



Coming Home

KJ Reed

A Valentine's Day Free Read

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Coming Home

“Okay. So he said what now?”

Jill sighed and took another large drink of wine. “He said, and I quote, ‘What’s the big deal? It’s just Valentine’s Day?’” It made her stomach hurt, just to repeat it. Maybe wine wasn’t the best choice. Water...she’d have water next.

Keri sat back in her chair and whistled through her teeth. “Of course he said that. He was five hundred miles away at a foodies convention. And he has a penis.”

“But he didn’t miss the plane on purpose, right?” Sasha asked, hope in her eyes. Poor girl, she was ever the optimist.

“No,” Jill admitted. “He didn’t miss the plane on purpose. But he didn’t understand why I was sad—disappointed, really—that he wouldn’t be here. And that our plans fell through.”

Adrienne settled the tray of Oreos on the coffee table and plopped down on the floor in front of it, long legs crossed. “I still don’t understand why it matters so much. It’s just one more day on the calendar. Let’s face it. Valentine’s Day is just a—”

“Holiday invented by the greeting card companies to scam unsuspecting consumers out of their hard-earned dollars,” the other three chimed in at the same time. God knows they’d all heard Adrienne’s views of most holidays enough times to repeat them all in their sleep. Adrienne was to pessimism as Sasha was to optimism.

“Maybe he got you a card or something, but he’s just not here to give it to you?” Sasha grabbed a cookie and twisted it in half, then stopped and stared at her glass. “Why are we eating Oreos with wine again? I’m getting milk.”

“Bring me a glass!” Keri called after her. To Jill, she said, “Look at it this way. Instead of hanging out with Otis, you’re here with us instead. Your best friends, having a girls night. We haven’t done this in forever.”

“I know, but still.” Jill bit her tongue, knowing if she went on about how she had been looking forward to spending time with Otis on Valentine’s Day, her friends would mock her. Well, not Sasha. But Adrienne and Keri would never let her hear the end of it. All in good fun, of course, and never maliciously. But still, she was a little too raw to deal with it right then.

The doorbell rang—most likely the pizza they’d ordered—and Adrienne popped back up to answer it. It was her townhouse, after all.

“Are you really mad at him?” Keri asked, her voice lower.

Jill shook her head. “Disappointed. I mean, it’s the first time I’ve had a guy on Valentine’s Day since, like the eighth grade. Which makes me sound like a junior high loser with no life. But it’s slightly depressing to realize that nothing about February fourteenth has changed for me in, oh, fifteen years.”

Okay, now she was starting to sound whiny and depressing. She glared at the wine. How many glasses was she at right now? That solidified her choice to stick with water from here on out. She nudged the glass out of arm’s reach.

“No, you were with that John Something guy two years ago, weren’t you?”

“He broke up with me a week before.”

“Huh.” Keri stared into her own wine before gasping, “Oh! I know. Senior year of college. Michael—”

“Was cheating on me with my roommate. I can’t really that ‘together’ can I?” She sighed. “I’m twenty-nine years old. I know it’s just a single day, so it’s not the end of the world, but...” She let her hands lift, then fall into her lap, unable to explain why it bothered her so much. “I love him, you know? He’s the one for me, whether he realizes it or not. I think I knew after our second date. And somewhere along the way, I guess I just built up this stupid, immature fantasy about what tonight would be like. Even if it was simply Otis putting his chef-skills to work and creating a dinner masterpiece built for two. Being with someone I loved...”

Keri scooted over on the couch to put her arm around Jill. "I know sweetie. You just had different expectations. It's okay. But I have a feeling things are about to look up."

Jill drained her glass of wine and set the cheap glass down on the end table. "Yeah? Why, do I get to pick the first movie for tonight's marathon?"

"Nope. Even better." Adrienne rounded the corner with a box that definitely did not hold pizza. "You have a delivery, Jill. And it doesn't come with extra cheese or mushrooms."

Her friend set the box gently in Jill's lap. Smaller than a shoebox, but bigger than anything for jewelry, the package was wrapped in violet-covered wrapping paper and tied with a dark purple bow.

"What's this?" Jill looked at Adrienne, then Keri. But both were simply waiting expectantly. "Did you guys do this?"

"I can say I had nothing to do with it," Keri said, holding up a hand as if taking an oath.

"Nothing to do with what?" Sasha asked, carrying four mugs of milk by the handles. "Oh, what's that?"

"No clue."

"So let's find out. Open it."

Jill untied the bow and lifted the lid of the box. A DVD case, cover blank, sat among lilac-colored tissue paper. She held up the case and joked, "Guess I get to pick the first movie after all." She tossed it to Adrienne who queued up the DVD in the player and let the movie run.

Jill held back a squeal when Otis's face popped up on the screen, but only just.

"Hey baby." His deep baritone floated out from the speakers, and Jill felt a sharp pang of disappointment that once again, she wouldn't see her love on the special day. "I know you're disappointed that I'm still stuck in Denver, but don't count me out yet. Follow these instructions carefully. Put on the dress the driver brought, then get in the car and relax. The rest will be explained later."

Dress? Driver? Jill lunged off the couch and sprinted to the front door, her friends laughing behind her. There, hanging off the coat closet's door, was a garment bag. Without looking back around the wall to the living room, she yelled, "You weren't going to mention this?"

"Oops," came Adrienne's unapologetic reply. "Guess it slipped my mind!"

"Uh huh," Jill mumbled. *Slipped* her ass. She unzipped the bag and gasped when she saw the gorgeous gold cocktail dress that peeked back at her. The exact dress she'd salivated over two weeks earlier during a quick dash into the mall with Keri for running shoes.

"Keri. I think you have some explaining to do."

"I know nothing," came the cryptic—and completely bullshit—reply.

Jill glanced out the windows to the driveway and gasped. "That's not a car. That's a freaking limo!"

Snickers were the only answer. The bastards. The rat bastards. They were all in on it. She rounded the corner, ready to give them all a piece of her mind. But all three of her best friends sat on the couch with wide eyes and their mouths in little surprised "O" shapes.

A lineup of innocent little lemurs. She just pointed, grunted, and went to grab the dress off the hanger. "I'm changing in your bedroom, Adrienne. And I'm stealing a pair of shoes."

"Check the bottom of the bag. You won't have to!" came the smug reply as Jill sprinted up the stairs.

* * * * *

Jill had to sit on her hands to keep from biting her nails in nervousness. Instead, she smoothed down the cocktail-length dress with loving strokes. The dress had been so far out of her price range, it was laughable to even glance at in the mall. But she was wearing it. And it fit her perfectly.

The limo turned into a neighborhood she had seen before, but never been into. A few more turns and the vehicle pulled up the driveway of a comfortable looking home at the end of a cul-de-sac on top of a small hill. Not old, but not brand new either. The shrubs were trimmed and neatly shaped, the paint on the shutters looked fresh, and the entire front yard was neat as a pin.

And she had absolutely no idea who owned the place or why she was there.

Jill reached up to knock on the partition separating the back from the driver when the side door opened. Otis popped his head in.

“Hey gorgeous.”

Jill’s mouth dropped open for a moment, and she was speechless. Then she wasn’t. “You ass. Why did you lie to me?”

The grin only spread on his handsome face. He held out a hand. “Come on out of there and I’ll explain.”

Jill climbed out, less than gracefully, with his help. Then Otis closed the door behind her. With a quick wave, the driver started to pull out.

“Wait! How will I get back?”

Otis just chuckled. “My car’s here.”

“Where?” Jill asked, shivering a little in the chilly February night. She realized then Otis was wearing a suit. A no-kidding suit. Jacket, pants, collared shirt, even a tie. What the hell was going on? Did someone die? He *hated* suits.

He wrapped his arm around her, rubbed her arm briskly. “In the garage. Come on. Let’s get inside.”

As they stepped up to the front door, he reached for the doorknob, then stopped. “Here. I need to do this first.” Then with both hands, he turned her face and pressed his cold lips to hers in a sweet, gentle kiss that warmed her from the inside and turned her knees to jelly.

“There. That’s better.” He stepped back and opened the front door with a flourish.
“Welcome.”

She stepped into the foyer and found it...empty. No furniture anywhere that she could see. But that only seemed to highlight the house’s beautiful details. Gleaming hardwood floors just begged for plush rugs to accent their beauty. The floor plan was open, with the kitchen effortlessly morphing into the dining room, only to slide into the living area. The high ceilings let her eye wander up to look at the gorgeous light fixture. And the fireplace was a thing of dreams with intricate wood detailing and marble. She wandered over slowly, her heels making a click across the floor that echoed in the space. Running one hand over the carved marble of the mantle, she sighed.

“So who owns this dream house?”

“I do.”

Jill turned around to stare. “No. You own an apartment downtown because it’s easy for you to get to the restaurant. You don’t want to leave the downtown area. You are going to be dragged from your bachelor pad in a body bag,” she said, parroting all his words from the last year. The words that hurt, since she knew she could never live in his tiny studio apartment. She needed space. A place to fill with kids eventually.

Otis shook his head. “Yeah. I know. I sold it.”

The words rang in her ears. “You sold...the apartment?” There was no way. She must have heard wrong.

“Yeah, I did. I needed the equity to buy this place.”

“Hmm. Why this place?” Jill tried to talk her body out of reacting to the news so violently, but her heart was picking up speed fast. Her hands went cold. And her toes tingled.

Otis, God love the man, stepped up and framed her against the fireplace with his arms. “Because I knew you would look perfect in front of this mantle. That you would get that dreamy look in your eye when you saw the house. That it would be perfect.”

She swallowed, throat dry. “Perfect for who?”

Otis shook his head, then reached in the pocket of his suit jacket.

Then he dropped to one knee and pulled out a velvet box. A square-shaped box. A box that could only hold one thing.

And Jill went deaf.

* * * * *

“Jill. Jill, are you listening?”

Christ, she went white as a sheet. She just stared at the ring. And he couldn’t even tell if it was a good stare or a “God, what were you thinking?” stare.

“Sweetie, blink if you can hear me.”

Instead she nodded, then shook her head, then nodded again. Which gave him absolutely no hint to her answer, or state of mind.

Okay. Another minute of this and he was going to call for an ambulance. And he was getting off his damn knee, because there was no way he was about to stay kneeling down like a jackass for however long it took her to snap out—

He barely had time to make a strangled “Oof!” as Jill pounced on him and knocked him back him to the floor. Her body covered his, all soft curves an softer skin, and she pressed her face into his neck.

He felt her trembling and he soothed one hand down her back, rubbing circles over the skin the low cut exposed. “What? Baby, what’s wrong?”

He was about to check for tears, but instead he heard laughter. The little idiot was laughing. He’d been half out of his mind with worry, and she was getting a giggle out of it. With a growl Otis rolled over and pinned her beneath him. Her blond hair fanned out on the dark wood, a striking contrast. Her eyes were glassy, but she had a smile that lit up all the dark corners of his soul.

“I love you,” she murmured and leaned up to brush a kiss against his lips.

Okay, that made up for a lot of worry. He leaned closer so she could brush more kisses against his face.

He was determined to keep it light. Romantic, not sexual. They were rolling around on a hardwood floor, for the love of God. The first time he made love to her in the house—their home—he figured it would be on a soft bed she'd picked out. With fussy pillows and a fluffy down comforter and the Egyptian cotton sheets he knew she loved but never dared spoil herself with.

But when Jill reached down and started unbuttoning his suit jacket, he knew that plan was shot to shit. At least for now.

He'd give it one more shot. "Jill. Jill, sweetie. Slow down. We don't even have a couch. Or a blanket."

"Don't need..." she muttered as she shoved the suit jacket off his shoulders and started pulling his shirttails from his waistband. "Just need you."

Her fierce determination and shaking hands were his undoing. He let her fumble with his clothing while he took her mouth with more enthusiasm than skill. God, he was unbelievably hard and too ready for her. A savage need to possess took him over. To claim her. Here. In their place. Not his, not hers. Theirs. The first thing they would truly have together. Her tongue did unbelievable things to his critical thinking skills, and he was shocked when he raised his head and realized she had his pants unzipped and was reaching in.

The first stroke of her soft hands against his cock were electrifying. He jerked, then steadied himself. Let her play and soothe and excite while he pulled the front of her dress down over her breasts. The low cut front was a huge bonus, as far as he could tell. Bonus friendship points to Keri for helping him pick it out.

He took one nipple, already puckered from cold, between his teeth and gave a tug. Jill moaned and arched into him, encouraging. He laved the sting, reveling in the little noises of pleasure she made. But her hand never stopped working. Stroking. Cupping. Squeezing.

"I'm...damnit Jill I'm not...I can't..."

"Don't." She gasped and raked her nails over his back. "Don't hold back."

With her permission granted, he pushed the skirt of the dress up, ripped her panties until they fell useless to one side, positioned his cock and sank into the sweet, warm heaven waiting for him.

“God, baby you’re so hot. I missed you every damn day I was gone.”

She pulled at him, every inch, as if thanking him, begging him to go deeper, to take more.

With pleasure.

He rocked forward, keeping his balance on his elbows. One hand cupped the back of her head, protecting it from the hard floor. She didn’t even notice, not if her dreamy expression was any evidence. Her hips ground up into him.

“More.”

He pulled out, then pressed back in faster, picking a tempo that had them both feverish for release soon. Too soon? No, never that. He would never have enough of his Jill.

“Close baby. I’m close.”

She mewled something unrecognizable in return, then reached down between them and touched herself. It drove him insane when she did that. The feel of her slim fingers against his lower stomach, against his cock when he pushed in was just another layer of sensation that drove him crazy.

And when he thought he couldn’t hold out any longer, she rippled around him, milking him, pushing him toward release until he followed her into the void of pleasure.

* * * * *

Jill shivered. The air was cool against their skin, with sweat drying. Her skirt was still up around her waist, breasts still spilling over the top. Otis had rolled over so she was spread out on top, sheltered from the cold floor. Always protecting her, that gorgeous man. She ran her fingers through his hair idly.

“Happy Valentine’s Day,” he murmured.

“Yes, it really was.” She tilted her head and kissed his chin, the only thing she could

reach without moving her body. Too tired to move. "Thank you."

They were silent a moment, listening to the hum of the house as the heat kicked on. His hand rubbed a line from the base of her neck to her bottom in soothing motions. She sighed, ready to fall asleep right there on top of her man on a wood floor.

"You never answered," he said quietly.

"Hmm?"

"You never answered the question earlier." His voice was hesitant, uncertain. So unlike Otis. "You just kind of stared at the ring. I thought I'd have to call an ambulance, you were so still and quiet."

"It was a shock," she admitted. "Everything. You giving up your beloved bachelor pad. The beautiful house. The ring..."

"Now that you've had some time to process—"

"Oh, is that what it's called?" she teased. "Processing?"

He gave her butt a pinch that had her squealing. "That's what all the kids are calling it. But in all seriousness..."

"You know, I never actually heard you say it. I think my mind just went completely blank the minute you dropped down. So maybe you should ask again."

He sighed. "Jillian Mary Ford, will you mar—"

She cut him off with a kiss. "Yes."

Recommended Reading

Did you enjoy this free read by author KJ Reed? Fellow romance author Keri Ford also has a Valentine's Day free read up on her website! Read the blurb below and head to KeriFord.com to download *Sell A Perfect Valentine*, a free short story.

The most important thing to Johnny is twenty-five pounds of giggling girl. She's a ball of light in his life who terrifies him to no end. The only way he's made it this far raising the girl during his visitation is by relying heavily on his friend, Leslie, for help. He knows he can't keep leaning on Leslie this much, but he's scared to death to keep his baby girl alone. What if she gets a fever? Chokes on her supper? Swallows some bath water?

Leslie loves her little god-niece to no end, even to the point she agreed to let Johnny keep the toddler at her house when the girl was an infant. Seventeen months later, Johnny is still sleeping in her guest bedroom every other weekend...and often through the week if he's allowed extra custody time.

Now it's Valentines and again, Leslie is without a date because everyone thinks Johnny is her boyfriend when they are only friends. She confronts Johnny and he knows it's time to cut the cord from Leslie and raise his own girl. He's free on Valentine's weekend anyway and offers to take Leslie out and let her publicly "break up" with him at the end of the night. It's the least he can do. But then...there's this kissing contest at their restaurant and all bets are off on what they had planned.

About The Author

KJ Reed is an inconspicuous housewife by day, folding laundry, changing diapers and washing dishes with pleasure. But late at night, when the rest of the household is asleep and not making messes she has to pick up, she writes erotic romance. She took up writing one day when she realized the voices in her head weren't multiple personalities, but characters begging to come out and play.

A military wife, she's fortunate enough to be surrounded by manly, Alpha-tastic inspiration on a daily basis. Nothing stirs the blood quite like a platoon of sweaty Marines running by in formation, does it ladies? Of course, she'd tell you where she lives, except by the time you're done reading this biography...she's probably moved again.

KJ is currently working on her next erotic romance, hopefully hot enough to singe your socks off. She loves hearing from readers, or anyone really, so head over to her website and send her a message.

You can find KJ on Facebook and also follow her on Twitter. But be kind if she doesn't acknowledge your tweet right away...she's still learning the Twitter ropes! She is also a blogger on the group blog Passionate Reads. Head on over and see what she and fellow erotic romance authors are talking about today!