

FROM THE  
AUTHOR OF

PUNK  
57

# FIVE BROTHERS

NEW YORK TIMES BESTSELLING AUTHOR  
PENELOPE DOUGLAS



## About the Author

Penelope Douglas is a *New York Times*, *USA Today* and *Wall Street Journal* bestselling author. Their books have been translated into twenty languages and include *The Fall Away Series*, *The Devil's Night Series* and the stand-alones, *Misconduct*, *Punk 57*, *Birthday Girl*, *Credence* and *Tryst Six Venom*. They live in New England with their husband and daughter.

**TITLES BY PENELOPE DOUGLAS**

***The Fall Away Series***

BULLY

UNTIL YOU

RIVAL

FALLING AWAY

THE NEXT FLAME

(includes novellas *Aflame* and *Next to Never*)

***Stand-Alones***

MISCONDUCT

BIRTHDAY GIRL

PUNK 57

CREDENCE

TRYST SIX VENOM

FIVE BROTHERS

***The Devil's Night Series***

CORRUPT

HIDEAWAY

KILL SWITCH

CONCLAVE  
(novella)

NIGHTFALL

FIRE NIGHT  
(novella)

Penelope Douglas

---

FIVE BROTHERS



*For 1438 Garfield Avenue*

## Author's Note

*Five Brothers* is a stand-alone romance that takes place in the same world as one of my other books, *Tryst Six Venom*. Reading *Tryst Six Venom* isn't necessary, but it would be helpful. The Jaeger brothers are featured a lot in that book.



Dear Reader,

This book deals with emotionally difficult topics, including dubious consent, mentions of domestic abuse, sexual assault, and discussions of suicide. Anyone who believes such content may upset them is encouraged to consider their well-being when choosing whether to continue reading.

# Playlist

“Afterlife” by Avenged Sevenfold  
“Blood in the Water” by Ayrton Jones  
“Careless Whisper” by Seether  
“Coming Down” by Five Finger Death Punch  
“Happy Together” by Filter  
“Heron Blue” by Sun Kil Moon  
“High Enough” by Damn Yankees  
“In the Woods Somewhere” by Hozier  
“Raise Hell” by Brandi Carlile  
“Shout” by Tears for Fears  
“Shout 2000” by Disturbed  
“Something in the Way” by MXMS  
“Take the World” by She Wants Revenge  
“Twist of Fate” by Olivia Newton-John  
“Waking Up Beside You” by Stabbing Westward  
“Where the River Flows” by Collective Soul  
“Whispers in the Hall” by Chromatics  
“Your Woman” by GYM

## Krisjen

*Don't walk alone at night.*

I grip the hem of my plaid skirt and glance behind me. The dark empty road disappears into the black void, like a tunnel under the canopy of trees. The midnight moon reflects only enough light to make the leaves look blue, while the mid-October breeze blows my hair across my cheek.

I face forward, continuing to walk. My heart pumps hard in my chest.

*Don't walk alone at night.*

I don't think my parents ever told me that, but I learned it well enough. The world is full of things that want to hurt us because they can. Because we make it easy.

Women shouldn't have too much muscle on our bodies. We shouldn't be too smart or learn how to manage money. We don't need to know how to navigate a crowd, lead the way through a city or an airport, or choose the car we want to buy. Let the man drive if there's one in the vehicle with you, and the dinner reservation should always be in his name.

Those are things my parents *did* tell me.

Everything in life is about power, and it wasn't that I was taught that I didn't have any. I learned that men would like me better if I didn't show it.

The forest closes in on both sides of the road, and I feel figures that aren't there. Hidden in the trees. Watching me. As if danger can tell when we're unprotected and show up at that exact time and place. Summer camp serial killers always know when a girl has traipsed off away from her group, don't they? No matter where the summer camp is. Even if he's in a different one.

But instead of being afraid, I look up, the semi-clear night offering a spray of stars so bright that I'm glad I'm out alone, after all. Deep on this dark road, away from the lights of town.

I clench my school skirt in my fists as the soft fabric of my shirt sticks to my damp skin. My breasts chafe against the cloth.

Jupiter will be visible in a few months. I forget what's visible this time of year, but it's nice to see anything. Coastal Florida towns in hurricane season aren't a joke. The clouds always roll in.

I don't hear the engine behind me.

"Need a ride?" someone calls out.

I jerk my head, my heart skipping a beat. I look over, meeting green eyes that peer at me from the driver's side of his truck. I move off the road, to the gravel, as his vehicle crawls up next to me.

His arm drapes over the door, and he's not wearing a shirt, every inch of skin that's bared on his chest, neck, and muscles tan.

He works outside. And often shirtless from the looks of it, because there are no lines.

A boy from across the tracks.

His black hair is pushed back under a backward baseball cap, and his eyes gleam in that way that I know by now. Men have been looking at me like that since long before they should have.

I swallow. "No, thank you."

I continue walking, waiting for him to press the gas and keep going, but he doesn't. The muscles in my thighs tense, ready to run. I move farther and farther away, feeling his eyes on my back.

"You know what you need?" he says, and I see his truck come up again out of the corner of my eye. "A girl like you should have a boyfriend."

A lock of my chestnut hair floats on the wind and then falls back against my face. I squeeze my skirt again, the tails of my white shirt hanging almost as low as my hem.

"Someone to take care of you and drive you," he says. "Would you like a man?"

His words climb my skin. I look ahead of me, down the road. More dark. More empty. No one knows I'm out here.

"Come here," he says, almost a whisper.

My mouth goes dry.

He's not asking.

I hear his door creak open, and I stop, slowly turning and watching him jump out of the cab.

*Run.*

Leaving his door open, he drops his chin, slowly approaching me as if I were a dog he needs to leash before I get away.

*Run, I tell myself.*

I take a step back, but he reaches out and catches the lock of hair hanging down my cheek.

He doesn't look at it, though. He looks in my eyes.

He's young. Not much older than me, but definitely taller. Broader.

*Too close.*

I spin around, but before I can take the first step away, he's grabbing me and hauling me back against his chest. I gasp, feeling one of his hands cover my breast and the other one slide down between my legs.

He exhales in my ear, stroking the slit beneath my underwear. "Oh God, you got something good, don't you?"

He moans.

I squirm, whimpering, "No ..."

He reaches inside my panties, stroking me as he sucks in air between his teeth. "Get in the truck." He spins me around and releases me, but he pushes me toward his car before I can run. "I'm your man now, honey," he growls.

I look side to side as he shoves me, his open door blocking my escape to my left and him blocking me on my right. I scramble into the truck, flipping over and crawling backward as far as possible to the other side until my back hits the door.

I grab the handle behind me, but the locks click just before I yank. I pull up and down, trying to get out, but his eyes are on me as he climbs in and slams the door. I can't move. I clench my thighs.

His gaze travels down my body to my legs and everything he can see with my skirt hiked up. I pull it down.

"Goddamn," he murmurs, his tongue moving inside his mouth.

He kicks the truck into *Drive* and hits the gas.

"Where are you taking me?"

"Somewhere I can pay my new girlfriend a little attention," he replies.

His eyes dance as he watches the road, a trickle of sweat streaming down his chest. I watch it glide over every ripple in his abs.

His dark hair is blacker near his ear where the sweat has matted it, and I watch him bite his bottom lip as he stares ahead. Smooth, young neck. Every muscle flexed as he holds his arm out straight and fists the steering wheel. No tattoos. Just a scar on his eyebrow—a small slit where the hair no longer grows.

I dig my nails into the seat behind me.

I should try harder to get away. Hit him. Kick him.

He pulls off the road, down a gravel path, and then takes a sharp left into a small lot surrounded by woods. It's where people come to play with their

ATVs. The woods are filled with trails.

But the lot is abandoned at night.

It's just us.

He parks and shuts off the engine, the cab turning nearly pitch black.

I feel hands grip my ankles, and I'm yanked down the seat as he kneels between my legs and hovers over me.

"I want to go home," I say.

He doesn't reply.

Reaching under my skirt, he peels my panties down my legs and over my shoes, staring at my naked skin. "Oh God, you are a pretty little bitch."

Pushing up my shirt, he comes down, sucking one of my nipples into his mouth as he strokes me between the legs with one of his hands.

"Mmm," he groans.

I grip his wrist under my skirt with both hands, trying to take his hand out from between my legs, but his muscles flex underneath my fingers, holding tight. Flicking my nipple with his tongue, he moves to the other breast, and I shove at his chest, whimpering, but he pays me no mind as he takes his pleasure.

Like he doesn't see me.

Like I'm just here for fun.

He pinches my nipple between his teeth, and a shock shoots through my stomach to down between my thighs. I release him and drag my fingers up my stomach to the waist of my skirt.

"Yeah, your wet little cunt is ready for me, isn't it?" he coos.

*Yeah, baby.*

I clutch the hilt of the knife hidden in my skirt and raise my arm, pressing the blade to his neck.

He stops.

I feel my smile in my fucking throat.

His hot breath hits faster against my skin as he hovers over my breast, and I lift my head, feeling like I'm floating as I get into his face.

"Get off me."

God, how he just stopped. That was awesome.

I could do whatever I wanted to him right now.

Slowly, he sits back in his seat, and I follow, keeping the blade at his neck as I slide my leg over his thighs.

Straddling him, I settle in his lap. "Put your hands on the roof," I order.

He raises his arms, still barely breathing as he places his palms above his head.

The steering wheel presses into my back, and I lean into him, the hard flesh of my nipples pressing through my shirt, against his warm chest.

He holds his breath as I slip my free hand down, digging in his pocket. I pull out a few folded bills and hold them up, smiling a little before dropping them inside my shirt pocket.

I press the blade harder. "Hands behind your head."

He pierces me with his stare but does what he's told.

I could probably escape right now. He might not grab for me. Or try to take away my weapon. A guy like him—good-looking and used to having whoever he wants—probably thinks I'm not worth any more trouble.

I could leave.

But I don't.

I shift, rolling so slowly over the bulge in his jeans and sliding my hand up his chest.

"On second thought," I taunt, rising to my knees so the breast poking through my shirt is level with his mouth. "You are built for fun, aren't you?"

I press myself into his mouth, and he seizes the invitation, nuzzling my collared shirt off my shoulder, baring a breast. He sucks it into his mouth. His hot tongue nibbles and teases so soft, and I grip the back of his neck, holding him to me to make sure he doesn't stop.

I come down, kissing his mouth and whispering against his lips, "Open your jeans and take it out."

I roll my hips into him, panting and groaning as he rips at his belt and unfastens his fly.

He tries to take my hips, but I dig the blade into his neck. "Don't touch me."

He pulls away, and I attack his mouth, feeling the hard, hot flesh of his cock brush against my clit.

I stare down into his eyes. "You still want me?" I whisper.

He nods, his mouth hanging open as he breathes hard. "God, yes."

I linger, rolling my hips and taunting him, but he's ready to go. He dives behind me, reaching for the glove box, and I kiss his neck and trail up his jaw and to his temple.

But then he goes still, and eventually, I stop kissing.

Looking behind me, I see his hand clutching a condom box upside down. As if it's empty.

He throws it down onto the floor and shuffles through the contents of the glove box, looking for a condom that must've spilled out. Papers and napkins and tools I don't recognize slide onto the floor, but when he stops, he's still empty-handed. Nothing.

He has nothing. No protection.

I tense. "There were two left," I tell him.

He glances up at me, a pained look in his eyes. He swipes his hand through the compartment again in vain.

I drop my arms from his body. "Trace ..."

He shoots up, letting his head fall back and locking his hands on top. "Shit," he murmurs to the roof.

My stomach drops a little. We were together three days ago. He had two condoms left in that box. His brothers don't use this truck.

I try to catch his eyes, but he won't look at me. "Are you serious?"

Without waiting for him to answer, I climb off, plopping back into my seat and setting the knife down.

"Come on," Trace says in a gentle voice. "Please don't be mad, Krisjen."

He reaches for my hand, but I take it away, buttoning my shirt the couple of notches I undid earlier to look like sexy serial killer bait on the dark road in the middle of nowhere.

He hesitates, but the mood is gone. He zips up his fly and fastens his belt, our little role-play switching back to reality. I'm eighteen again, graduated and no longer in Catholic school, and he's twenty, trying not to make an enemy out of one of his sister's best friends, because he knows he'll be running into me a lot in life.

"Please don't make me feel bad," he says softly. "I didn't think you were exclusive to me, either. You're not in love with me, are you? I'm an idiot."

I close my eyes but almost laugh, because he is an idiot.

And I'm not in love with him.

But now I can't lie to myself anymore. I am absolutely not special to him. I'm probably just the only one who texted back tonight.

I did like him, though. He goes along with my role-playing fantasies where I overpower someone trying to overpower me.

I bow my head, rubbing my tired eyes.

"Krisjen, seriously." He takes my hand. "I'm sorry. I didn't think we were like that."

"Don't apologize," I tell him, pulling my hand back. It just makes me feel more pathetic. "You're right. We're not getting married."

I meet his eyes, saying his name in my head. *Trace Jaeger*.

And Milo Price. My ex-boyfriend. The two men I've slept with.

I always thought it would be only one. When I was twelve, I imagined my true-love experience would be passionate kisses on seaside cliffs as my dress blew in the wind. He would be a poet. And secretly a duke. With a castle. Like, I literally thought that's what would happen, because I had lofty ideas and never figured in my desperation for attention.



But that's not what happened. I was a sophomore, invited with some friends to junior prom, which ended at a party where I gave it up to my boyfriend on a stranger's bed, and it was all over in eleven minutes.

I've slept with two men.

And counting.

Trace won't be the last.

"Other guys will do what you do to me," I murmur.

"Exactly like me?"

"Probably harder."

He snorts, sitting back in his seat. "Well, you know you can still come over when you need a break from your future husband five or ten years from now. When you need it good and dirty."

He's trying to make me smile, but I don't. I look out the window instead. *Ten years from now* ... God, will I still need him in order to feel alive?

An image flashes in my head, but almost immediately I realize it's not my mother. It's me. With her hair. In her clothes. In her life.

He tries to take my hand. "Come here."

I resist.

"Come here," he whispers.

But gently, I pull my hand away before he can take it.

Trace is a people pleaser. He hates anyone being mad at him. Comes from years of dodging four older brothers who are all tornadoes.

Macon, Army, Iron, and Dallas.

His sister, Liv, dates my best friend, Clay, but Liv is pretty calm compared to the rest of the Jaegers. Which I'm sure *also* comes from years of dodging five older brothers who are all tornadoes. She loves them all, though.

Their parents died within two months of each other more than eight years ago. The oldest, Macon, was forced to leave the military to come home and raise his siblings. Trace's older brothers are pretty much his only memories.

"We could go on a date," he says. "You have my money."

"You mean your allowance?" I pluck the folded bills out of my breast pocket—a twenty on the outside and, knowing him, it's probably a one on the inside. I hand it back before pulling my underwear on.

He returns the bills to his pocket. "I'm a man who makes his own living, thank you."

*Mm-hm.* "I'm not letting you take me on a date out of guilt."

"Well, I'm still up for sex, too," he adds, flashing his adorable smile. "I mean, this was all your idea, and you got me pretty worked up." He gestures to the hard-on in his jeans. "The part where you robbed me was pretty hot."

I force a frown, but only because I'm mad that I want to smile. He's trying hard to make me feel better, and for some reason, I feel an urge to let him know his effort is appreciated.

Turns out, I'm a people pleaser, too.

"I was trying to be tough like your sister and Clay," I mumble, teasing.

I thought I was doing well, but now, I don't know.

He touches my face. "I'm glad you're not violent," he says quietly. "I like that you're soft with people. Don't change that."

It's nice of him to say, but being that way doesn't seem to work out for me. Being gentle just makes me an easy target.

"Don't change, okay?"

*Yeah, okay. Whatever.*

"Just take me to your house." I push up my sleeves and fasten my seat belt. "I need to pick up my car."

"Krisjen ..."

"It's fine, Trace." I don't look at him. "We're not a couple. We never were."

I lied to myself. I did it to myself.

I'm pretty sure I was officially a booty call from the start. One night last spring I followed Clay across the tracks into Sanoa Bay, the original settlement of St. Carmen.

Officially, we're all St. Carmen now, but the Bay—where Trace and his family live—doesn't like to hear that. They're possessive of their land, and they want to rule separately.

They're wild.

We hide everything.

They're poor.

We're not.

They're Swamp.

We're Saints.

Clay fell in love with Liv, the bad girl from the wrong side of town, and I fell into insanity with one of that bad girl's brothers.

But it was never love like it was for Liv and Clay. Trace doesn't think of me after I leave his bed, and if I'm being fair, I don't think much of myself, either.

He turns the key, starting the engine, and in a moment, he's pulling onto the road and heading left, toward the swamps.

We cruise past the gates of my house, and I glance to see the upstairs lights still off before Trace turns right onto the dark lane and then takes a another left, across the bridge and over the wetlands.

I take out my phone and DM my brother.

**Running to the Bay to grab my car. Be back soon.**

Marshall is almost thirteen. He usually has his headphones on so he won't hear Paisleigh if she wakes up.

A text rolls in. **How did you know I had the old iPad?**

I laugh to myself. **Because you're smart, like me.**

I took all of his tech when I put them both to bed two hours ago, but I didn't ask for the one device he thought was still a secret. Maybe I should have. If my parents had been stricter with my bedtimes, maybe I'd be in college right now like all my friends.

But I also know Mars is going to do what he wants to do. I'm strict enough that he knows I care about him getting a good night's sleep, but not so strict that all he learns is how to hide from me. There will be bigger battles than iPads and cell phones.

If he's anything like me.

**Love you. Give Jason a hug for me.**

**Leave my pillow alone,** he fires back.

I laugh out loud, and I see Trace look at me out of the corner of my eye. My brother has a pillow with Jason Momoa's face on it. It's a good-looking pillow.

My phone vibrates with a text. **And nice flowers,** Mars taunts. **Mom dug them out of the trash.**

**And I promptly threw them back in,** I tap out my reply. **Good night. Sleep tight. I love you.**

I tuck my phone back in my pocket, turning the volume up on Trace's radio as he speeds me away from those white roses in the garbage at my house.

I love getting flowers, but not from strange men.

I'm tempted to reach out to my father and grandparents to let them know that my mother is trying to marry me off, but I'm not sure they'd care.

And I'm not asking my father for anything. He doesn't want to support his family, so I don't think he'll care that my mom is trying to find a way to do it instead by making me marry someone rich.

Droplets of rain spatter the windshield, but I crack my window, inhaling the scent of the wind. The gentle lights of St. Carmen and the soft glow of the gas lamps on Main Street disappear in my sideview mirror as Trace exits the overpass. We bounce over the tracks, the road turning pebbly and loud under the tires as he coasts into the wild landscape of the Bay.

Old shacks that have been here for a hundred years serve the area's best gumbo and fresh seafood, and we pass unkept land, the dark porches of hidden houses just peeking through the brush.

I rub my hands together in my lap.

There's a part of me that's asleep until I come here. Maybe it's the heat, which I feel just a little bit more, or maybe it's the land, chaotic and overridden as if the trees are trying to take it back.

Over hundreds of years, Seminoles and Spaniards claimed, fought, lived, warred, and then eventually built together.

And when more Europeans came and wanted the swamp and the beautiful views of the sea, the Bay became one nation unto themselves—one wall against the world.

Communities stop working together over time once they no longer have to, but the Bay is unique. After five hundred years, they're still fighting to survive. That one common goal has kept them together.

St. Carmen has passion, too, but it's not nearly as fun.

Trace speeds down the dirt road, passing a few homes and businesses along the main street, and then swings the car around in a U-turn, pulling up in front of his house. Half a dozen trucks and other vehicles are parked outside, the downstairs lights illuminating the windows.

We hop out, and I look next to the fence, seeing my Rover still parked where I left it.

"Son of a bitch!" someone bellows from inside the house. "I could've been killed!"

I inhale a deep breath. *Iron Jaeger*. One of Trace's older brothers. I know his voice by process of elimination. He's the only one I rarely hear yell, and I know all the others' voices. If it were Macon, the oldest, I'd probably just turn around and leave.

Guys come barreling out the front door, running down the walk and out into the rainy dirt road. Their girlfriends wait by the cars, laughing and shielding themselves from the weather.

Music inside makes the house vibrate as the Seminole flag blows over the garage door. Ivy and moss climb the exterior of the ancient pink stucco of the dilapidated Spanish mission-style mansion, and I inhale like I always do, because you can eat the air here.

Stepping through the arch of the heavy wooden front door, I hear one of the shutters on the second or third floor flapping against the house. Screams pierce the air, and I wince as more people rush toward me.

I leap, Trace pulling me into his arms and out of the way. The music cuts off as they squeeze past me, out the door.