



Time Out & Body Check

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Editorial Review

About the Author

New York Times and USA Today bestselling author **Jill Shalvis** is the award winning author of over three dozen romance novels. Visit www.jillshalvis.com for a complete book list and a daily blog chronicling her I-Love-Lucy attempts at having it all; the writing, the kids, a life ...

A RITA-award nominated author, Elle Kennedy grew up in the suburbs of Toronto, Ontario, and holds a B.A. in English from York University. From an early age, she knew she wanted to be a writer, and actively began pursuing that dream when she was a teenager. Elle currently publishes with Silhouette Romantic Suspense and Harlequin Blaze. She loves strong heroines and sexy alpha heroes, and just enough heat and danger to keep things interesting!

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As always, Rainey's brain was full, too full, but one thought kept rising to the top and wouldn't leave her alone. "Tell me again," she asked Lena. "Why do we like men?"

Her best friend and wingman—even though Lena was no longer technically single—laughed. "Oh, honey. We don't have enough time."

They both worked at the beleaguered North District Rec Center in Santa Rey, a small mid-California beach town. Lena handled the front desk. Rainey was the junior sports coordinator, and today she was running their biweekly car wash to raise funds for their desperate sports program. Sitting on a stool in the driveway of the rec building's parking lot, Rainey directed cars in and accepted customers' money, then sent them through to the teenagers who were doing the washing. She kept her laptop out for the slow times. In between cars she'd been working on the upcoming winter sports schedule while simultaneously discussing all things men. Rainey was nothing if not a most excellent multitasker.

And maybe the slightest bit of a control freak.

"I thought you were going to try that online dating service," Lena said.

"I did. I got lots of offers for hookups."

Lena laughed. "Well, what were you looking for?"

Coffee, a few laughs, a connection... A *real* connection, which Rainey was missing lately. Her last two boyfriends had been great but...not great enough. Lena thought she was picky. In truth, Rainey was looking for something that she'd felt only once before, a very long time ago, when she'd been sixteen and stupid.

"Men suck."

"Mmm," Lena said. "If they're very good, they do. Listen, you've had a dry spell, is all. Get back in the pool, the water's warm."

"I haven't had a dry spell, I've just been busy." Okay, so she'd had a little bit of a dry spell. She'd been spending a lot of time at work, trying to keep the teens in the North District—the forgotten district—out of trouble. That alone was a full-time job. She turned to the next car. Mrs. Foster had the highest beehive in all

the land, and had been Rainey's fourth grade teacher. "Thanks for supporting the rec center's car wash," Rainey said.

"You're welcome." Her beehive, bluer now than ever, still quivered. "I was going to go to South District since they're giving away ten-minute back massages with each wash, but I'm glad I didn't. I overheard about your dry spell, dear. Let me get you a date with my grandson, Kyle."

Great. A pity date. "No, that's—"

"He's quite the catch, you know," Mrs. Foster said. "I'll have him call your mother for your number."

"Really, it's not necessary—" But Mrs. Foster was already driving forward, where her car was immediately attended to by a group of Rainey's well-behaved teens.

Okay, not all that well-behaved. Rainey had coerced them here on threat of death and dismemberment, but they desperately needed the money if they wanted a baseball and softball season.

"Score on Mrs. Foster's grandson," Lena said dryly.

"Think Kyle still has buck teeth?"

"My mom won't give him my number." Probably. Okay, she totally would. Rainey had gone to school with Kyle, so her mother would think him safe enough. Plus, she'd turned thirty last week and now her mom was on a mission to get her married before it was "too late." Hot and sweaty, Rainey swiped her forehead. It might be only June, but it was ninety degrees, and she'd been sitting out here for hours. Her Anaheim Ducks ball cap shaded her face for the most part but she could feel that she'd still managed to sunburn her nose, and her sunglasses kept slipping down her damp face.

They'd fed the teens pizza about an hour ago, and the kids were using the fuel to scrub cars and squirt each other every chance they got. They were down a few bodies since Rainey had kicked four of the guys out, the same four who always gave her trouble. They'd been trying to coerce one of the younger teen girls into the woods with them.

Even long before the fires had devastated Santa Rey the previous summer, the North District had been steadily deteriorating, and that core group of four were hell-bent on deteriorating right along with the area. Working at the rec center was far more than a job for Rainey. She genuinely cared about this community and the kids, but those boys had no interest in her help. She couldn't allow them back, not after today, and given that they'd called her a raging bitch as they'd vacated the premises, the hard feelings were mutual.

"Rick promised to take me out to dinner tonight," Lena said.

Rick was a lifelong friend of Rainey's as well as her boss, and also Lena's boyfriend. "Huh," she said. "He promised me some summer league coaches." Coaches who wouldn't quit when the going got rough, like the volunteer coaches tended to do. "It's three days before the start of the season."

"He's on it," Lena said, just as the man himself walked by, all dark eyes, dark hair, and a dark smile that never failed to get him what he wanted.

He flashed it at Rainey now. "I promised," Rick said.

"And I'll deliver."

"Great," Rainey said. "But *when*—"

But nothing. He'd given Lena a quick, soft smile and was already gone, back inside the building to wield his power there.

"I hate it when he does that," Rainey grumbled.

Lena sighed dreamily. "If he hadn't tasked me with a hundred things more than I have time to manage this morning, I'd totally want to have his babies."

"Honey, you're dating him. You've been dating him for a year now. Chances are decent that you *will* be having his babies."

Lena beamed, ridiculously happy. Rainey wasn't jealous. Yes, Rick was hot, but they were friends, and had been since high school. Because of it, they knew far too much about each other. For instance, Rainey knew Rick had lost his virginity behind the high school football stands with their substitute P.E. teacher. In turn, Rick knew that Rainey had *tried* to lose her virginity with his brother—the last guy she'd felt that elusive connection with—and been soundly rejected. At the humiliating years-old memory, she slumped in her seat. "What if my dry spell is like the Sahara Desert, neverending?"

"All you have to do is take a man at face value. Don't go into it thinking you can change them. Men aren't fixer-uppers, not like a house or a car. You buy them as is."

"Well I haven't found one yet who's not in need of a little fixing."

Lena laughed. "No kidding, Ms. Control Freak."

"Hey."

"Face it, Rainey, you always have to have a plan with a start, a middle and an end. Definitely an end. You have to know everything before you even get into it. Dating doesn't work that way."

"Well, it should." Rainey gestured the next car through, accepting the money and handing out more change. The teens were moving the cars along at a good pace, and she was proud of them. "Everyone could benefit from a well executed plan."

"A love life doesn't work that way," Lena said. "And trust me, you need a love life."

"You can get a love life in a specialty shop nowadays, complete with a couple of batteries." Rainey took a moment to organize the cash box and quickly checked her work email on the laptop. "Thirty new emails," she groaned. All timely and critical, and she'd have to deal with them before the end of the day. Goody.

"I could help you with some of that," Lena offered.

"I've got it."

"See? Control freak."

Ignoring that painful truth, Rainey deleted a few emails and opened a few others. She loved her job, and was doing what she wanted. She'd gone to business school but she'd come back here to do this, to work with kids in need, and to give back. The work was crazy in the best of times. But these days, in the wake of the tragic California coast fires that had destroyed three out of four of their athletic fields last fall, not to mention both buildings where all their equipment had been housed, were not the best of times. Worse, the lease for the building they were in was up at the end of the year and they couldn't afford renewal.

Problem was, she had a hundred kids, many of them displaced from their own burned-out homes. She wanted to give them something to do after school that didn't involve loitering, shoplifting, drugs or sex. She'd just started to close her laptop when her gaze caught on the Yahoo news page. Hitting the volume key, she stared at a sports clip showing a seedy bar fight between some NHL players from the Anaheim Ducks and Sacramento Mammoths.

The clip had been playing all week, because...well, she hadn't figured out why, other than people seemed to love a sports scandal. The video was little more than a pile of well-known professional athletes wrestling each other to the ground in some L.A. bar, fists flying, dust rising.

Rainey gestured another car through, then turned back to the screen, riveted by the million-dollar limbs and titillating show of testosterone. On the day the footage had been taken, the two teams had been in the Stanley Cup finals. The game had been decided on a controversial call in favor of the Ducks, killing the Mammoths' dreams.

That night at the bar, the Mammoth players had instigated the fight, holding their own against four Ducks until their head coach strode up out of nowhere. At thirty-four, Mark Diego was the youngest, most popular NHL head coach in the country.

And possibly even more gorgeous than his brother Rick.

On the tape, Mark's eyes narrowed in on the fight as he walked fearlessly into the fray, pulling his players out of the pile as though they weighed nothing. A fist flew near his face and he deflected it, leveling the sender of said fist a long, hard look.

The guy fell backwards trying to get away.

"That's the sexiest thing I've ever seen," Lena murmured, watching the clip over Rainey's shoulder.

Yeah. Yeah, it was. Rainey had seen Mark in action before, of course. He and Rick were close. And once upon a time, she'd been just as close, having grown up near the brothers. Back then, Mark had been tough, smart, and fiercely protective of those he cared about. He'd also had a wild streak a mile wide, and she'd seen him brawl plenty. It'd turned her on then, but it absolutely didn't now. She was grown-up, mature.

Or so she told herself in the light of day.

On the screen, hands on hips, Mark said something, something quiet but that nevertheless had the heaving mass of aggression screeching to a halt.

"Oh, yeah. Come to mamma," Lena murmured. "Look at him, Rainey. Tall, dark, gorgeous. *Fearless*. I wouldn't mind him exerting his authority on me."

Rainey's belly quivered, and not because she'd inhaled three pieces of pizza with the teens an hour ago. Mark was no longer a wild teenager, but a tightly controlled, complicated man. A stranger. How he "exerted his authority" was none of her business. "Lena, you're dating his brother." Just speaking about Mark had twisted open a wound in a small corner of her heart, a corner she didn't visit very often.

"I've never gotten to see the glory that would be the Diego brothers in stereo." Lena hadn't grown up in Santa Rey. "Mark hasn't come home since I've been with Rick. Being the youngest, baddest, sexiest head coach in all the NHL must be time-consuming."

"Trust me, he's not your type."

"Because he's rich and famous? Because he's tough as hell and cool as ice?"

"Because he's missing a vital organ."

Lena gasped in horror. "He doesn't have a d—"

"A heart! He's missing a heart! Jeez, get your mind out of the gutter."

Lena laughed. "How do you know he's missing a heart?" Her eyes widened. "You have a past! Of course you have a past, you grew up here with Rick. Is it sordid? Tell me!"

Rainey sighed. "I was younger, so Mark always thought of me as a."

"Forbidden fruit?" Lena asked hopefully.

"*Pest*," Rainey corrected. "Look, I don't want to talk about it."

"I do!"

Knowing Lena wouldn't leave it alone, she caved. "Fine. I had a crush on him, and thought he was crushing back. Wrong. He didn't even know how I felt about him, but before I figured that out, I managed to thoroughly humiliate myself. The end."

"Oh, I'm going to need much *more* than that."

Luckily Lena's cell phone chose that very moment to ring. God bless AT&T. Lena glanced at the ID and grimaced. "I've got to go." She pointed at Rainey. "This discussion is not over."

"Yeah, yeah. Later." Rainey waved her off. She purposely glanced away from her computer screen, but like a moth to a flame, she couldn't fight the pull, and turned back.

Mark was shoving his players ahead of him, away from the run-down L.A. bar and towards a black SUV, single-handedly taking care of the situation.

That had been three days ago. The fight had been all over the news, and the commission was thinking about suspending the players involved. Supposedly the two head coaches had stepped in and offered a solution that would involve giving back to the fans who'd supported the two teams.

She looked into Mark's implacable, uncompromising face on her laptop and the years fell away. She searched for the boy she'd once loved with all her sixteen-year-old heart, but couldn't find a hint of him.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Mary Russell:

In this 21st hundred years, people become competitive in most way. By being competitive currently, people have do something to make them survives, being in the middle of the crowded place and notice through surrounding. One thing that often many people have underestimated the idea for a while is reading. That's why, by reading a reserve your ability to survive improve then having chance to stay than other is high. For you who want to start reading a book, we give you this particular Time Out & Body Check book as basic and daily reading publication. Why, because this book is usually more than just a book.

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