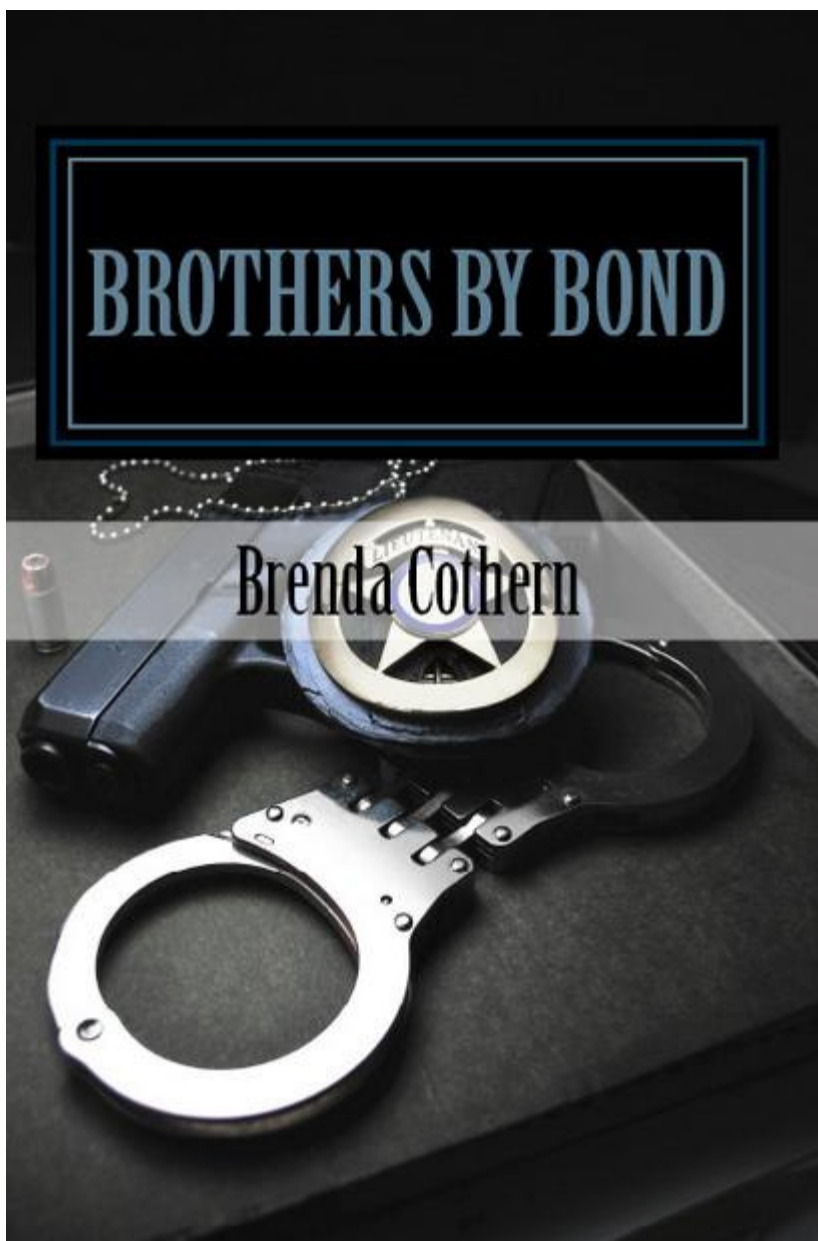


# BROTHERS BY BOND

Brenda Cothern



BROTHERS

BY

BOND

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DEDICATION  
TO ALL THOSE WHO SERVE & PROTECT



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS  
AS ALWAYS, MY BETA TEAM: TRACY, LORA, KEVIN & STEVE

&

THE BODY SHOP, OFC TAVERN, & THE L.A. HANG OUT FOR LETTING ME USE THEIR BARS  
AS MY OWN PERSONAL OFFICE.

## *Praise for Brothers By Bond...*

*Amazon Best Seller!*

★★★★★ *There is nothing I love more than a love story about two characters that started off as friends and end up as lovers and this story definitely delivers on it... The forced closeness brings about unexpected consequences. I have owned this book for about two months and I have read it at least six times since I purchased it. Definitely on my list of keepers. ~~ Bookworm via Amazon*

★★★★★ *I just read your book, Brothers by Bond and I wanted you to know that it was a excellent book! I enjoyed the chemistry between the two and I was crying with Mikey while Johnny was in the hospital and when he came out of the comma. What a freakin awesome book, ~~ J. Stewart via email*

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## AUTHOR NOTE

The beginning of this book uses several ten- codes that are used by police and emergency personnel. For you reference, the ten-codes used in chapter one are defined below in the order that they appear.

10-28 - Vehicle registration information

10-38 - Stopping suspicious vehicle

10-4 - Acknowledgement (OK)

10-52 - Ambulance needed

10-77 - ETA (estimated time of arrival)

10-44 - Permission to leave ... for ...

10-80 - Chase in progress

10-76 - En route ...

10-60 - Squad in vicinity

10-57 - Hit and run (fatal, personal injury, property damage)

10-32 - Man with gun

Mike Morgan sat in ICU 4, head in hands, and prayed. He was never a religious man but silently vowed he would go to church every Sunday until the day he died if God would just help the man in the bed across from him pull through.

*Please, please, please, God don't take Johnny away from me.*

The steady sounds of the life support machines droned on, unheard, as wave after wave of guilt consumed him.

"This is my fault, Johnny," Mike whispered into his hands.

He should have been on duty tonight with Johnny. Should have been where he'd always been for the last five years; at his best friend's side in the patrol car instead of working at different precinct.

"I am so sorry, so, so, sorry," Mike muttered into his hands as he fought the tears that threatened to fall.

If he hadn't been avoiding his best friend for the last week, he would have been there and maybe it would have been him lying in that bed instead. Oh, if he could only make it so, he would trade places with Johnny in a heartbeat.

His mind, unwillingly replayed the events over and over like a broken record. No matter how hard he tried, he could not keep from hearing dispatch in his head.

"Unit 349, dispatch," Johnny's voice came over the radio.

"Go ahead 349," dispatch replied.

"10-28, nine, seven, Charlie, nine, Oscar, Tango," Johnny read the tag number to dispatch like he had done with others hundreds of times before.

"349, be advised vehicle reported stolen," dispatch's clear voice informed him.

"Copy dispatch, 10-38," Johnny replied to inform dispatch of his intention to stop the vehicle. "10-4, 349."

The radio went silent and Mike's partner for the night spoke. "Isn't that your normal unit?"

"Yeah," Mike replied without offering anything else.

"So what, you and your brother have a fight or something?" Jones asked.

Mike and Johnny had known Ted Jones since the Academy so Mike didn't feel like his friend was prying. They and several of the other guys hung out and watched enough football that it was natural for him to ask.

"Something like that," Mike replied but there was no way in hell he was going to tell Jones the truth of the matter; especially when he couldn't even tell Johnny.

The squawk of the radio silenced their conversation when they heard Johnny's voice.

"10-52, officer down, officer down," Johnny's breathless voice called over the radio and Mike's gut cinched.

*Oh God, not Johnny. Please not Johnny,* Mike thought as sweat broke out all over his body and his adrenaline spiked.

"349, ambulance in route, 10-77 ten minutes," dispatch told them calmly.

Jones was already accessing the onboard computer to locate unit 349 when Mike hit the lights.

Johnny's voice carried out of the radio loud and clear, "10-44 to pursue suspect vehicle."

"10-4, 349," dispatch replied to Johnny before continuing. "All units, be advised 10-32 a blue Honda Civic. Tag: nine, seven, Charlie, nine, Oscar, Tango. 10-80 by 349."



"Unit 349, dispatch," Johnny's voice could barely be heard over the sirens of his squad car.

"Go ahead 349."

"Suspect is white male, 19-25, blonde hair, 5'8 - 5'10. Driver is Latino female, 16-20, black hair. Facial piercings in nose and left eyebrow. Over."

"Copy 349."

"420 dispatch," Jones called in. "Go ahead 420."

"10-76 to assist 349, we are 10-60," Jones informed dispatch they were in the vicinity and reroute to assist.

"10-4, 420."

Mike ignored the other units, which told dispatch they were in route to assist because they were also in the vicinity, as he drove. His relief that Johnny hadn't been the officer down did not last long when he heard his brother call-in that he was giving chase. Mike kept glancing at the onboard computer that Jones had turned enough for him to see. He easily tracked unit 349 and estimated what route the suspects were likely to take so he could try to cut them off. Jones had plugged in the other units that were in pursuit but Mike's eyes only saw the red dot under the numbers 349.

"10-57 intersection of 83rd and Rome, two vehicles, 10-52, driver suspect still in vehicle. 10-32 fleeing on foot south on Rome. 349 10-80." Johnny's voice updated them and Mike cursed under his breath.

Chasing an armed suspect on foot without backup was drilled into their heads under the 'Do Not Do It' list so many times in the Academy that Johnny should have known better.

Mike turned on to Rome so hard that Jones cursed when he was slammed against the passenger door. "Fuck! That's my gun arm dick head."

Mike ignored the complaint as he traveled north on Rome. *77th, 78th, 79th, 80... There.* He just caught Johnny hauling ass as he turned into the alley between two buildings. Jones called in their location as the squad car lit up the back of Johnny while he chased the gunmen.

*Please let the perp have tossed the gun,* Mike thought as he closed the distance with his eyes glued on his brother.

That's when the world as Mike knew it came to a screeching halt. One minute he was watching Johnny, legs pumping like when they were in track back in high school, and then the next minute, he was thrown backwards. It was like an invisible cord was tied around his waist and someone yanked him, hard, back toward the patrol car.

"Shit," Jones swore at the same time Mike yelled, "No!"

Mike slammed on the brakes to the squad car only a few feet from where Johnny lay and jumped out of the vehicle so fast that when Jones reached over to stop him, his hand met nothing but air.

Time seemed to move in slow motion as Mike rushed to his best friend's side. His unconscious mind registered that Johnny still held his gun but all he saw was the pool of blood that his brother lay in.

*No, No, No, No!*

Mike could not recall how he ended up kneeling next to Johnny as he looked down into his best friend's sky blue eyes, eyes that he knew so well. Johnny was gasping for breath as Mike fumbled to loosen his Kevlar vest. Blood soaked through the knees of his uniform but Mike noticed nothing but his brother, his best friend, as he lay dying in the dirty alley. He did not know how long he sat there staring into Johnny's eyes but when his brother finally closed them he seemed to snap out of his shock.

"No!" He yelled that Johnny. "Don't you dare fucking die on me!"

Mike's eyes roamed over Johnny's body looking for the source of where all the blood was

coming from. His brother had taken two shots to the chest but his vest had stopped them from being lethal. It was the shot that hit him somewhere around his upper thigh or hip that seemed to be draining the blood from him like a sieve. With trembling hands, Mike pressed on where he could just barely make out a tear in Johnny's uniform pants to try and stop the bleeding. No matter how hard he pressed, the warm flow of this best friend's blood continued to pump through his fingers.

*No, no, no, no...* Mike couldn't let him die!

"Morgan, let them in, man," Jones said but Mike did not hear him.

"MORGAN!" Jones yelled. "Let the medics in before he dies!"

Mike did not realize he had been speaking aloud. *Before he dies.* That got Mike's attention and when he came back to himself he saw the paramedics in front of him kneeling on the other side of Johnny.

"It's all right, Morgan," the female medic told him. "Lift your hands and I'll take over."

Mike nodded numbly and did as he was told. Jones pulled Mike to his feet and out of the way so the medics could do their job. He watched, without really seeing, as they cut Johnny's uniform from his body, started two I.V.'s, and put an oxygen mask on his pale face before they rolled him onto a backboard. Once on the board, they strapped Johnny into a pair of strange black pants that had tubes coming out of them. Mike watched as one of the medics inflated the pants before they lifted the board onto the stretcher.

"He's coding," the female medic said and started chest compressions.

The second medic ripped the oxygen mask off Johnny's face before sticking a tube down his throat. The tube was connected to a bag that the medic squeezed to breathe for Johnny. The female medic started her chest compressions again as Mike stood frozen to the spot in fear. His mind shut down as he watched his brother die.

Mike had no idea how he came to be at the hospital when he woke up in the ER. He was sure he did not faint, so he must have gone into shock. They confirmed his theory after they told him his brother was in surgery. The doctors had sedated him when he arrived and wanted to keep him for observation which he adamantly refused.

Mike shook his head. That was eighteen hours ago? He no longer knew.

"Mikey?" The soft voice of Mrs. B. called to him as if she were talking to a terrified child. He had once been that child and wished to never hear the ragged concern in her voice again.

"Mrs. B.," Mike's voice sounded like gravel even to his own ears.

She stepped into the dimly lit room and stood at the foot of her son's hospital bed. Mrs. Baxter was a petite woman and only stood at 5'2. All of the Baxter boys, including him, and even her husband towered over her but she was the foundation that the family was built upon.

"All these years and you still call me that," her voice was quiet as if she was afraid to wake Johnny. She didn't turn to look at Mike and he knew that his adoptive mother was not chastising him. She would always be Mrs. B. to him and she was okay with that.

"He looks so peaceful," she began.

*He looks dead,* Mike thought.

"...even with all that medical equipment attached to him." Mrs. B. soothed the bottom of the blanket atop Johnny's feet. "You can't blame yourself, Michael," she finally turned to look at him and he felt the tears welling up in his eyes. This kind woman who saved him when he was twelve years old knew him so well.

"Whatever was going on between the two of you would have worked itself out." Mrs. B. told him then added, "Like it always has."

*Oh, if she only knew. How disgusted would she be? How much would she blame me then?* Mike's heart broke just a little bit more at the thought of causing her any more heartache and he looked away from her.

"You can't blame yourself, Michael," Mrs. B.'s soft voice held a firm tone.

Mike could count the number of times Mrs. B. had called him Michael on one hand and now she had done it twice in a matter of minutes.

"We don't blame you and neither would Johnny," she stepped into his line of sight and her small hand lifted his chin so she could look in his eyes. "We all know the risks you boys take with your job."

Mike hadn't felt the tears begin to fall but knew there was no stopping the steady stream cascading down his face when Mrs. B. used both of her tiny hands to brush them away. When his waterworks showed no sign of stopping, Mrs. B. stepped in close and cradled his head against her petite frame. That small comfort was all it took to unleash a torrent of guilt and pain that had filled his heart. He hugged Mrs. B. and sobbed as his uncontrollable tears fell.

After crying like a baby, for he didn't know how long, he came back to himself to the sounds of Mrs. B. whispering soothing words and running her small hands through his hair. When Mike unwound his arms from around her tiny waist and looked up at her, she wiped the tears from his cheeks once more.

"You need to go home, Mikey." Mrs. B. looked him dead in the eye. "Or at least come to the house. You need rest."

Mike was already shaking his head before she finished talking. He had to be here in case Johnny woke up. He had to be the first face his best friend saw because he refused to be only the last.

"Mikey," Mrs. B. began again. "You won't be any good to Johnny if you don't get some rest and do you really want him to wake and see you like this?"

Mike knew that she wasn't referring to his tear stained face but instead to his disheveled uniform and unwashed body. Mike was not vain but Johnny always gave him hell when he looked like shit.

"He wouldn't care," Mike mumbled.

"Oh, now we both know that is not true," Mrs. B. gave him a sad smile. "Get some rest, Michael. If not for yourself, do it for Johnny."

Mike watched her turn and walk to the side of the hospital bed. She reached out a hand and brushed a stray lock of Johnny's blonde hair off his forehead.

"I will call if there is any change. I promise." Mrs. B. didn't turn to look back at him as he stood and stretched. "Andy is in the visitor's lounge waiting to take you home."

Mike walked to the door of ICU-4 and looked back at Johnny and his mother. Once more he silently prayed, *please don't let this be the last time I see him*, before he turned and walked down the hall to the lounge.

Mr. B. was waiting for him just as Mrs. B. promised but he wasn't alone. The visitor's lounge looked like a precinct with all the uniforms that were packed in the small space. All heads turned to him when he entered and all he could do was shake his head at their unasked question.

Andy stood and stepped up to Mike, placing a fatherly hand on his shoulder before he spoke. "Come on son, let's get you home and cleaned up a bit."

Mr. B. guided him out of the lounge and it was only then that he realized what he must look like. His pants were encrusted from the thigh down with Johnny's blood and even though his uniform was black there was no hiding the fact. He still wore his Kevlar vest but it hung loosely over his shoulders and he could not remember when he ripped the Velcro free. Now, he attached it back in place so that it was once more fitting securely and not hanging loosely off his large frame. Mike felt stiff

patches of Johnny's dried blood on other parts of his uniform, as well, but he tried not to think about it. All he wanted to do was go back and sit by Johnny's side but he knew by the look on Mr. B.'s face that he was on a mission. A mission that Mrs. B. had sent him on to get Mike home.

Once in the car, Mr. B. asked, "to the house?"

They always referred to the Baxter's place as 'the house' and Mike never gave much thought to why. It was strange that he even wondered about it now.

"My place," Mike replied flatly.

"Son," Mr. B. began. He always referred to Mike as 'son' even before the Baxter's adopted him. They had always been his family, legal or not, and he knew how lucky he was to have them. Knew how lucky he was to have been rescued from the hell hole that was his childhood. *No, don't go there*, Mike's mind warned him.

"You should come to the house," Mr. B. continued. "You know Sophie will worry about you if you don't."

Mike didn't want to add any additional worry to Mrs. B. but he knew he would totally break down the moment he stepped into the bedroom he had shared with Johnny for so many years as they grew up.

"My place, Mr. B. Please," Mike said and was glad that Mr. B. did not argue further.

"All right, son."

Mr. B. stopped at the curb in front of the house that Mike had been renovating for the last two years. It wasn't much to look at but it was his.

"Want me to stay a spell?" Mr. B. asked.

"Thanks, Mr. B. but I'm good," Mike said as he opened the car door. "Just going to shower and hit the sack."

Mr. B. looked like he wanted to say something but instead changed his mind before saying, "get some rest, son. We'll call if there's a change."

Mike nodded and closed the car door. Mr. B. waited at the curb, like he was a boy, until Mike was inside the house, but Mike did notice.

Mike made his way to his bedroom, removing his Kevlar vest as he went. He dropped the vest in his corner chair before taking his gun from its holster and placing it in his night table. The utility belt, that held his other equipment, joined the vest on the chair as he sat heavily and unzipped his military style boots. By the time he peeled off his socks, the true state of his exhaustion kicked in. It took everything he had to drag his ass off the bed and into the bathroom.

Mike turned on the shower before stripping out of his clothes and he tried to ignore his blood encrusted pants as he kicked his uniform into the corner. Mike thought his emotions could not be more wrung out than they already were but he was wrong. Standing under the hot spray from the shower his tears once more overwhelmed him when he saw the pink tinged water swirling down the drain.