and yet was half an hour late. He picked up his sweet tea and sipped it, debating how much longer he'd wait. He still had a long day ahead of him, but decided to wait another fifteen minutes. When was the last time he allowed himself to just sit and relax? Building a business from scratch was a lot of work, but he loved it. From the time he was a toddler, he'd had one goal in mind for his life, and that was to run his father's huge farm equipment empire. Three years ago, that dream had been dashed when his dad sold the company. He and his brothers who had been raised living, breathing and working in the stores had all been thrown for a loop.

His older brother Henry, who had been his dad's right hand man and everyone's pick for taking over, actually took off. He sold his house, and he and his wife, Riley, were down in Florida where they now owned a yacht that they used to take rich people out on excursions. He seemed to love it.

Sebastian, who had been the clean-up man for the company,

coming in and taking over struggling stores to put them on the right track, now owned a company that sold baseball and softball uniforms and equipment. His wife, Maggie, was a teacher and played semi-pro ball.

Lucas, his twin brother worked for the new company that had bought Jones' Farm Equipment, and seemed to be rising in their ranks.

He'd started a business management company, putting his Master's degree to work, and now employed over a dozen people and was trying to hire a new client. Veronica Fischer had inherited a chain of upscale shoe stores from her father, but unlike the Jones boys who were put to work pushing brooms as soon as they were old enough to hold one, had never worked in the stores. Not even the three here in town. He couldn't imagine. The only job she'd ever held, she'd told him on the phone was in a small florist shop and she'd gotten fired from there within a few months.

Logan didn't think that was anything to be proud of, but she seemed to be. She was also, not surprisingly, struggling with the stores, and seemed to have no clue what she was doing and decided to hire a management company. Well, he could have helped her with that, but unlike her, he had places to go and people to see and had sat here twiddling his thumbs long enough.

He motioned to the waitress and pulled his wallet out to pay for his drink. Of course, right then the bell over the bar door jangled and a small woman with very wildly colored mostly blonde hair rushed in looking around quickly, then calling out, "Logan? Logan Smith?" as if she was too important to ask the hostess or wait to be seated, or even to remember his name.

Raising his hand, he waved her over, already feeling a sinking sensation in his stomach. This wouldn't be a fun meeting. If he didn't like her, he decided, he would just tell her he' declined the offer. Life was too short to deal with drama and as she got closer and he saw her blonde hair streaked with blue and red and shimmering with some sort of glitter, he thought she might be. Espe-

cially, when she caught the waitress by the arm and said, “Bring me a Long Island Iced Tea, would ya, hon?” Then plopped onto the bench seat across from him and said, “It’s just too damn hot out there.”

Fanning herself with her bar napkin, she said, “Are you the boss? You look too young to be the boss. I said I wanted to meet with the top man, only.”

Logan sighed inwardly, but smiled at her, “I get that a lot. Logan Jones.” He knew that between his mom’s good genes, his longer than usual shaggy hair and small scruff of beard he looked like the college kid he’d been a few years ago.

“Hi, Logan, I’m Ronnie,” she smiled and he noticed a deep dimple that seemed out of place with her brittle and almost harsh demeanor. He also noticed she didn’t say a word about being late. Taking a deep breath, he said, “Good to meet you. I heard you’re looking for a management company.”

“Oh, hon, I’m too hot to talk business until I get a drink in me, Miss, Miss? Do you have my drink?” She leaned over and confided, “I’m from a small town, Blizzard, South Dakota, and I’m just not used to this kind of heat.”

“Illinois weather is different,” he agreed. “You get used to it after a while.”

She laughed, and once again, he was struck by the difference in her musical laugh and appearance. Ronnie was an odd duck and for some reason he felt a little intrigued despite his better judgement. The waitress brought her drink and she said, “Thanks, hon, make sure I get another one of these before this one is empty, would you?” She noticed Logan’s empty glass, “And bring him another of what he had.”

“Sweet tea,” he reminded the waitress with a smile and vowed to leave a really large tip.

“Oh, put something in that, hon! We’re having a business meeting and need to get to know each other,” Ronnie called too loudly, and Logan wondered if that was her first Long Island

Iced Tea today. He shook his head slightly at the waitress who nodded in understanding.

She took a long sip of her drink and looked up at him, “So, tell me about yourself.”

“I started my business almost three years ago. I sent you a list of my references,” he started but she interrupted with a wave of her hand.

“Oh, I know all that. I checked out your company and your references. Tell me about you. You married? Seeing anyone?”

Logan knew his business didn’t depend on her, so he leaned back and said, calmly, “You first.”

Ronnie looked startled as if she hadn’t been questioned before. “This is a very hands-on business. I need to know who I’m working with,” he said, picking up the tea glass the waitress just put down. “Thank you,” he told her.

Ronnie took another long pull on her straw and said, “Well, I’m divorced and it wasn’t my idea. My dad left me his shoe stores when he passed away, and I’ve never run a business before.” Logan held his hand up. “No, not about your business, about you.”

Once again, she looked uncertain and he liked that look on her. She looked younger, less hard. Almost as if the hardness were a cloak she wore. “How old are you?” he asked abruptly.

“What?” She looked shocked and her dark eyebrows rose. He wondered if they were real.

“Age. It’s just a number. What is it?” Being in control suited him and he wasn’t going to let her think she could run over him. It simply wasn’t happening.

“Not yet thirty,” she mumbled and sipped her drink again while motioning to the waitress for another. Already. “You?”

“That doesn’t matter,” he said, firmly. “Have any kids?”

She shook her head and he stifled a grin, realizing he’d made her all but mute.

“I know you’re divorced. In a relationship?”

She shook her head. “I don’t think that has anything to do with your ability to work for me.” She squared her shoulders and looked him in the eye.

“You’re right, it doesn’t.” He smiled at her.

Ronnie bristled as if she knew he’d been playing her, then looked him in the eyes, took a deep breath and leaned back. “You know what, Logan Jones? I think we will make a pretty good team. Would you like to come by my office tomorrow and sign a contract?”

Logan stood up, and said, “I’ll let you know tomorrow. Did you drive here?” He felt a sense of relief when she shook her head. “Good. Make sure to all a cab when you leave, if you drink the other one of those. I need to go to work.”

Giving a fifty to the waitress, he walked out the door, wondering what he’d just gotten himself into. She would keep him on his toes, at the very least, probably drive him crazy and for some odd reason, he was really looking forward to the challenge that was Ronnie Fischer.

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RONNIE SAT THERE and sipped at her drink as she watched him walk away from what had to be the shortest interview ever. What had just happened? Had that blond man, who looked like he was still in college, just bested her at her own game? She’d found since her divorce if she came on strong and confident, brass and ballsy, she often got her own way. Sure, sometimes it took a few drinks to do that, but she got so she didn’t mind that at all anymore. In fact, she liked the warm powerful feeling a few drinks gave her. She didn’t like the feeling he gave her, though, as if he were her boss. No. She had one man telling her what to do for years and she didn’t like being a doormat. When he’d dumped her, telling her she was boring—boring—of all things, she’d decided never to be boring again, and never to have

another man telling her what to do. Sure, she'd floundered for a while, trying to find where she fit into life without a man, without a real career, but then her father had left her his shoe stores.

Ronnie knew she was not stupid and that she'd been given a huge opportunity, one most people would love to have, and she planned to make these stores support her in the manner to which she'd like to become accustomed. It might take some work but hiring Logan Smith, no, Logan Jones, was the first step in managing that. She had a trust fund coming, but only if she made a success of her stores. She didn't think that was fair, but the lawyer assured her it was legal. Her daddy who had spoiled her all her life apparently thought she should work for a living. Imagine that. If he wasn't dead, she'd give him a piece of her mind. But the silly will said nothing about not turning it over to a management company. Her dad probably didn't even know such a thing existed.

Sighing, she picked up her second drink, finished it quickly, and after a short debate with herself motioned for the waitress for the check.

"Your friend already paid," she was informed and Ronnie grabbed her purse so she could leave. She needed to swing by her store and see if they'd figured out their personnel problem. Frowning, she wondered why her dad thought she could just take over these stores with no training or anything. Maybe she should just put them up for sale. She kept having this fight with herself. Her tax lady told her that would be a stupid move, and her lawyer told her that the trust wouldn't go to her if she sold them before ten years. Sure, she'd get a quick influx of cash that might last her ten or twenty years, but she was young yet, how would she support herself the rest of her life, they both asked her. She quipped back that she would land a rich man by then. The woman had given her such an icy stare that Ronnie vowed to run the business for ten years, build them up, sell them, and retire before forty. Most people dreamed of that and she'd been given



an opportunity. That was the plan unless, of course, she met that rich man who wanted to take care of her for life. She couldn't wait to hand over the reins to someone else, someone who knew what they were doing. Two months in and she'd had two of her three managers here in town quit, over a dozen shop people had walked out and despite reminding herself that people in retail turned over often and quickly, she'd grown frustrated. She didn't want to work in the shops, she wanted to sit back and collect the checks while someone else did the down and dirty. So far that wasn't working out real well for her, but almost hiring Logan Smith, Jones, how hard could that be, was a step in the right direction. She'd researched his company thoroughly. Being good on the computer, she quickly found out he was all his resume said he was. His company was young but had great reviews and results. She needed some new, fresh blood, a young up and comer who wanted to prove his worth to her. He'd make these stores what they were a few years ago before her dad got sick.

If he could come in, hire some really good managers who could hire good people, and then one other person to oversee her managers and their stores, she'd be good to collect those checks. He needed to, well, she had a list someone needed to work on. Someone who was not her. She stretched her leg out and looked at the three-hundred-dollar pumps on her feet.

There were some perks to this job, of course. Shoes. What girl didn't love shoes? Ronnie admired her feet; she did have pretty feet and expensive shoes just made them more attractive. Her dad always said the first thing people noticed about you were your shoes. Was that true? She tended to notice a nice smile, especially on men, but she did know if it sold more shoes for people to think that, she'd be telling them that repeatedly and wearing the best shoes her stores could provide. It was advertisement and her duty, her job. The fact her job was wearing pretty shoes was not her fault. If only that was her only job. She didn't like any of the rest of it.

She walked the three blocks to her store, showing off her shoes with every step and wishing she had a shirt with her name on it so people would know where she got them. Not that she would wear it, of course, that seemed a little tacky, a thing people like mechanics did, not her. However, she could make the people at her stores wear them. They had to do anything she told them to do, after all. She would need to order some. Maybe her new guy would do that for her. She'd needed a guy, all her life, someone to do for her, take her orders instead of her taking his, but she just never knew it until Logan walked in, and now that was all she wanted. Him to take over her business. Just her business, she told herself, turning the last corner and enjoying the click of her heels. Nothing more. She was not attracted to young, blond men who were looking for work. She'd vowed if she ever wanted another man in her life, he'd be very old and very rich and she'd let him die happy on their honeymoon. Well, after he signed a new will, of course. The shaggy haired, blond boy in sneakers was not what she wanted, even though he was sort of hot. As long as he was good at his job, it didn't matter, though. She wouldn't ruin a good working relationship by using his body for her pleasure. Nope. Sex was overrated anyway, she'd found. Why was she even thinking of this?

Taking a deep breath, she wished she had another drink as she walked into her store. The only employee she could see was the part-time high school girl. Maybe the manager was in the back? Sarah had been assistant manager last week but got promoted when the manager had quit after she'd tried to explain how she was doing her job wrong. They were her stores and needed to be run like she wanted them to be. How hard was that concept?

Ronnie looked around and smiled to see about ten customers in the store, that must be a good thing. However, she frowned when the high school girl—Tiffany? Brittany?—came up to her and said, “Sarah quit and I'm done. Good luck,” and sailed right

on out the shop's door. Open mouthed she stared after her and three customers started clamoring for attention. So she was the only one here until nine tonight? Not happening. She wasn't even certain she knew how to run the cash register, and she knew she didn't want to deal with anyone's smelly feet. Making a rash decision, she announced loudly, "Due to a gas leak, this store is closing immediately. Thank you for coming and please safely exit out the front door." She began ushering people out, ignoring their groans and moans of protests. Frowning, she thought of all the lost sales, but gas leak! What could she do? Safety first!

Three minutes later, she was alone in the now empty store, locked the door, and turned out the lights. So she had another manager quit. Just what she needed. Why did they have to do this to her? Going to her locker in the back room, she fumbled for her keys. She'd found out quickly she needed a locker to store her needful things. This store was a hub in town, and she was here most often, though hopefully not much longer. She found a locker here very handy. These teenage girls, who came and went so quickly, didn't need one like she did. What did they have of importance? After unlocking it, she took out a small bottle, unscrewed it and took a big swallow. Damn, she needed that. There was nothing more lovely than the feel of fire flowing through her veins and into her brain. Those two Long Island Iced Teas must have been really weak to lose their effect already.

Leaning back, she ran her fingers through her blue and red streaks and wondered what she should do tomorrow. Green streaks? Maybe just bright red hair? Yeah, that might work. She'd sleep on it and decide. Right now, she'd go to bed, no, go home and go to bed and think about things tomorrow. Who worked here now? Well, she'd figure that out tomorrow, too. She did not like having to deal with these kinds of things and once again a flash of irritation at her father went through her. What was he thinking?

Tomorrow, all her problems would still be here, but maybe

she'd have a clearer head and hopefully, Logan to help her. Ronnie closed and locked her locker and walked to the front of the dark store. Opening the register to count the money, which was easier than actually taking the money from people, she decided she couldn't remember the safe combination, to put the money away, took another drink from her small bottle, shuddered as it went down, and walked away. She'd remember the combination of the safe in the morning, too.

Looking up at the clock on the wall, she saw it wasn't even four in the afternoon yet. Could she go to bed by five? Taking another sip of her drink, she texted Uber and set up a ride for half an hour. No way was she doing the books tonight, not that she knew how to do the books or the end of night reports or anything, but she'd come in tomorrow and see what kind of mess there was, and maybe someone would be here working. Just show up and decide they wanted to do the actual job they were hired to do, it was like a concept! It could happen! Tomorrow was a new day, and hopefully would be a better one.

Right now, the only thing she wanted to do was talk to Logan Sm-Logan Jones. Jones, she repeated to herself and started humming the song. "Along came Jones, slow talking Jones." Were those the words? She couldn't remember and picked up her phone to call him and ask. Oh, she didn't have his number. Just that of his company. Oh well, she probably shouldn't call him anyway. At least her head was clear enough to remember not to do that. No drunk dialing for this girl! Maybe those Long Island Iced Teas were stronger than she thought.

Looking around her messy store as she walked to the front door, she vowed to be there as soon as she got up tomorrow, to clean it and get it ready for the day. If no one was here to work, she'd have to borrow someone or a couple someones from the other stores to cover in here. She was the boss over them all, right? She could do that. Why had the girl quit? How hard could it be to help people try on shoes? That Al guy on TV did

it every day. Yeah, she'd color her hair red tomorrow like his TV wife, and get some ridiculously high heels too. Sipping the last of the bottle, she dropped it in her purse so that no one would find it in the trash, went to the back, and double-checked that she'd locked her locker. The Uber driver should be here soon.

Ronnie walked to the front door, and leaned against it, watching the people busily walking around the bustling street. This store was in a good location, there was no reason it shouldn't do well. Why wasn't it? Well, maybe it was, how would she know? She didn't understand the books or the reports. She didn't know how things worked. Maybe she should take a class? How would she have time to take a class? She had a chain of stores to run and unruly, untrustworthy employees to watch over. That was too much work. No one could be expected to do more than that.

Logan and his band of merry workers was the only thing that could save her and she clutched on to them as if they were a life-line. She'd be calling them as soon as they opened in the morning, get that contract signed and hand over the reins. It would be the best thing that ever happened, she just knew it. Oh, there was her driver. She hurried to the car, and settled in the back seat. It wouldn't be long before she was home.

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LOGAN WALKED BACK into his office, waving at Tony, his right hand man whom he'd stolen from his dad's office when it shut down. "How'd it go, boss man?" Tony asked. "She signed on the dotted line?"

"I told her I'd get back with her tomorrow. She'll be a challenging client, more than a handful. I'm going to have to think on it." Logan sat down at the desk across from Tony.

"We're in a bit of a lull here," Tony reminded him. "We need

some new clients. Because I'm so great at what I do, we're twiddling our thumbs, waiting on you to sign more clients."

"She's got three upscale shoe stores here in town, and four more out of state, that she inherited and has utterly no clue how to run them. I'm pretty sure she wants a crash course in business management as well as help to set up handbooks, a bookkeeping system, training manuals, we'd be starting from the ground up." Logan thought of her dimple and for some reason that made him smile.

Tony misinterpreted his smile, "But you love a challenge, right, boss man?"

Logan looked at him and said, "When you do the contract, we need about twenty bucks more an hour than our usual rate. She's going to make us work for every penny."

"I can do that," Tony said.

"Then I want to add some things to it when you get it done, so just forward it to me and I'll finish it up." That thought made him smile again.

"Sure thing, boss. Oh, Sebastian called, needs you to call him back when you can."

Logan got up and went to his small office off the front room to call his brother back. He talked to his twin, Lucas, every day, but Bastien and Hank didn't call that often.

"Hey, brother," Sebastian answered on the first ring.

"What's going on there?" Logan asked.

"I'm fine, how are you?" Bastien said.

"Sorry, you just don't call that often," Logan said. "How are you? How's my sister-in-law?"

"Good. Championship game is in a few weeks, so she's practicing all the time."

"Tell her I said good luck. Let me know when and where and if I can, I'll try to make one of the games," Logan said. "Is that why you called?"

"No," his brother said, "but it's not bad news. Mom got

accepted in some trial program and they are going to be in France for the duration of it.” Their mom had an aggressive form of cancer, which was why his dad had sold his company. Whatever it took to get her the best treatment, and that took money.

“When are they leaving?” Logan asked, wondering if he had time to see them before they left for who knew how long.

“Not for a couple weeks. I was hoping I could get you and Lucas to come up for a family dinner before they went. They’re going to fly to Florida on the way to see Hank and Riley.”

“I will make the time,” Logan promised. “Just let me know what day is good for you all.” Nothing was more important than family, and with their mom sick, well; they all did whatever they could to be together when they could.

“I’ll let you know as soon as I make the reservations,” Bastien promised.

Logan hung up and sighed, then texted Lucas to update him, in case Bastien hadn’t already gotten hold of him.

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RONNIE WOKE to the sound of her phone ringing. Looking around groggily, she realized she was on the couch in her living room. Yeah, she remembered coming home now. Who was calling her? Luckily the phone stopped ringing and she shut her eyes again, relieved, until it started up again. “No,” she mumbled. Who was it, and what time was it? Fumbling, she grabbed her phone and saw it was eleven p.m. and Brinks Alarm. That shot a little bit of fear through her, and chased the fog from her brain, or most of it. “Hello?” she finally answered.

“Ms. Fischer?”

“Yes,” she confirmed, wishing her head didn’t hurt.

“There’s been a break-in at your store on Second Street. We’ve called the police and they are on the scene.”

“What?”

The news didn't change the second time she heard it. That was where she'd just been a few hours ago. “I'll be right down,” she said. Stretching slowly, she went to the kitchen for a drink of juice, and a couple aspirin, then to the bathroom, and finally to her bedroom to find some clothes. Could she drive? She hadn't had a drink since five, which was over six hours ago, she should be okay. After slipping into yellow pants with a red and yellow top, she pulled on some sandals and admired her pedicure. Why did she have to go down to the store? What could she do? That should be the manager's job, oh, yeah, she'd quit. No one ever thought about her, when they did their own selfish thing. Giving her teeth a quick brush, she grabbed her purse and headed to the garage. Her phone rang as she got into the car, the alarm company again.

“Ma'am are you on your way? The police want to know.”

“I'll be there in about ten minutes,” she assured them. Annoying. What could she do, anyway? She wasn't a police person. Why couldn't they just handle it? Did no one do their jobs anymore? It wasn't like, as her dad used to say, their job was rocket surgery, or anything.

She parked across the street from her store and got out, looking at all the blue and red flashing lights, and ran her fingers through her hair as she walked across the street, feeling a little apprehensive. Squaring her shoulders, she took a deep breath and put on her attitude cloak. There would be nothing she couldn't handle, she reminded herself. She'd probably sign a few papers and then call the insurance company in the morning. The stores were insured, right? There was just an overwhelming amount of things she didn't know.

“Ma'am?” An older policeman walked over to her.

“I'm Ronnie Fischer,” she held her hand out for him to shake. “This is my store, the alarm company called.”

“Yes, ma'am. Can I see some ID, please?” he asked.



Rolling her eyes, she unlatched her purse and fumbled for her wallet. Her fingers clutched a small bottle and she remembered she'd put it in there earlier. Hastily, she dropped it and grabbed her wallet, carefully, closing her purse before opening her wallet to show him her driver's license.

"I don't care about this right now," he said, "but for your information, that license expired two months ago. You should get that taken care of as soon as possible."

"I certainly will, thank you, Officer." She dropped the wallet back in her large purse on top of the small bottle, and said, "So what happened? Did you catch them?"

"Yes, ma'am, a couple of juvies from the neighborhood. They've been in trouble around here before. Said they found the door unlocked and just walked in. The register was open and they helped themselves, to the money and a couple pair of sneakers."

Ronnie willed herself not to react. She'd been the last one in the store, and she'd opened the register so she could count it. Had she locked up when she left? Trying to recall, she remembered leaning against the door and waiting for the Uber, but then not much else.

"Oh, no," she said, weakly. "Can I go in?"

"We have the security tapes," he told her. "We'll need to know who the last one here was; we have someone reviewing the security tapes now."

There were security tapes? In her store? Why didn't she know this? Where and what had they seen? Was there one in the back room where she'd been drinking? Why should she know? It was only her store, after all. She was the owner, who apparently didn't need to know about things like security cameras and tapes and managers who quit, and, oh, no, her insurance company. Would they pay since she... Ronnie shook her head and tried not to think about things. How had something like this happened to her?

All she wanted to do was go back home, and get in her lovely new bed with the soft thick mattress, and fancy, new, girly-pink rose bedspread and cover her head and not come out for over a week, then call her tax lady and tell her she was selling these stores. She was not meant to be a boss, a store owner, a business person, or to be standing out here in the middle of the night talking to cops.

“Ma’am, do you know who the last one here was? The door was unlocked and maybe this was an inside job. Probably just one of opportunity, but we need to cover all the options.” He waited expectantly as Ronnie waited for the floor to swallow her. It didn’t, of course. Stupid floors, never did anything you wanted them to do. Was lying an option? It was, of course, but a stupid one if there were tapes. Would they see her drinking in the back room? Well, she was an adult and allowed to drink, especially in her own store and even more so since she didn’t drive home.

She pulled her shoulders back and looked down at her expensive sandals, and then up into the officer’s eyes as she said loudly enough for anyone to hear, “That would be me,” as she felt her temper rise. How dare he? She wasn’t sure what he was daring to do, but, how dare he anyway. She’d teach him to mess with her! No man would make her feel less than, ever again. She would make sure they knew that.