



Unspoken Truths  
Destiny Blaine

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*Destiny Blaine*

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*Unspoken Truths*

**Unspoken Truths**  
**A Whispers Publishing Publication**  
**August 2008**

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ISBN Not Assigned

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Published by: **Whispers Publishing**, P.O. Box 1165, Ladson, SC 29456-1165.

*Destiny Blaine*

*Dedication*

*For the bookies and the gamblers... and the  
women who love them whether they win or lose*

## Chapter One

The corner of the club defined cozy almost to the extreme. It invited intimacy with its seclusion from the rest of the crowd and the dim candlelight illuminated romance. Ally knew what would happen once she took a seat in the scantily lit area but her determined legs moved her forward. Defiant feet carried her there. Her body, with full sexual intentions, planned on winning. It spited her every single time when it came to the man walking in front of her.

He toyed with her on the dance floor denying her nothing but once they were seated, she knew what to expect. The game would change. It always did. He would forbid as much as a touch unless he initiated it.

He looked over his shoulder. "Don't worry baby. I don't plan to make all of your *Tanner does me* dreams come true." He stopped abruptly and flashed a wicked wink. "At least not tonight."

*And just like that.* Moment ruined. Leave it to a man.

Ally's face heated. She felt the madder-than-hell white-hot warmth wash over her. *Who the hell did he think he was talking to?* She quickly let go of his hand and stormed off in the other direction.

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Unfortunately, her body felt the sudden loss as soon as they parted.

Making her way for the closest exit, she passed by onlookers, the same men who watched her with lust-filled eyes when she swayed onto the dance floor an hour or so earlier. She moved quickly beyond the bouncers and barmaids only to hit the exit filled with regret. *He won again.* Tanner always did.

Once outside, she took a deep breath inhaling the undeniable smell of rain. She heard his voice and the slam of the metal door behind her. "Don't show up at clubs where you know I'll be if you don't want to see me!" His laughter filled the air.

Ally wheeled around on a spiked heel. "What the hell did you just say?" She heard him. Oh boy, did she ever. He knew it too. If there was any doubt, he could quickly pick up on it as she marched over to him with anger-boiling-over strides. Those were hard to deny and she made sure she took them quickly.

"Come on baby. Don't play dumb with me. How many light blue Corvettes do you see in this damn town with a Florida Gators tag? You knew I was here and..."

"And if I did, what of it?" Cutting him off never presented a problem.

He made a solid point. It took balls or blatant stupidity to run around Knoxville, Tennessee with the University of Florida Gators plates on a car. Since he wore ignorance proudly, he really

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deserved to become an easy mark when she wanted to find him. The car made it uncomplicated. Yes, she saw his convertible and ditto; she stopped because she knew he was inside the club. Old habits don't die hard. They smother the life out of innocent bystanders. Never mind virgins on the prowl.

The anger facing her was ready to leave her at a disadvantage. It ripped through her. Cut her into small pieces. Tanner Dorsey always boiled her blood.

"What of it? Well, let's see. You walk into Jake's, spot me on the dance floor and can't wait to get out there just so you can shake your pretty little ass in my direction. Oh *but yeah* Ally, you're damn straight you knew without a doubt I'd be here and you knew exactly what to do with me when you found me." The young Mr. Dorsey spent most of his life getting under her skin.

Ally couldn't help herself. She wished like hell she could but she just couldn't. She never backed down from a good battle on the Tanner-playing field. "You know," she paused for effect but to also think of something to say, "I was dancing just fine with..." She stopped again as she tried to think of a random name but she danced onto the hardwood flooring without a partner. She couldn't pull it off fast enough to make up a non-existent dance partner.

"Oh yeah you were. You got that part right because baby, you always dance *just fine*. You

don't need a man to show you what that little body of yours can do but in case you forgot, *you danced up to me*. The only man in the place that can handle that sweet little ass and you found me without any problem." His face filled with the highest level of sex appeal and with an added wink, set jaw and seductive look, her knees were jelly.

Damn him. Damn him to another century and back. No. *To hell...and without a return trip*.

"What's wrong love, cat got that pretty little tongue of yours?" He continued to taunt her.

No it wasn't a cat. It was more like a ferocious mountain lion.

She was putty in his hands but the asshole still acted like he was fifteen. He had driven her nuts when she was twelve and into complete madness at eighteen. At twenty-two, she was certifiable.

He was still full of himself. Ally couldn't think of one thing to say to him. Not one, lone word. She huffed and puffed or at least, thought she did before she turned to look for her car. They appeared to be alone in the well lit parking lot. Something she noted when she started walking.

"Looking for someone?" He noticed she surveyed the large area.

"No, not at all. Just checking the place out to be sure there aren't any witnesses around who will see me when I kill you." There was a hint of humor in her voice.

Within seconds he had his arm draped around her shoulders and she knew he had already

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undressed her with his eyes. The playfulness evident in his voice. "I can't die yet."

She stopped short of reaching her car. "Why not? It seems like a viable option." She looked him up and down. Yep, he still looked lean. Perfect. Good enough to eat. Hell, he deserved to die. She picked up a steady pace again.

He quickly caught up with her again but his demeanor had changed when he spoke. It had seriousness oozing from it. "I'm not ready to die. I haven't experienced everything...everyone...yet." He grabbed at her waist and pulled her toward him with rough hands. She could have sworn she heard a thump when she landed against his chest but decided it most likely had been the lump moving to her throat that caught there on impact.

She grunted, or so she thought. Maybe she didn't but she had the shove down to an art when both of her palms went to his hard upper body to push him away. "You think you're so funny. Fucking hilarious."

Comical or not, he was right. She used to feel the same way when it came to him but she'd decided the year before that Tanner wasn't part of her past, at least beyond little school girl dreams, and he couldn't be a part of her future. Denied attraction never ended in satisfaction and when she joined the FBI, she sealed her fate. With each passing day, she'd come to accept it.

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“Drive me home?” He interrupted her thoughts as they approached her graphite pearl Honda Accord.

“No.” Her answer was flat. She knew he wouldn’t notice.

“Why not?”

“Because you can drive yourself.”

\* \* \* \*

He was all over opportunity. Always had been. “Yes, I could. You’re exactly right. I could drive myself but look at me; do I look like a man who likes to ride alone?” He bit his lower lip and the dimples he flashed should have landed him in jail. “Besides, if I drove tonight...”his words started to slur on command, “I’d likely catch a DUI.”

Before she could say anything, she watched him walk to the other side of the car determined to get a lift home. “Tanner, I can’t. I don’t have time.”

“You don’t have time to drop me off four buildings down from your own?” He smirked. “Yeah, okay.” His voice clearly held that ‘duh’ tone and a hint of determination.

He ignored her. Again. She knew it before she opened her car door and long before he opened the passenger’s side door. She knew it before he sat down and probably guessed as much when he followed her into the parking lot.

\* \* \* \*

They sat quietly in the bucket seats for a few seconds before the keys were placed in the ignition. She leaned over the steering wheel and

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looked up at the street light with unwarranted interest. “Why do you always *do* this?”

He was ready to play. “Why do *you* do this?” He chuckled as he reached across her taking his time to buckle her safety belt before he grabbed his own. “I’m ready when you are baby doll.” He’d been so close when he moved his arm across her waist, all he would have had to do is look up. She felt a pucker form on her lips.

She shot him a condescending look and then shifted the car into reverse. “Yeah, well you may have waited just long enough to miss your chance.” She wasn’t really prepared for what came next. If she had a rewind button designed specifically for a shameless big mouth, she would’ve hit pause first, to gather her thoughts, and then replay or better yet, erase.

He was fast. He reached over and slammed the car into park. Luckily, she’d been in reverse with her foot still on the break. “Ally, I can’t stand a woman who mumbles. What did you say? I don’t think I heard you.”

His eyes danced. She could see them in the moonlight along with the overhead lamp that he switched on for theatrics. He wanted an invitation but he wouldn’t get one. His firm stare didn’t move away and neither did his hand which rested easy on the gear shift. The old Ally would’ve dismissed it with a wave of lofty fingers but the new woman who replaced the has-been had lived a little since

the last time she'd been with the man sitting beside her.

Shifting in her seat, she turned to face him. "I said..."

Tanner moved close. "I heard what you said but what I want to know is why?"

"Why what?"

His voice lowered. "Why did you come here tonight, Ally?" Thank goodness he was going to let her mumbling words pass. He didn't look away from her which was okay because it gave her the opportunity to revisit his outer appearance.

*So easy to look at, so hard to tolerate.* She tried to convince herself that she spotted a gray hair in his head. *Maybe he'll age quickly. Maybe he'll get a beer gut. Maybe, he'll lean over here and kiss me until tomorrow.* It was always the same thing with her. She would scour over his tall frame with a meticulous eye and try to find a blemish in his perfection before wishing him to a fate that would ruin him for another woman.

It generally ended up, at least at some point, with her wishing him away to a life of impotent possibilities. She'd even gone as far to check out the Viagra site to see what his chances were. Slim. With his sex drive and vibrant health, very slim.

"Ally? Why do you want to stroll into town and straight into Jake's? It's not a place for nice girls."

"Maybe I'm not a nice girl anymore." Damnation, how she wished that were true.

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He moved closer so she could breathe him in and a hand went to her knee before he began to crawl with steady fingers toward her thigh. "I might just want to find out." The twinkle in his eye disappeared. Instead, he peered up with a certain element of darkness about him. Hooded eyes watched the rise and fall of a heavy chest.

Her breathing became interrupted just by his touch. She knew her eyes gave away everything but more than anything else, fear lingered. A broken heart wasn't something she could stand one more time.

His lips moved to her collarbone but they didn't meet skin. Heated words were mumbled with a raspy call to uninhibited pleasures. His mouth strategically plotted to deliver but refused to give while words stung just a little more. "Baby, you still aren't ready *for me*. That I can promise you but what I want to know is why you want to play where the big boys entertain the *naughtiest of girls*?" He moved away from her slowly taking a smooth hand from her leg.

"I don't know why. Okay? It was a mistake. I know Jake's isn't a place for me, at least according to you. I got that. Okay? Now, please just *get out*." Hot, raw emotion ate at her gut. She was on fire from his touch, heated by the moisture forming in her eyes, never mind the puddle of slick heat forming between her legs.

She continued as if she had to justify her reasons. "If I thought you were too drunk to drive,

I'd do the right thing and give you a ride home but you haven't had anything to drink in the last hour or so because we've danced for that long. Besides that, I know you and you never drink more than you can handle."

He moved close to her. Playing her for all she was worth and then some. "I'll make a deal with you. If you'll take me home, see me to the door *and* kiss me good-night, I'll never tell Darren and David I saw you here."

Her daring eyes locked with his and she wanted to scream as soon as he tossed out the names of her brothers. She also wanted to kick his ass and she wanted to do it slow too. *Slow and easy.*

"You wouldn't."

He moved away from her and settled into his seat leaning his head back. "I would, and honestly?" Moving up a little, he turned his neck and glanced to the side. "I'd enjoy watching them scold you." He closed his eyes and pretended to relax. "Hell, I'd even offer to spank you just so I can know the feel of your bare ass on my palm. Maybe now that you're old enough, they'd even let me."

A sigh fell dramatically into the wind while she threw the gear shift into reverse and drove him home without another word but the smack-smack sound of him spanking her ass offered appeal. She could almost hear it and what she would give just to *feel it*.

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It was safe to say, she'd lost her ever-lovin mind.

\* \* \* \*

Fifteen minutes later and they pulled into his complex. She didn't bother to put the car into park. It didn't matter; the arrogant ass in the passenger's seat did it for her.

"Well?"

"So you're here. Safe and sound." Her words found a deliberate coolness.

"It appears I am but you won't be if I have to go straight up those stairs and tattle to your brothers. You know, just so they won't worry about you."

Now she was pissed. "Tanner, have you failed to notice that I am not a child anymore? Have you? Have you forgotten that...?"

"Oh, don't think I haven't noticed that you aren't a child anymore." He moved closer to her. "What I want to know is why are you back in town? Last I heard you were working as a DEA agent or something."

*Yeah. Or something.* The *something* presented the problem.

Tanner winked before he grabbed the door handle. "Come on, walk me to the door."

She jumped out of the car and did as she was told. She always did as she was told. If her brothers weren't telling her what to do when she was growing up, Tanner offered to do it for them and it hadn't gotten any better once she found a career

with the FBI. At the moment she just wished like hell she hadn't chosen a career in law enforcement. More than anything else, she wished that Tanner didn't deliberately get under her skin.

She approached the building somewhat cautiously. He kept his eyes on her. "You look really good Ally. A sight for sore eyes and all that." He was never one to make small talk. At least, not with her.

"Thanks." She fired back the note of appreciation.

"How long has it been?" He stopped on the last step before moving forward with a nod.

She knew what he meant. "It's been over a year."

"I thought you weren't coming back here," he challenged her. She knew he would. He had to be curious about why she would bother. There wasn't anything left for her in Knoxville. He made that clear to her when she left. He told her with finality that she would never be in his heart or...in his bed.

"I didn't plan on it." Her foot hit the last step and she let out a long sigh. How many times had she walked up these steps to find her brothers? How many times had her parents sent her to fetch them knowing that they were mixed up with Tanner and his *business*?

The lights were on and the lingering and familiar noise of football games drifted outside. "Which one is here?" She should've known both her brothers would be at Tanner's place. They always

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hung out there and the reason for it waited on the other side of the door.

He moved closer to her with a mischievous whisper and a twinkle in his eye. “Which one do you want to see first?” He put the key in the door and turned pushing the door back to showcase the familiar sight.

## Chapter Two

“Damn Tanner!” David jumped up first. “Shit, man! Why did you have to bring her here and put her in this position?”

Darren shoved by him and spread his arms wide. “How’s my baby sister?”

Ally couldn’t help but smile at her older brothers. “Not a baby now but always your sister.” She embraced Darren before moving over to David to slide a kiss on his cheek.

“Hey now, I didn’t even get a hug.” Tanner winked. She’d given him more than a squeeze on the dance floor.

David was pissed at his friend so he didn’t look away from the computer screen for more than a second. “Why the hell did you bring her here man?” His gaze fired passed the woman in question to look disapprovingly at the man who held the only keys to his sister’s heart. Her brothers knew it.

Tanner played it cool in front of the two men. “I thought you’d want to see her so I lured her here with my charm.”

He’d been leading her around by the nose since she could remember. Why should he stop now?

David looked her up and down. “Damn. Did you go out dressed like that?”

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“Forever the conservative one.” She couldn’t help but pat her oldest brother on the back. “Don’t worry, Tanner was the first person I saw and he took good care of me.”

Darren immediately turned to him, probably trying for a good read on his best friend’s face. It took him a minute to answer. “Yeah, I just bet he did.”

Tanner looked over at her. His eyes determined to undress her. He always had such an alluring way of assuring her that he was capable of lingering over every inch of her body. He’d never dared to tower over it in a more explicit exploration but she knew. He’d thought about it. A lot.

With the short skirt clinging to her hips and low-cut black tank, it was safe to assume sex was on the minds of the men who’d caught a glimpse of her at Jake’s. It was probably the main reason that he seemed so hell-bent to keep a keen eye on her. Once he’d spotted her, he’d ditched the brunette hanging on his arm.

Darren saw it. Hell, even her other brother caught it and he had his back to them. “Take her home. She doesn’t need to be here. Have you forgotten that she works for the FBI?”

Tanner popped open a beer. “FBI, DEA, CIA, what’s the difference?” he joked but the other men didn’t think it was funny.

She volunteered to clarify. “There is a difference.” *Oh hell, was there ever.*

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Tanner gazed over her again. “Then you’ll have to explain those to me later.” His eyes tempted her but she realized it was just that. The damn lure of temptation was one thing. The forbidden zones; another one altogether but he never offered more than just a few little moments here or there.

Mind games. He loved them. He always toyed with her—but things were different now. She’d matured. Forgotten about him. Didn’t even care. She barely noticed him or the undeniable chemistry that had kept her brothers threatening him for most of his adult life.

The phones began to ring. It was Monday Night and the calls started coming in at one time. Tanner sat the beer down before grabbing a pen and notepad. Her brothers were already in the zone before the bookie-lingo began. “Gentleman, play ball!” He rubbed his palms together. His eyes danced across the room and for a moment she swore they flashed dollar signs.

“Talk to me baby. You got the lines?” Darren took the first call as the room became a chatter of conversation all about sports.

“Giants are four and the over and under is thirty-six.”

“A dime on Cowboys plus four? Is that it baby? Alright you got it!” Smiles lit up the place as the room began to dance with the familiar sound of bookies taking the bets.

“What? No. We’ve got your action baby. If you want two dimes on it, you’re covered. Three? Hell,

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why not go four?" Darren encouraged the big bets. They must've felt damn confident they were on the winning end. Imagine. Odds in the favor of the house.

"Who is this? Who? Yeah. Yeah. I know you. Well, let's see. Darren, hand me Davy's card." A shuffle around the room and papers flew before Tanner went back to him. "You owe us ten grand. Can't take your action. Pay me half and I'll catch ya next week."

"Hello? Yep. You got him. *I'm your man.* Eagles? Hell baby, Giants and Cowboys tonight. Giants are four and thirty-six. What can I do you for?"

She took it all in. They had come a long way. She had to hand it to them. Computers were everywhere and the notepads they once had stacked up in the corner were now limited to the handheld post-it notes. Darren entered them into a computer program and then shredded the evidence as quickly as he keyed in the bets.

They were the go-to guys for local action before she left town. Now, the calls came in from around the world. They'd hit the big time and yet still maintained their business in a little apartment that barely had running water.

She was fourteen when she realized that her brothers and Tanner were involved in an illegal gambling ring. Fourteen when she realized that the siblings she worshipped were crooked and the

friend she'd known since childhood had become the love of her life.

It was a hell of a year. It was the year she'd decided that one day Tanner Dorsey would notice her and decide that he couldn't live without her. It was also the year that both her brothers realized she had a maddening sickness for him and informed her that he wouldn't live at all if he decided he felt the same way. So, she'd flirted. Dared him, really and he stayed away. She knew he had good reason. Darren and David were built like gorillas.

Tanner was built like a tank. The six-pack abs and the strong arms were only part of his six-foot-three frame that tempted most eager hot blooded females. He could look at a woman with the seduction of a skilled man but let him open his mouth and he'd talk any woman into an orgasm. In fact, he was capable of generating multiples with a little lip action, or so she'd heard.

His smile could melt margarine. Hell, it probably molded steel. More than anything else, it inspired even mere virgins to want. She knew from experience. Whenever he looked her way with a certain practiced seduction, she felt the hot heat between her legs.

\* \* \* \*

The phones didn't quit until well after kick-off. Tanner's cell continued to ring until the first score. Her brothers always had a fit. He just couldn't stick to the rules. He was a gambler's bookie. He'd bet on anything. He liked to bet on first score and who

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would make it and then anything else about the game that would keep it a little more interesting. If someone called during a game and wanted play by play action, he was the man to talk to and he'd gladly take a gambler's money.

The boys moved to the living room to watch the game in more comfortable surroundings. Suddenly, she found herself fidgeting. She hated it but it was true. She wanted to go and then wanted to stay. Her brothers would be furious either way.

He looked around the room for a minute acting like, and she was sure it was just Tanner-drama, he misplaced something of substantial importance. He rummaged through some notes, picked up the computer printer and continued to look concerned over his loss of nothing in particular. When he picked up a couple of pens and put them back in place, she lost it. Laughter refused to be still.

"Gee, what *did* you lose? I think you're getting paranoid with me here. Maybe you think I'm bugging the place or something." She walked over to the door with a smile still spread across her lips. "I wouldn't dare interrupt the guys. Send them home after the game and I'll have some chili ready for them."

Tanner moved toward her slowly. "I had fun tonight watching you dance...dancing with you." He took a deep breath and probably thought better of it for a second but defied it anyway. "I always liked holding you in my arms."

She glanced up at him for a hint of anything. Mischief? It wasn't there so she decided it was something else. Flirtation? No. Malice was more like it. Since he said those words to her and didn't act on them, then damn him. No. Damn her. She couldn't do anything with him now. It was too late. Too much time passed. Her life changed. His hadn't. She was on one side of the law and he would always be on the other.

He must have waited a whole thirty seconds before speaking. Maybe he wanted her to process it all before he continued. "But Ally, there's something I want to know..." He stopped just three steps shy of being totally in her face... "What I'd *love to know* is why you went all rigid on me when I wanted to just sit down in the corner and catch up. You know, chat for awhile." She heard him catch a broken breath.

"I didn't." Her own chest rose and fell but she could have sworn the airway was blocked. She was unable to move and breathing even seemed like a special assignment.

He moved closer. Damn him. He moved a whole step closer. Now, two short baby steps and he would be close enough to hear her groan, which she did a lot when she was frustrated. She stayed physically and mentally challenged when he was nearby.

"You didn't huh?" His perfect body never moved away from her. He had to be the best built man that ever passed through the gates of heaven

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only to bring a little hell with him to those women who craved him. She knew all about that because she lived in the pits of it.

Lust-filled nights kept her awake more often than not. Frustrated days made her into a nervous wreck. There wasn't a man alive that could please her. Not one masculine hand that could turn her on—not one. And now she wasn't even sure that Tanner's could.

She'd learned to resent the time she'd spent wasting away only to have him tell her the year before that they would never be. How the hell could something be over when it never began in the first place? She owned the devastation his words brought to her and it almost drove her to an unexplainable madness. Fury set in but now, wanton need replaced it. Once again, just as always, she longed for him even in the midst of denial.

Clearing her throat, she started to leave. "Just tell them where to find me."

He took that extra step. "And what about me? Where do I find you while you're home? Are you staying with the boys or your mother or...?"

Her head started to spin. It always did when she was around him. She only drank one glass of wine at the pub and now she was acting like a woman in a drunken stupor ready to spread her legs for the first man who knew how to help a willing woman open them.

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“Don’t do this.” She really wanted to beg him. She wanted to tell him all the reasons that now wouldn’t be the best time to start something that should have begun long ago. She wanted to run out the door but she couldn’t. He smelled so damn good and all she wanted was just one kiss from him. Okay, maybe two or three but he could start with the first one.

\* \* \* \*

He towered over her five-foot-four frame. Smiling down on her, he bent his forehead to hers and with a smooth and skilled hand that would have made Don Juan proud, he brushed a hair from her cheek with the back of his hand.

*Suave.* She had to hand it to him. He was silky smooth.

“I thought you wouldn’t be back.” His voice was far too serious oozing with the knowledge that she still craved him. Taunt with implications that lust filled the air.

Her tone didn’t match his. “Yes, well, look at me. I appear to have waltzed back into Tennessee hell-bent on getting your attention. So, now that I have it, I promise I’ll sleep better tonight. You know how I love to win when we play our little games.”

It was no secret that she’d carried a torch for him. It also wasn’t a secret that he would have climbed into her bed on more than one occasion if her brothers had just turned their heads long enough to allow him to pull back the sheet and

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yank his pants down. They never did. They weren't about to start now.

Darren's voice was firm from behind them. "What are you two doing over there? Discussing football I hope?"

She came back to her senses. Well, not really, she reached out and grabbed some element of them when she heard her brother's voice.

The one with the perpetual smirk backed away from her. "Yep, man, you got that right. We're discussing plays over here." His eyes didn't punish him just because his body wasn't able to react to her. They never left her and lust, she knew it was just a hint of it, flooded his eyes. "Ally, I guess the next move will be yours."

Darren snickered before he left the room with a piece of cheese in one hand and a beer in the other. "Careful what you wish for there, buddy."

Her brother left them alone. Remarkable. It was truly a day for the record books. Either the game was tight or maybe he just wasn't in the mood to run intervention. Maybe like her, he'd grown tired of the Tanner and Ally saga.

A lingering stare wasn't denied. "Yeah? Well care to guess what I've wished for? If the next play is yours, I'm cheering for you to make a touchdown baby and if you don't..." he stopped himself from words but not the actions. He moved the pad of a steady thumb over her pouty lower lip before he finished. "If you don't, I may just run my best offense on your little ass." He sighed before he

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added with a twinkle in his eye. “Regardless of who is standing by to tell me it’s the wrong play to make.”

Now, she wanted him. She’d fought it well at the club. She’d denied him in the car. She’d resisted him on the way up the steps to the apartment and she’d just about escaped unscathed. Then, he pulled out all the stops.

She flipped her long strawberry blonde hair over her shoulders before tying it up behind her head. “Well, thank goodness you let me in on your plans because just like you, I can run like hell.” She opened the door and shot him a flirty little wink. “And this time, I will.”

## Chapter Three

Ally was in the kitchen throwing things. She tossed everything she could into a pot. An unopened can of tomatoes, a whole onion, a whole green pepper, and a bottle of ketchup. She stopped in her tracks and called out to an empty room. "What the fuck am I doing here?"

Darren slammed the pantry door as he slid by her. Placing a kiss on her cheek, he answered for her. "The real question is little sister, what took you so long to come back?"

She could feel her cheeks redden. She peered down into the large pot. "Oh, I thought you guys wouldn't be home until after the game."

"Good thing I came home when I did. It looks like you've forgotten how to cook." He loved to tease her. "The veggies, you wash and chop and the cans, you open before you..."

"You're the funny one tonight, huh?" Her giggles were sincere. She loved spending time with her brothers.

Darren sat down at the kitchen table and studied her. "Why *are you here?*" His voice held steady.

"What? Am I not welcome anymore just because I moved away? Can't your sister come

home for a visit? And can't she come for a visit without the whole world wondering why?"

A deep breath was drawn before he spoke. "Ally, he's not worth it."

She played dumb. "Who?"

"Don't play me for a fool. You can't get over him and you've come back for him. Don't waste your time." He looked down at his hands and slowly shook his head. "He'll destroy you and everything you've worked for."

She pulled out a knife from the kitchen drawer. She couldn't look at him. He thought he knew her but this time, he was wrong. She released a troubled sigh as she cut into the onion. A little moisture found its way to her the corner of her eyes. *Damn onions*. She wished like hell she was alone and then she'd just go with it. Have a good cry.

Her brother's eyes didn't leave her. "You know that saying. There are women you bed and women you take home to mama?"

A smile crept across her lips and she had to laugh. "Well, it goes something like that I guess." She picked up a chopped sliver of onion and threw it at him.

"Yeah, something like that." He continued, "Honey, Tanner's our best friend. He's a good guy but dammit little sister, he's no good for a woman and I hope you know it."

She put the knife down and walked over to claim the chair opposite him. "Tell me something,

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why is it that you and David always had your pick? You always went after the girls you wanted, the dreams you wanted to chase, the life you wanted to live. Yet, you never wanted me to do the same. Why is that?"

Darren slammed his palm down on the table. "Damn you. We wanted you safe and you have no idea what you'll have your hands on if you get Tanner Dorsey. No idea at all."

Tears threatened to spill again so she bowed her head choosing instead to watch her hands form a steeple. She thought long and hard before she lifted her eyes to tell him her would-be truths. "Darren, you're right, I'm here for a reason but it has nothing to do with Tanner."

"You're a liar."

"No, I'm not. In fact, you want honesty, I'll give you a good dose of it." She paused as she took time to glance around the kitchen. All the cat and mouse games she'd played with Tanner often began right there. The memories tore through her heart before she spoke.

"A year ago, I came back for him. I came home *for Tanner*. I wanted him to pay me some attention, tell me something, give me...anything."

"And?"

"And he did." She nodded slowly.

"Then I'll kill the little bastard." Darren stood up with anger in his eyes and his fists clenched at his sides.

*Destiny Blaine*

She reached up and grabbed his forearm. "Sit down. It's not what you think."

"Did he hurt you?" Brewing anger held his jaw firm.

Yes, he hurt her. He tore her heart out and threw her away in the process. He destroyed her. "No," she lied. "He did exactly what you wanted him to do." Her lips turned down while the memory and pain provoked tears.

Darren sat back in his chair emotionless. He crossed his arms thoughtfully. "I'm sorry. I really am."

A snickered grunt, if there was such a thing, slipped from her lips. A steady stream of tears drifted down her cheeks. "I imagine you are, but you still got what you wanted. He told me to go and not look back. He said..." she choked as the words hung in her chest... "He said if I was looking at him for a reason to stay, I wouldn't find it." She swallowed hard and was about to let the misery she'd felt over a year ago consume her when her phone rang.

She jumped up and went over to the kitchen counter where she'd left her purse. "This is Ally." She sniffed into the receiver which she shouldn't have done. She was an agent with the FBI and her demeanor, not to mention the way she answered the phone, showed weakness. She coughed trying to cover up the pain. "Okay. Okay. Where?" By the time the last "okay" fell from her lips, she appeared to have found some inner strength. She

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closed her phone with one hand and returned it to her purse.

Sniffing once more, she turned back to her brother. "We'll finish here later." She meant the conversation. The chili, he could manage. She bent down to rummage through a duffle bag she'd just left by the door. She came up with a revolver and a sweater.

"What the fuck?" He eyed the gun.

"Not for you big brother. Although," the tease came back into her voice, "I could hold you at gunpoint and demand that you finish off the chili while I'm gone."

Worry spread across his brow. "If you think I'm going to let my little sister take a phone call and then walk out of here with a pistol in her hand, you got another *think* coming."

She shoved the gun in her back tucking it securely in her belt while she dug back into her bag in search of ammunition. She was good. Setting up the whole stage perfectly. She pulled out a box of it and fingered it lightly tapping nails on the container that held rounds upon rounds of firing power.

"Agent Ally Stephens, FBI." She played with him sticking out her hand waiting on a handshake but instead he pulled her into an embrace.

Whispering in her ear, his voice was worried. "Damn, I'd hoped I'd never have to see you like this. Be careful out there."

*Destiny Blaine*

She smiled weakly before turning away. Her lying eyes daring to give her away.

\* \* \* \*

She approached with caution. There didn't appear to be any movement straight ahead. Her head was alive with what-if scenarios but she couldn't think about them. She refused to acknowledge them with any measure of fantasy role play. That was the intelligence agent in her.

She walked deeper into the night, moving swiftly as the darkness pulled her in and the creatures of the hour kept her company. The night critters were alive and crickets beckoned her closer with lightening bugs providing just enough amusement.

Looking around, the agent in her carefully assessed the surroundings. She knew the place well. She'd spent her summers there watching from the bleachers as her brothers and Tanner ran the bases or spit sunflower seeds on the dirt floor of the dugout.

She heard a whistle and stopped dead in her tracks. He beat her there. She turned around to look for him and then an owl sound made her turn back. He was in the dugout.

Approaching with frustration in her heels more than anticipation, she opened the tall wired gate and pushed through it with the swing of her hip. And there he was. His legs stretched out in front of him crossed at the ankles with sunflower seeds already flying.

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"I was beginning to think you weren't going to show up." He threw a few seeds down at her feet playfully.

"Hmm...I bet you were." Nodding, she pretended to believe him.

"What took you so long? Darren didn't want to let you out of the house? What did you tell him?" The questions flew out of his mouth.

"Got a lot on your mind Tanner? The interrogation becomes you."

He threw the package down and stood up. "Yeah, I've got a lot on my mind baby. I've had a lot on my mind for years. It's just time you heard about it."

"This was a mistake." She shifted her weight with full intentions of walking away.

He sat back down on the bench. "No. The mistake, I own. I should've never pushed you away. I was one foolish man to let you go." His gaze drifted over her. "Look at you. Any man stupid enough to back away from you should rot in his own hell and believe me; I've been there and back."

Ally studied him for a minute before moving again. "Well, you did and I haven't forgotten it. I told you exactly how I felt and you still threw me away like I was nothing to you. In fact, you didn't leave anything to chance. You assured me I meant nothing to you. I was, how did you put it? Oh that's right, the smallest of splinters that you caught in your ass while sitting on the bench. It's kind of ironic that you called me out here. You know?"

*Destiny Blaine*

He was back on his feet without a second to spare. He grabbed her arm to stop her from turning away from him. "Don't you dare do this now," he warned her. "You've chased my ass for years and I swear, I'll spank yours if you don't sit down there and listen to me."

Her eyes narrowed daring him but fully knowing he could overpower her if he made up his mind. "Tanner, what the fuck? What do you want from me?" Her voice held more and more bitterness with each passing word.

\* \* \* \*

She'd been there with him before. He'd called her out once when she first turned eighteen with a promise of great adventures. He'd given her a kiss on the cheek. A year earlier, he summoned her to the dugout so that he could let her down gently only he chose to break her heart. No, correction, shatter it beyond repair. Each time, he'd taken something from her. Each time, he left her with less of herself.

He looked down at his hands clasped between his legs. His knees spread open wide. He reached for her and pulled her to him passing all warnings of familiar boundaries. She stood in between his open legs looking down on him feeling...vulnerable.

"What do I want from you?" He watched with knowing eyes ready to spill lots of personal truths..."I don't want anything *from* you." He moved closer taking her right hand and placing it

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on his left shoulder before carefully moving the left one on his right. "I just want you. All of you."

Her breathing was labored until that very moment and then it ceased to exist altogether. Stopped entirely. She was sure of it. Maybe she wasn't even alive anymore. Maybe that's why she felt so light and dizzy.

Wiggling free, she turned her head so their eyes didn't meet when she lied. "It's too late. I don't want you anymore." She held her head high and with a free hand, released her ponytail so freed curls could gently flow back down her back. She was good. She had the icy stares down to an art. It became something that served her well when she dealt with hardened criminals. It apparently caught the man in front of her off his game. At least for a minute, maybe two.

She'd no more than moved out of his grip and from between his thighs that he stood fast and then pushed up against her pinning her quickly before she could possess a sensible thought. The web of fencing behind them reminded her of the challenges he always seemed ready to offer. Now, he appeared somewhat willing to stop all games. She didn't think so. She wasn't ready.

"Move, damn you." Her lips formed a tight line.

"I like it rough baby so don't make me take what I already know you want to willingly give." He teased as he moved his lower body into her more pivotal point. The hard-on he pushed into her tempted...sweet mercy, did it ever call to her.

*Breathe in. Breathe out.* She kept reminding herself because at the moment, the man she'd always loved was about to plant a first kiss on her lips and she knew if he did, she would lose her objective, her focus, and her...

Hot, hungry, divine moisture-filled lips covered her very receptive mouth. His tongue and teeth did things to a woman that no other man had attempted. Slow movement urged him in deep as his kiss roughened a bit then softened just enough. Tender, sweet, and delicious yet famished, his mouth tore her entire world apart. Her lower half eagerly reacted to him in a way she didn't know how to handle.

His hands didn't waste a lot of time either. He moved his fingers down the side of her breast, stopping for a second, allowing a lingering debate to exist as the fire guided him on. "Oh Ally, sweet Ally, I knew you'd taste hot and sweet just like the morning sun." His hand continued down. Smoothly touching her hip before moving to her ass. "I've waited so long baby...so long." His words would cut off kisses before he devoured her with another.

Wet. She was so, so wet and she knew what he'd want. She knew where he would take her if only she'd let him but she couldn't lead him there. She wouldn't...

His fiery lips moved across her cheek in slow motion toward a pain she would know forever if he didn't stop this now. He paused long enough to whisper into her ear nipping the words between

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quick nibbles and heavy breathing. "You've waited for me. I know you've waited for me."

*What? What did he just say?* She shoved him away. "What did you say?"

Tanner moved his forefinger to her lips. "Shh...baby, it's *all* right I won't tell a soul."

Hot heat flushed her cheeks. She felt it move there in an instant. There was absolutely no way he could know she still had her virginity. No way whatsoever. She pushed him away with both hands on his rock hard chest. "You are one piece of work Tanner Dorsey. An arrogant masterpiece. A true work of art!"

Inquisitive eyes roamed over her. "What have I done wrong this time?" His eyes had humor back in them, the wanton look he'd only just held for her disappearing as quickly as it made a first appearance.

"You know damn well..."

"That you're a virgin? You bet I know. It's my business to know." His face flared with obvious satisfaction.

Her mouth made a perfect O shape and nothing came to mind to say, but when it did, her arms moved him aside as her mouth fired away. "You don't know shit." She quickly made her way to the fence and grabbed the hook to push it opposite her. She had to get out of there. She was mad. Evil thoughts ran rampant. She wanted to kill the man.

To hell with the fact she wanted to fuck him. She always had those thoughts and lived with them.

Other men surely had the same initiatives to do the dirty deed. She just needed to go find another one. The kind that knew how to keep his damn mouth closed!

“That’s right, baby, I don’t know anything at all. You keep telling yourself that. It’ll make you feel better tonight when you’re lying there alone in your room wishing you had me between your legs instead of that vibrator. You know the one. You keep it in your nightstand back in Florida.”

The words stung her. She slowly turned around. “You bastard!” She raised her hand but knew it would never meet flesh. She couldn’t strike him no matter how bad she wanted to do it.

Tanner’s dark eyes taunted her while his jaw set with determination. “Yes, I know all about it. Now, I have to warn you that I may not have as many different speeds as your little toy but I’m just as big not to mention hard. Well, here...” he took her hand in his... “Why don’t you just feel for yourself and that way...”

Ally yanked her arm away. “You fucking prick! Damn it Tanner! You make me so mad!” She stormed away from the gate and then back again. Her hip cocked out to the side with a hand waiting to rest on it one minute and then waving him off with a middle finger flying in the air the next. “Fuck you, Tanner. Where do you get off going through my things? Where?”

Her screams could have been heard in Nashville. Forget Knoxville. The whole damn town

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probably knew about her little toy by now. The woman was blue-hot mad and not only did she see red, she saw blood and wanted to help Tanner shed a little of it.

After marching up and down the field throwing her arms around her head madly, she stopped. Just dead in her tracks, she came to a sudden halt. The truth had a way of putting people in their place. It practically ran her over.

Her words tumbled out but were still jumbled in her mind. "You've been in my apartment? When I wasn't home? You've invaded my personal space? Gone through my things?" The reality of it dealt a huge blow. She marched right up to him with both hands on her hips. "Why would you do that? What kind of sick prick are you?"

He nodded up and down. "You got that part right." He looked down and then back up again. "But there's a way to cure me." He glared at her from under hooded eyes. Those that would never allow her to run from him, he followed her every move with knowing truths. "And you're not a lost cause either."

She huffed. She hated when she did that. It proved that she couldn't win with him. She stormed away again and then back but she couldn't form the first syllable so she stomped away once more. "Damn you!"

"Ally, you can be mad at me if you want. When I heard you were working for the FBI, I just couldn't help myself. I had to put someone on

you.” His voice fell an octave. “I just wanted to be sure that you were always protected.”

Oh now, *now* he’d gone too far. Way too far. “*You did what?*” She rushed over to him glaring at him through watery eyes. Not from hurt but from a temper ready to explode into a fit of well-provoked eruption.

“I put someone on you. I didn’t stutter. I put a crew of guys on you and you never knew they were there. End of story.” A smug expression defined his glee.

“No! No! It isn’t the end of the story. I...I...” She was speechless and he seemed to enjoy it all the more.

\* \* \* \*

Her arms continued to fly around everywhere. “I’ll have to talk to you about this some other time. I can’t...I just cannot believe you would do this! You’ve gone too far and this time Tanner Dorsey, it will bite you in the ass!”

He let her walk by without reaching for her. She’d almost made it to the gate when she heard him. “Ah, hell Ally. Don’t you know how I feel about you by now? I can push you away but my heart won’t leave you alone. I wanted to keep you safe.”

Her back was to him. She didn’t want to face him. She didn’t want him to see the true pain that existed in her eyes but she needed him to hear her. Loud and clear, she wanted him to know. “If you wanted me safe, you would’ve never sent your guys

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to check on me. You would've come for me yourself. You just wanted to stroke your ego. I hope the hard-on you wear around for me was worth it because your dick just got you in a heap of trouble."

## Chapter Four

She dialed her voice mail.

"You have three new messages. Two saved messages."

She hit one to retrieve.

"Hey, Ally, we've got a problem. Call me at 488-555-4242. Now."

"Ally. Steve. Call me 555-4242. I'm waiting to hear from you."

"Agent Stephens this is Marcel Fernandez with Internal Affairs. I think we may need to sit down and talk. Give me a call when you can please at 488-555-4242." *Shit.* It was the same number where Steve had called from earlier. Yes, she had troubles and they were piling up on her by the minute. Tanner was such a control freak that he probably didn't know the Feds would have tagged him or his crew early on. She'd been used for bait and now damn them all, she hung out on a limb threatening to break at any moment.

She dialed the number slowly. "This is Agent Ally Stephens. May I please speak to..."

"Agent Stephens? Yes, Marcel Fernandez. We need to talk and I'd like to do that tonight. I'm going to give you an address over on the Riverfront. We'll meet there. It's close to the stadium so you

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won't have any trouble finding it. In fact, it's not far from the ballpark you know well..."

\* \* \* \*

She pulled into the vacated parking lot of one of Knoxville's finest restaurants. The staff had long since left for the night and her stomach growled allowing her to remember she'd missed dinner.

She looked out over the water until she noticed a car approaching with dimmed headlights. She quickly reached for the gun stashed in her back. She went for it on instinct.

Marcel Fernandez rose from the driver's seat slowly with his hands up. "It's me, Fernandez." He addressed her and then reached for his badge and flashed it. She knew who he was. He was a snake. She'd recognize him anywhere. How he'd ended up as a supervisor for the FBI's Internal Affairs Division was anyone's guess. How he'd ended up being in charge of her current operation was up for even further debate. That is, until Tanner left little to her imagination.

"So he bit."

"Who? What are you talking about?" Obvious confusion came through in her voice.

"Tanner Dorsey." She heard a voice behind her and quickly turned to see him. The man who possessed it walked up on her slowly. Special Agent Steve Whitehead took careful steps with his approach.

"Steve. Good to see you. I didn't know you'd be here." She should have expected as much. He'd

trailed behind her everywhere she went and she should have known she would run into him sooner or later. They were both on a special team trying to crack open a case that involved drugs, gambling rings, prostitution and murder-for-hire. A new cartel that often made the mafia look like child's play.

Fernandez possessed a reputation for being one cool cat and as he lurked nearby taking in her body language, she knew she was under the scrutinized eye of suspicion. He moved toward her slowly. "Did it ever occur to you why you were chosen for this job?"

She looked at Steve and back at Fernandez. "Because my credentials are solid. I'm the best one for the job. I have experience and contacts and you wanted someone who could do the job quickly, effectively and..."

"Cut the bull shit, Stephens." He waved his hand and began his prance. That's what a lot of the women agents called it. Fernandez wasn't just easy on the eyes; he was a pleasure to the skin. Not that she knew from experience. Thank goodness. She'd been warned early on and as far as she could tell, she could've been one of the few Special Agents who hadn't slipped into the man's bed. When he walked, he strutted. Confident, manly and just a damn pleasure to watch, at least for most. At the moment, she wasn't impressed.

"Let's chat, Ally." Fernandez was in her face for longer than what she would consider

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comfortable. She could smell a hint of scotch on his breath. Of course, she couldn't blame him. It was after hours. He was off the clock and didn't appear drunk. He'd likely had a sip or two waiting for her call.

She shifted her weight and stared daggers at Steve. The only man who had almost bedded her on numerous occasions just because the chemistry seemed to be there but something always held them back. That something was Tanner and Steve apparently knew it.

"What do you want from me Fernandez?"

"I want Tanner Dorsey and I want your brothers. How soon should I expect them?" He chuckled before he looked over her with a condescending smirk.

The pit of her gut throbbed with pain. Had someone kicked her there? She could have offered a sworn statement that they had. It filled her with agony and her heart broke right along with the shattering pain that took over her body. She had the good sense to keep her mouth closed. Her lips formed a tight line while trying to sum up what Fernandez knew and how much Steve had likely witnessed.

"See, Ally, or is it Special Agent Stephens?" He laughed before continuing, "I seem to forget these days. After all, who would've ever thought you could've waltzed into the FBI and secured a job. I have to hand it to you. With your family ties

knotted tightly into the underworld, you pulled off the impossible.”

Her eyes darted back and forth between men. Angry men. It showed in their expressions. They believed one of their own had betrayed them and the sanctity of what the agency stood for. It wouldn't be easy to convince them that they were wrong.

Fernandez paced. “Nothing to say?”

“What can I say? You think you have it all figured out. You're forgetting one thing though. There's a number of years difference in my age and the ages of my brothers and Tanner. I don't know what they do in their spare time...”

“How about in their daily lives, what do they do day in and day out? Got any inclination about that?” Steve wasn't going to let her off easy. He felt betrayed and by the look in his eyes, he resented the hell out of it. He probably followed her to the club, or worse, to the baseball field. There, Tanner would have made any man see what was always more than obvious. There was an undeniable, uncontrollable, maybe even dark fascination that always kept both Tanner and Ally coming back for more.

Her eyes narrowed with the recognition of the corner that she had her back against. She was in a difficult place, a very tough predicament but one that could be handled in time. Tanner had taught her early on how to cope with the element of

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surprise. She didn't need to open her mouth when caught off guard. So, she listened.

"Tell me what you know about Dorsey and then we'll work on your brothers." Fernandez met up to his reputation. Smooth, smooth as silk until he went in for the kill. She knew to watch herself. Contemplate every word before she spoke it.

Fernandez could drag information from the lips of dying men and never feel bad about it if the one dying used his last sip of life to give him information. Ruthless, cold-hearted and one who possessed a damn sharp mind, most of their own kind considered him armed and dangerous at all times.

"Agent Stephens? I'm asking you a question. I'd like to know what you can tell me about Dorsey."

Her phone rang. She walked over to the car, leaned in and pulled it out slowly. She knew who'd be on the other end. The caller ID didn't have to boldly announce it. "This is Stephens."

"Hey, can I come over? I need to talk to you. I want to get this over and done with Ally. We've fought this thing for far too long and..."

She cleared her throat. "Yes, yes. I am so sorry about that. Did I leave the stove on? You'd better run check just to be sure. I'll be there shortly. No need to worry. I just left in a hurry." She snapped the phone shut before Tanner's voice could ring out with questions.

Clearing her throat again, she began. "I'm not giving up my brothers." She paused and took a

deep breath. "Or Tanner." She spoke with conviction. "If you think I'm too close to this then pull me off the case. I'll go back to Florida tomorrow and..."

Fernandez blew up, or at least, he might as well have. His veins bulged, his face reddened, his belly heaved with a chest rising and falling with each word he screamed. "The hell you will! You've already jeopardized us enough so if you think you are going to go running back to where the sun always shines, darling welcome to the FBI. We hope you like it here." He gritted his teeth, set his jaw and then spun around quickly but not before he turned to face her again before leaving with a final warning.

Pointing his index finger at her, he pushed it into her chest for effect. "I haven't gotten to where I am letting someone like you turn the other cheek when family is involved. Everyone comes from somewhere and many of us have skeletons in our family closets. We just do what we can to be sure that their blood is the only thing we share. And if it isn't, we drain enough of it to keep from tainting everything else we touch." He shook his head and then walked away.

From the car, Fernandez yelled for Steve. "Let's get out of here. I believe Dorsey's on his way to Ms. Stephens's house. I wouldn't want us to hold her up. They probably have a lot of unfinished business."

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Steve started to walk by but stopped long enough to offer cruel words. “While you were keeping that tight little pussy all wrapped up in an intimate little package, your boyfriend’s goons were spying on you. I hope, I really hope you didn’t know Dorsey’s men were always there. Tailing you. Sweeping your apartment. Stalking your men friends. I hope you didn’t but so help me, if you did, I’ll make it my mission to see you in hell.”

His words stunned her. She drew in a breath, took in his anger and possessed it as her own. She had no doubts where she’d take it out or to be precise, who would catch the brunt of it when she released her own animosity. She had a new determination and as soon as she pushed aside one obstacle, Tanner Dorsey would pay hell because she planned to bring some of it down on him.

## **Chapter Five**

She was seething. The day's events played out again and again in her head. Oh yeah, she was going to clean his plow. But first, she was going to fuck him. It was the only thing standing in her way. The fact that she'd never had the only man she truly wanted placed her at an extreme disadvantage. She lost her ability to think so she had to do it. It was a must-do if she ever hoped to have peace of mind.

She waited for him in the lobby. The atrium feature of the Alcoa Highway Hilton provided an open and airy—if not relaxing—atmosphere but the bar was closed. It was after midnight and the crowds had gone home. The only people left in the area were those who planned to steal away a few hours upstairs before their spouses came looking for them.

He walked in with her leather bag over one shoulder and rolling a suitcase with his free hand. She followed him with steady eyes before turning away. They met at the elevator. They stepped in and five floors later, they stepped out.

Silence drifted between them but words couldn't stop where they were headed. She knew it. Sure, she was mad as hell because thanks to him, he'd left her no other choice but to tear down

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his organization but first; she intended to try out what had always belonged to her. She would know what it felt like to have Tanner Dorsey in between her legs.

The keycard worked. Thank heavens for small miracles. The way her luck had been, she couldn't be sure. It slid in and out and just like that...the door opened. He dropped everything just inside of it. He was a smart man and she was a very anxious woman.

She moved quickly to lock the door behind them. "We don't have much time."

He took her in his arms and pulled her tight. "Baby, I plan to take all I want and then some."

"Tanner..." Her voice whispered need but not desperation. Even if she had no interest in bedding him, she would've still had to meet him out somewhere. She'd be forced to tell him that they faced a nightmare, a hellish storm that lay just beyond their time together.

Lust filled his eyes as he held her in his arms. "And oh how I'll love loving you in the time we have." He pulled her close and held her in a piercing gaze teasing her with the strength of his waist-down grind. Pushing into her with a force she wanted to know. The feel of a man.

She pulled him in lavishing him with a kiss only meant to guide further carnal pleasures. Lust rolled over her tongue. She licked beyond teeth and plunged further into the depths of a warm, lush heaven. She'd never kissed with such passion but

then again she'd never kissed with much intent. Men came and went in her life and most wanted to bed her. She had opportunity but just because those chances were often there didn't mean that she jumped at them. She'd waited and in that moment, seemed satisfied with her decision.

"So I finally get to live in those *Tanner does me* dreams?" He played with her soft hair cascading over her shoulders pulling away from her long enough to study her face.

Full, soft lips covered his face. "Don't you dare, not now. Tanner, don't talk. Just please, don't open your mouth and ruin this." She begged with a well warranted plea but he bargained for more.

"Oh but baby, I'll open my mouth on you in places you'll never want me to leave. That's a solemn promise." His eyes danced with the crackling fire she could see and then he began his pursuit of fulfilling all he'd ever promised and then some.

The kiss he first drew her into was hungry. Dominant. His body moved into her with slow skill but forced speed control. He was dying to rip her clothes from her and she could see it. The allure of it all turned her on and guided her forward.

His heated grip caught one wrist and moved it high above her head while a chilling clasp of fingers grabbed her free hand leaving them palm to palm before he slid it up the wall to meet the other. One mobile lock ensured his clamp covered both her

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wrists locking them in one firm grasp. She was his and he wanted to be damn sure she knew he could do just about anything he wanted.

Tanner tilted her chin up in a firm hold but she couldn't look at him. What if he asked her about the sudden rush to meet? What if he demanded answers just like she certainly would have expected from him? What if...

He did.

"Open your eyes, pretty lady." Tanner's voice held that primal fear. The kind of eerie tone that would make many women shiver under him but Ally knew what it held for her. A moment of truth.

His lips moved across hers in a light feathery gesture meant to tease her. She wanted to capture them. Grab tightly to one lip or the other before dragging him back for a more meaningful lock but he wouldn't allow it. Another peck here and one more there, his lips traced her jaw and then under her chin before working their way back up again.

Her eyes opened and closed once more.

"Now then." He kissed both lids before planting one on the end of her nose. "You're going to tell me where you've been. And..." He slid his hand down to the band of her pants running his finger back and forth, back and forth before he finally spoke again. "Then, I'll give you what you want. What you've always wanted." His voice was husky, sexual, overbearing.

Reluctantly, she came to her senses. *The nerve of him*. She felt the agony of defeat whispering out

all of her sexual frustrations over and over again reminding her that she really was there, in that moment, because she'd waited on him for years. "Oh no you don't. You don't get to decide here." Her voice didn't sound like her own. "Shut up and kiss me." Demanding and dominant, she knew better.

He snickered for just a second. Maybe not even that long before he gave her one, long, deep, soulful kiss. "Baby, I'm not only going to kiss you, but I'm going to put a smile on that pretty little face that you'll never be able to hide again but only after..."

A few more lingering kisses maybe? No, she probably wouldn't be that lucky.

He continued. "You tell me where you were and what had you so upset that you couldn't even go home to get your luggage?"

With a grin pasted to his face, he moved away from her sliding a slow hand to his mouth where his thumb moved back and forth across his lower lip. "You taste incredible by the way." A groan later and he was even more determined. Undeniable, it existed in his senses. The way he touched her, the way he tasted her when their lips met, proved controlling her was easy for him. Nothing changed just because he planned to fuck her.

"Cocky ass. You fucking prick." Ally pushed by him grabbing the handles to the duffle bag while giving it a short fling to the bed. She had reached

*Unspoken Truths*

mad-mode and her mouth was a motorized weapon.  
“You are nothing but a common tease.”

“Baby I’m anything but a tease, I can promise you that.” He looked her up and down with starvation in his veins. The bulge in between his legs wasn’t the only clue. His voice projected true hunger. Something she’d never heard before but decided she could adjust and learn quickly to love it.

“You always were. Always so confident that every woman in town wanted to fuck your ass...” She started pulling things out of her bag slamming each piece of clothing on the bed in a half-hearted attempt to ignore the need, not to mention the moisture, driving her to madness.

“They did and some of them even got to do it.”

That one stung.

He immediately saw it and tried to reach for her but she slapped him away.

“Oh no you don’t, you don’t get to do that now. You don’t get to push me away and then pull me back. Go offer your stud services to someone else.”

“That’s Mr. Stud to you.” He owned the rights to a superior male ego. He stood taller with an apparent understanding. “I guess the only way to shut you up is to feed you a good dose of what you’ve been missing.”

She was clearly agitated and so what if it showed. “You know, you just can’t keep doing this to me. I’ve waited for your ass for so long that it

hurts. Physically *hurts*.” She fought the tears that wanted to fall. Defied them and dared them to flow, feeling that if they did, she’d just curl up in the bed and cry herself to sleep. She needed a good cry. She’d welcome it.

He approached with caution and she flung a shirt at him. “Hang this up.” Then she continued. “You know, you are so stupid. You should’ve just fucked me but no, you couldn’t do that. You wanted to talk so you sure as hell better be a good listener.” She tossed a few more items on the bed and then bent over the bag in search of something of substantial value.

“Whatcha lookin for, baby girl?” His voice gave him away. He was all about monkey business if it came at her expense.

“Where is it?” She stormed over to his bag and opened it. She didn’t see it...at first.

“Where’s what?”

Through gritted teeth, she rose up from the floor to face him. “You know *what*, damn you.”

She didn’t feel like games. She was going to go fuck herself. She truly was. She didn’t care if she didn’t know how to operate the damn thing. Didn’t give a shit if he heard her and didn’t particularly care if she had the batteries for it or not. She planned to do it. Nice and slow.

He was ready to be all...Tanner. “Well babe, if you’ll stop long enough to look in the front pocket, I think you’ll notice that your toy is in there.” The humor spread over his face with rapid speed.

*Unspoken Truths*

She bent back over the bag and retrieved her vibrator. She could feel her face heat as she pulled it out.

“You know, if you don’t mind my saying so, I noticed that it’s never quite made it out of the box.” He pointed to the pink and lavender container.

“Shut up.” She used the packaged toy to hit him once in the chest.

His approach was all alpha male. He was going to take what was already his. Claim and brand what he already owned and he would do it on his own terms. She could see it in his fierce eyes but he sure as hell took his own sweet time. Anger consumed her but everything he said and did only provoked, if not sealed, her need.

“Damn you Tanner...”

His name almost didn’t slip from her mouth before he pulled her to him. His arms wrapped her in a possessive hold. He was so close, her heart could beat right next to his but it wasn’t her heart that was pumping. It was the throb in between her legs. It was pulsing with lust. Years of it.

She struggled to get away from him but it was only because she wanted him more and she knew he wasn’t going to let her go now not with the recklessness in his eyes. His cock gained full awareness alerting her every time he moved closer that *this was it*. The night that she would lose her virginity or at least, she’d better.

## Chapter Six

He moved her back against the bed with a kiss that would make even an experienced woman weak in the knees. She lived through some of those kisses. She wasn't completely untouched, just never undressed.

He pushed her down on the bed and worked the buttons on his shirt loose before stripping the material over his head. Almost in the same move, he worked his belt loose and unzipped his pants.

*Oh fuck, this is happening. It's really going to happen.* Her head started to swim but she fought against it. She wanted to be around for the main event. Losing some level of consciousness wasn't the way to go not when fucking the only man who ever appeared in her wet dreams seemed interested in doing it. *Finally.*

Bare chested, his abs were something to admire and he knew it. The twinkle in his eyes showed it. A loose fist ran solid knuckles over her cheek before he moved the pad of his thumb over her swollen bottom lip. "I'm going to be gentle with you. I promise I won't hurt you. Not now. Not ever." His voice was quiet. It wasn't the Tanner she'd loved most of her life but definitely one that held some measure of appeal. Damn sexy, in fact.

\* \* \* \*

*Unspoken Truths*

His hands worked to move her sweater and then the tank top over her chest and her neck before he removed the confined arms. "So beautiful." He stared down on her breasts. Heavy with desire, she didn't wait for him to make the first move; she drew him close with both hands.

Kisses fell from his lips to hers, trailing down to her chin before slowly moving to the chest he wanted to explore and she frankly couldn't wait for the exhibition to begin. She moved to the side a bit and reached back behind her unsnapping the only barrier they had. Years of permanent separation, nights of cold showers, visits to sex shops just to find a toy that looked somewhat appealing, and here he was, taking his own damn time. Enough already! She didn't wait this long for a slow hand.

A smile warned of things to come with a wicked promise falling from the mouth that carried it. "You may wish later that you'd let me do that."

Ally moved further back on the bed sliding out of her pants as she did. Playfully, she kicked off her shoes, before watching in amazement one of the sexiest acts she'd ever witnessed in her life. Unhurried, he stood up before he pulled the pants all the way down, over knees and ankles. He tossed them aside but never noticed where they fell. He returned with slow fingers crawling up both ankles before yanking both stockings off completely and tossing them over his shoulder.

*Damn, he's good.* He definitely knew how to make an impression on a woman.

His eyes never left her.

He dropped his pants just as quickly, and there he was—in the flesh. All pure man, rock hard and ready to go. Long and lean, he proved thick with the desire he only had for her.

Once he moved beside her, his lips went to work softly planting a kiss on her slender shoulder before moving to the mounds that invited him. He couldn't. He wouldn't stay anywhere long. Wherever he kissed, the heat he left behind warmed her to the quick.

“Oh Tanner. You have to...”

He rose above her towering with deep wonder in his voice. “I have to what? Take you to the other side? Let you know what it's like to have a man invade your soul, ravage your body, and consume your mind? That's what I'm going to do Ally, make no mistake about it.”

She didn't doubt it. He managed all of that with the first kiss. Hell, he had that pretty much covered before he ever made it that far.

His tongue drifted down her stomach as his hands drifted behind her to cup her ass. He squeezed and released. “So perfect. You've always been just so damn beautiful.”

She did define pretty. She had the perky little breasts, full pouty mouth, and legs that didn't necessarily go on for days but still projected the perfect, if not shapely, image. She knew it drove men to dream about her and it happened to be the reason she didn't date much. Men obsessed over

*Unspoken Truths*

her and most she dated only wanted to control her. No one deserved that opportunity, no one except the one who always reserved the right to claim her.

Sexual frustration took over and she told him all about it. He seemed satisfied and hell-bent on taking things slow. A small turtle moved faster than Tanner. "Damn you. If you can touch me with confidence then you can fuck me with conviction so stop wasting time."

He didn't blink. He didn't acknowledge her words but instead watched her writhe under his cautious touch. His palm massaged her mound while one hand trailed back to her breast taking the opportunity to tweak and twist first one nipple and then the next. His rubbing became a little more aggressive and before she knew what to expect or how she would feel about the invasion, he had his fingers inside. Slowly stretching her ensuring she would be ready for his cock and more than a little willing to welcome it.

Her moans were stuck in her throat but she wanted to release them. Wanted to let him know what he was doing to her but he saw it. What he couldn't see, if the masculine ego prevented it, then he could definitely feel and nothing would be left to the imagination.

"So soft and warm. You're ready for me aren't you baby?"

Hell, she'd been ready for him when she was eighteen. She closed her eyes and without thinking much about it, her finger went to her mouth. She

*Destiny Blaine*

bit down on her forefinger in anticipation. Maybe it was a good thing because what came next would've drawn a scream.

\* \* \* \*

His tongue didn't just lap at her juices, it fucked her with the strength of a man's cock. At least, what she imagined one might feel like. In and out, he swiped with one lick and then another but that wasn't the best part. No, the really good stuff was still on the way and she soon realized it.

She remembered being told about Tanner's skills by another young woman a long time ago. Once they'd been described to her, she'd looked them up on the Internet bound and determined to know more about the oral pleasure of what she had heard he could deliver. Now, she could experience.

His gaze caught her in a daring test. He wanted her to watch. Wanted to see the pleasure he would soon give and did he ever bring it. With aggressiveness like no other and a delicious determination, she felt his breath on her skin and knew he wanted. His grip translated into dire need.

Clamping down over her clit, he bit with just enough force to instill magic and spin it through her with cunning skill. His tongue lapped.

She begged.

Knowing eyes locked, zooming in on his expression while her hands went to the sheets knotting them up in clenched fists. Her hips rose and then slid back from him. "No. Please no. I want

*Unspoken Truths*

to feel you first. Please..." She begged him for time.

"Oh baby." He sat up just slightly, "*You don't feel me?*"

She knew what he meant. "I want my first time...to um...dammit, I don't want to spell it out for you!" She was so damn wet. She couldn't think with his fingers moving in and out of her slowly, leisurely. "Sweet mercy me. I'm going to..."

"You'll have to, I'm afraid." His mouth went back to hover over her ready, from the looks of things, to deliver her to pleasure's door.

She was caught in the storm of what she'd always wanted and what felt better than anything she'd ever had in a wet dream. "Fuck me, Tanner. Fuck me silly. I want the first orgasm I ever have with a man to be..."

She didn't have to say another word. He moved slowly up the bed. Pressing his erection into her side when he did.

Holy fuck. He was so big. Larger than anything she'd ever imagined. She was afraid to touch it yet anxious for it. She wanted to clamp her hand around it. Feel it swell in her palm. Maybe even taste it if she dared.

He moved her hand to his lips. "You can do whatever you want to me." He read her mind and before she could wonder much about how he knew her thoughts, his hand moved hers to cover it. He closed her fingers around the width of it and began

moving her hand with his. Together they stroked until he shifted her body underneath his.

His kisses began again and he found refuge over her with the ultimate of vulgar sins on his mind. She could read it by expression alone but feeling it was heavenly.

“Baby, I don’t want to hurt you.” He rolled over her moving his hands to stroke her chest with forced strain coming across his face.

She felt his size. She handled his throbbing cock with a firm grasp while the urgency of relief pushed into her hand. The length and width brought terror and joy just as she knew he would deliver pleasure and pain. She wasn’t afraid of riding with him into a moment of bliss because if another woman could handle it, and she knew many had, she could too. She didn’t come this far to run away. “Tanner, please.”

“Please what?” He would take her into a tight circle of ecstasy but damn it all he would make her ask for it until the bitter end.

“Please...” Her voice caught in her throat. “Please *just fuck me!*”

His eyes widened after hearing her plea and then darkened with pure commitment to the cause. She didn’t have to ask again.

His dick lingered at the opening of her vagina waiting for a little more encouragement. She gave it to him by raising her hips up off the bed. She took him in and he gave her a little at a time.

*Unspoken Truths*

“Oh holy hell.” She cried out and he pushed in more. “Oh fuck...”

“You better believe it baby. It’ll be the best screw of your life.”

“The *only* one...” She reminded him... “So it better be!”

“Just for that,” he winked knowing what he was getting ready to do, “I see little reason to wait.”

She screamed with the agony as the seal broke and cried out with the pleasure and the pain as he began to move into her with slow strides. Making sure he still allowed her the time she needed before he sprinted forward.

Her legs wrapped around his back draping over him while urging him on. “I won’t break.”

“You’re damn right you won’t because I’m not going to let you.” His moans of satisfaction pleased her. It became music to her ears.

Careful movements, slow kisses, lingering touches. Who would have guessed. Tanner Dorsey was taking it slow.

Until, she refused to let him.

Nails scraped down his back, digging in, pulling him closer. “Now!”

Faster strides worked with them both. A throb and beat here or a thrust there warmed her to the quick as the flood of pleasure took her by surprise. “Oh! Sweet fucking mercy! Don’t stop! Please!” She screamed out his name grabbing onto his forearms.

*Destiny Blaine*

He gave and then gave some more. “Fuck, yeah. Don’t move baby. Don’t move. That’s it. Sweet. Oh so sweet.” His pulse was obvious as his pace slowed. His cock played havoc on her pussy and he didn’t want her to fucking move but that alone, fueled her desire.

Breathless and spent, he collapsed on her chest which is where he stayed until he drifted off to sleep.

## Chapter Seven

“Tanner, Tanner?” He was face down in the pillow and a mumble away from denying her an answer altogether.

“Don’t tell me.” He rolled over to face her with a smile. “You’re hungry. I know you.” He kissed her forehead and then ran a lone finger over her belly before kissing the same spots he touched.

“I wish it was simple as a meal.” He knew her so well. She was hungry but food wasn’t why she woke him. She had a real problem on her hands and Tanner or her brothers would have to fix it.

Tanner moved back against the headboard. “Oh yeah. I guess we need to chat about that *thing* I did, huh?”

She nodded. “Among other topics.”

Tanner watched her with curiosity. “You know I love ya. I always have. I’ve hated to admit it but I have. It’s just...”

She didn’t want to hear it now. She knew there was a “but” in there and she wasn’t going to hear it when it fell from his lips. “This isn’t about us or the damn sex you kept from me all of our lives.” She moved away from him and walked over to the window to peer outside. Yep, they were there. The white surveillance van parked out in front of the hotel made her shiver.

“You give a guy your virginity and don’t want anything in return?” He smirked taunting her with a possible war of words.

“I have what I want.” She picked up a pillow and threw it at him.

“You do?”

“I do. You just don’t know it yet.” She strutted across the room bare ass and naked and couldn’t care less. She sat in the leather chair comfortable in the newly discovered sexuality he allowed her to display.

“What I do know is that if you don’t put some clothes on, I’m going to be over there in a New York minute. Spanking your little tail just for strutting it around seems like the thing to do.”

“I like the sound of that. Really, I do.” Her voice hitched in her throat and then the tears came. The acknowledgement of someone beyond the door waiting to take him from her scared her to death. Never before had she known such joy or such sorrow.

“Baby...?” He jumped up and went to her wrapping his arms around her before moving them both back to bed.

“What’s all this? Did I really wait too long?” He stroked her cheek.

She nodded. “But not for the reasons you think. I’m trying to figure out how to get you out of here. That’s why I had you meet me here. I just can’t figure it all out. There’s a van down in the parking lot. The white one. It’s surveillance.”

*Unspoken Truths*

He moved his head back and looked at her for a long while before he took a deep breath and then let it all out. His cheeks swelled and he appeared to be in deep thought. After a few minutes, he stood up and tossed their clothes at her. Anger didn't show in his eyes. Not a hint of resentment. Nothing.

"Tanner, I'm sorry but it's not what you think."

He ignored her and went for his pants. Sticking one foot in and then another, she saw the side to him her brother had told her about. A smirk was on his mouth but ice flowed through his veins. At least that's what she thought.

He picked up the phone and hit one of the numbers on the keypad. "Yeah, it's time. Lock it down." He closed the phone.

A smile spread across his lips and where bitterness only just existed, fiery mischief took over. "If we had all day, you'd never be allowed to put those clothes back on." He chuckled. "But...we don't have all day, do we?" His demeanor could swing faster than her moods.

She shook her head.

"Well then, I guess I'd better start talking. Convince you to come with me or something like that huh?" Tanner clasped his hands in front of him.

"What are you talking about?" Clearly, he knew more about what was going on than she did.

"Ally, we've known for some time now that our party was almost over. We just didn't know when."

“The ‘we’ would be you and my brothers?”

“Yes. We were tipped off last fall right before you came home. I was going to ask you... well, I’d ask your brothers to let me just give us a shot.” He waved his hand above his head. “Hell, I don’t know why I’m telling you this now. It’s not like it will make a difference or change things. It doesn’t matter...”

“It matters to me. More than you know.” Her voice was soft, weak, and barely above a whisper.

Tanner’s ability to dress fast slowed by his inability to do it in front of her. He walked over to the window for another peek while his hands continued to work with buttons. He stood there for a long time. “I couldn’t leave you behind...” He paused as the torment of what might be his truth hit him. “That is, I couldn’t leave without seeing if there would be a slight possibility that you would consider going with me.”

Tanner paced the floor. “I’ve had my guys on you for a long time. I know more about you than you know about yourself.” A tortured sigh led him to reveal more. “I know you get up at five-thirty in the morning and roll to the left and then the right before you throw the little digital alarm clock across the room. I know you shower twice a day, both times after running and you eat dinner every night, when you don’t have a date, at six o’clock...” His lips turned down in a little frown.

“Okay, okay. I get that you know all about me. It almost creeps me out but I accept it.”

*Unspoken Truths*

“If you stay with me, you’ll need to accept it.” His voice broke, catching somewhere in between right or wrong maybe or perhaps just on the fact that the truth had fallen from his lips.

“If I...if I *stay* with you?”

“Yes, if you’ll...” The phone rang again lighting up his shirt pocket with the obvious threat that loomed.

Damn.

“Yeah? Yes. Yes damn you. I told you she would be with me. *Yes, all night long.* What the fuck did you think? Now, get over it.” He slammed the phone closed.

She covered her ears. “Do not tell me who that was or what they asked.”

Tanner went to her and pulled her hard against his chest. “I told them last night that I was going to fuck their sister into next year and guess what, they both had some surprising news for me.”

She already realized what came next. He didn’t have to say it because she knew her brothers.

“They told me if I did it now, it better follow with a proposal.”

She gasped and turned around to hide the smile that crept across her lips. She tried to keep her mouth from saying “yes” before he asked but at the same time fought against her reality. She would need to say “no” when he did.

Tanner walked around her. Down on one knee he went. “Come with us.”

“What?” She suddenly realized her stupid splendor.

He took one hand in his and then asked again. “I said, come with us.” His head moved from side to side for a second before he continued. “We’ve bought a place out of the country and it’s set back off the ocean. We’ve all been there several times. You’ll love it. Your mom is going to be there. Darren’s already left with her. We want you with us.”

Her eyes swelled with tears. “You’re proposing, down on one knee...” Her breath caught in her throat. “Because you want...want me to come with you while you take my brothers, my mother...my, my...” she couldn’t comprehend it all.

He didn’t have a clue. The man just did not have a clue. She swatted his head and then moved away from him. “You just take it all, don’t you? Mother’s too ill to travel but that doesn’t matter to you. What matters is that you can do it. You can leave this country, pack it all up, and call it a day. The cost of doing business, isn’t that right?”

He rose from his bended knee and walked over to the drapes. Once again, he peered down into the lot. With an expression full of regret, the only word he managed to say fell out with a tortured sigh, “Ally...”

“You take my youth and spin it any way you want it, *you* did that. You always led me on but never offered me anything in return. I spent days, no—not just days Tanner—*years*. I spent fucking

*Unspoken Truths*

years dreaming of you! What it would be like to be in your arms. *Your bed*. No other man ever touched me and for what? For you to rape me of my life and the only family I have?"

He tried to console her but she pushed him away.

"Don't you do that. Don't touch me!" Anger filled the space she proved she wanted.

"Have it your way." He backed off, just a little.

Her words formed with fierce velocity. "Where's David? Hell, I guess he's going to do whatever the great Tanner Dorsey tells him to do huh?"

He didn't look at her as he started to zip up his luggage. "It's not like that."

"Like hell it isn't. You just take and tear down and take some more. Wow, it must be great to be you."

Tanner nodded. "Okay, if that's what you believe then we're through here." He stood up and nodded toward the bed. "Whether you believe me or not Ally, I wouldn't have taken *that*. If I didn't think it was my only chance to get you to come with me, I wouldn't have left you with nothing."

She kicked at his luggage. "Oh really? Don't you pity me you bastard! You aren't leaving me with nothing because you aren't going anywhere!" She pulled her gun from a holster in the bottom of her duffle bag.

"Beautiful. Just beautiful." He leaned down over her and took the end of the pistol and put it

his chest. "Fire. Go ahead. Pull the fucking trigger. Do it because I swear to you, I'm not worth much and without you, baby I'm nothing. Ally, I'm sorry if I hurt you. I swear, I didn't want to hurt you. I only wanted to persuade you to come with us."

"Well you came up short!" Breathing proved difficult and being in the same room with him presented a challenge. She lowered the gun but kept her gaze straight ahead. She saw him in it for a moment and then she didn't. He stood and went to the door and she watched that too in her peripheral.

"I wish you would reconsider. I don't have time to convince you but I happened to be the best chance your brothers or your mother had to keep your family together and they all realized it. I've known it for awhile. This day was bound to come and when it did, I knew I was the only one you'd leave the FBI for." He opened the door but closed it again. With his hand on the back of it, he took a deep breath. "Damn. So here we are."

"Leave my job *for you*?" She was amazed at the audacity of her family. Never mind Tanner. What the fuck did he expect? If he'd gotten down on one knee and professed love or marriage, it might have been something she could have considered *but no*, he definitely fucked up. *Most definitely.*

Her phone rang and the caller ID confirmed. It was Fernandez.

"Agent Stephens."

*Unspoken Truths*

“Steve told me you’d come through. Now, we followed your mother and brother to the airport. Apparently, she’s ill, right? Going to her sister’s place in Texas?”

A long silence spread over the room before she answered. “Yes, Texas.”

Fernandez continued. “We have surveillance ready to set up as soon as we locate your other brother and of course, Dorsey.”

“Surveillance? Sure. Of course you would.” She swallowed.

“Where are you Stephens? I’ll buy you a cup of coffee.” That’s when it hit her. He wanted to keep her talking. She shut down the phone and pressed the off button.

She began laughing hysterically before rubbing her hand over her brow. “Oh but you’re good.” She pointed an accusing finger at him. “You’re really, really good aren’t you?” Tears streamed down her face.

Anger hit her with the reality of what the moment of their truth would soon be. “That’s your fucking van?” She walked over and smacked him across the face once and then turned away before swatting him again. “Those are your people? Answer me, damn you!” The anger consumed her and then the reality of her world as Tanner and her brothers created it, hit her dead on. “Oh, no! No! You tell me this is a horrific nightmare! You tell me something, damn you!”

*Destiny Blaine*

The look on his face told her it wasn't a bad dream and even gave her a little of what she needed to see. He wanted to tell her that she was wrong before he allowed her to see that she was exactly right.

Her voice strained one octave barely above a whisper. "And if you can arrange all this then you..." She couldn't say it. She fought an internal war trying to prevent it. "If you have that much power then you're the man we've been looking for aren't you?"

Tanner stared at her in disbelief.

"Answer me damn you! Are you behind the unknown American-based cartel we've been looking for?"

He refused to dignify her question with a response.

And that was all the confirmation she needed.

## **Chapter Eight**

Tanner's hand went to his cheek covering it but not from the sting so much. Instead, it was something else. He knew there was a good chance it would be the last time she touched him. So it was a hit. This late in the game, who the fuck cared?

Ally sank down to the bed burying her face in her hands. "Why? Why would you do these things? You're not this monster. I've read his profile. I've studied the cases. He's not you." She stared up at him.

He didn't have the response she wanted to find. Sure, he could give her something to save his own face but he wasn't going to give her what she truly needed. To give those answers would mean to take the other two people that she loved most from her and she wouldn't be able to accept it. That would be enough to break her and he loved her too much to do it.

"Why Tanner?" She asked him again. She needed, genuinely needed to understand.

He looked away from her.

The mean spirit he used to tease her about took over her and she rushed at him with fists drawn. "Why? You answer me damn you! You owe me that much."

*Destiny Blaine*

The answer he gave her ripped at him. Tore through his soul and conquered his identity. The one she chose specifically for him. The one that he had no other choice but to let her believe. "I did it because I could."

The room fell quiet.

It was better than telling her the whole truth. The sports were what he loved. The bookie lifestyle, the games and money, the trips and travel, it was all enough. More than he deserved but not enough, never enough, for the Stephens boys. They always wanted more.

Her words were slow to the draw. "I ought to kill you myself."

He nodded slowly. "Maybe you should because without you, I'm already dead. The possibility of having you was what I lived for and now that I've had you, I don't know if I can let you go."

She looked up at him with a face full of questions. "Nice touch but I don't believe you. I'll never believe another word that comes out of your pathetic mouth."

He nodded again. "Then, you've made up your mind."

"Made up my mind? As if I have a choice. You've taken that away from me. If I let you walk out of here and anyone finds out, I lose my job. Do you hear me? I lose the only career I ever wanted!" She opened her mouth wide when the whole truth delivered even more than she'd thought about.

*Unspoken Truths*

“It’s the only thing I ever wanted outside of having you love me.”

Tanner stood mere inches from her. He looked beyond her and closed his eyes for a minute savoring the mess of tangled sheets forbidding his mind to do anything more than to grasp hard to the memory still lingering there. “I’m sorry Ally. I really am.” His fingertips touched her hair and she smacked him away.

“I’ve spent my whole adult life loving you.” The words came through the sobs.

His gut hurt. He could’ve bent over from the pain but it wasn’t anything compared to the knife he felt twisting in his heart. “I know you have.”

She strained against the fountain of tears and he saw it. “I said I love you damn it and you’re so stoic that you can’t even give me something to make this all go away? Oh Tanner, why would you do this? Just tell me that much.” Her arms wrapped around her body and she began to move back and forth rocking herself into his heart with a memory he would hold forever.

His earth shattered. Completely broken, he forced words to cross his lips. “If you’ve loved me, and I know you have, then I should love you enough to let you stay behind. I shouldn’t have asked you to go and I never should have told you I needed to leave. We’ve left things as-is before and that’s how I meant to leave them before now.”

Kneeling in between her legs, he tried to leave her with enough to last her a lifetime. Enough to

remind her later why she would be better off without him and maybe without the lot of them because none of them deserved her. “Baby, all you ever loved was an illusion of me, the very idea of what I could’ve become if only I’d had you there to love me before your brothers and me...”

He stopped himself from spilling it all. He stroked her hair petting her once more but realizing it wouldn’t be enough. Only moments before he’d hoped it would but now, looking into her eyes, he knew it never would be. His back straightened and he forced the cold eyes to appear. He knew he possessed the skill to do it and he used it to his advantage.

He looked at her with hardness, the same glare he used when he beat the shit out of people who didn’t pay them what they owed. The eyes that looked the other way once their businesses gained another focus. He stared down on her with a dismissive and uncaring glare. And he hated doing it—even despised himself for it.

She caught his hand and refused to let him leave her with a forced look of uncaring. One she recognized because he’d taken on the false face in front of her before. “Don’t do this. Please, Tanner. I’m begging you...don’t.”

“Someday, Ally, sometime in the future, you’ll thank me. Maybe you’ll even still smile when you think of me but if I stay here and I’m arrested, then what do we have?” He watched her accept what he said and that too, tore at his heart.

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“What we’ve always had!” she blurted it out.

“No honey, no. What we had was something special, what we *have* is something that you’ll never replace. I know because I’ve looked. I’ve tried to move on in life without involving you but I can’t. You’re in my heart. But I still want you to go. You live what’s in yours.” He pointed to her chest and then touched her cheek. “And no regrets, baby. None. Okay?”

She nodded and sniffed back a few cries but he knew she couldn’t see his good-bye for what it had to be...forever. After he was gone, she would try to decide what went wrong and what she might have done to fix it. That’s when she’d finally pack it up and go back to Florida. There, she’d find everything he’d left in place for her. On the short chance she didn’t leave with him, he made arrangements for her. Something always told him she wouldn’t go with them and he made sure if he couldn’t have her that she would at least have a wonderful life full of anything and everything money could buy.

A year before, when the cartel began to plot their move, he started putting everything in motion. He wanted to be sure she came first when the bottom fell out of everything. Even though Ally hadn’t come to terms with the fact that she was a member of one of the most powerful families in the cartel, he still wanted her future secure. Perhaps some things were just better left unsaid so she’d find out about what he had in place for her later.

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Then maybe she would understand the extent of his love for her.

He touched her hand and nodded. Once she glanced up, the tears rolled. They would stain her cheeks for a little while but they'd mark his soul forever. He wanted to tell her good-bye. He was dying to go to her, wrap her tightly in an embrace meant to last her well into a future they would never experience together.

He needed to tell her he loved her more than his own life and always had. But some things, even unspoken truths, were often the greatest acts of love. Tanner planned to go to his grave with several of them.

## Epilogue

Tanner sat behind a huge walnut desk when Darren came in with a folder. He tossed it on his desk before he turned to leave. "It's the package you've been waiting on."

Reaching as quickly as he could to the edge where his friend dropped the folder, he opened the flap. He stared blankly at the first three photos before he reached one that would change his world and forever ruin him. "Oh holy hell. They're beautiful." His words filled the room.

Darren stared out beyond the patio to the open sea. "It appears you were right. Twins."

The new father ran his hand back and forth and back and forth over the pictures. "Why did she..." He stopped himself from saying it. He knew why Ally chose to have those children. They were a part of him.

He walked over to a bookshelf and began propping up the pictures in the study. A close-up snapshot of her alone told a story that he didn't necessarily want to see. She was sad, lonely even.

The sadness took over and suddenly the pain was more than he wanted to carry. He ran his hand over the photograph once more. "Burn them." His own bitterness took over.

Darren walked over and collected the photos that Tanner had only just placed strategically around the room. "When hell freezes over."

"You think you know all about your sister and me don't you buddy?" He glanced back at her pictures and those of his children.

Darren looked at him long and hard. "And what's that supposed to mean?"

He went over to the patio doors and opened them up wide. "There are so many things you can't even begin to understand about Ally. Things she knew about all of us, things that she loved about each of us, and barriers that she would've crossed over if any one of us had asked. That's why I left her behind. Because I never wanted to witness the change in her like I have the rest of us. I never wanted her to change just because it would make our lives a bit more comfortable."

Darren slapped him on the back. "Then you live in your hell buddy because I'm here to tell you, with two kids on her hip, my sister won't stay single long."

He slammed another folder into Tanner's chest before he turned away from him. Tanner fumbled with the tab knowing what he'd find. He'd heard all about it but didn't know if he could stand to see the proof. Still, her brothers put in the order. They wanted to torture him with the evidence and they provided plenty of it.

The first photograph captured him with Ally alone walking hand in hand with a belly larger than

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both of them. He smiled down on the photograph wishing he had been there when his twins were born.

The second was a torturous picture of the four of them. Marcel Fernandez moved right in and he seemed to play the part of attentive boyfriend. He'd become her hero. Saved her job. Helped her prepare for motherhood and obviously tried to replace *him*.

"He's living there now. In case you're curious." The other brother came in from the side entrance.

"I imagine he is." Tanner's eyes burned with the images. He looked at another one, a close up. Pure hatred burned through Ally's pupils. "Does she know our men are there?"

"Are you kidding?" David laughed. "She strikes poses for them on the sidewalk and tells the twins to smile for Daddy. They're going to grow up thinking that every man with a camera is their daddy."

Tanner dropped the photographs to his side. "Maybe." He stood up fast, the anger pushing his buttons. "But there's one man that will never own that title."

"That was your choice." David didn't look up from the newspaper that he'd just started to read.

"I'm talking about Fernandez."

The silence held thick when the meaning behind it stilled cool waters. Now, it divided the air to a degree of reckoning most in their business fully understood.

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The two brothers exchanged glances. They typically ordered the hits. They'd been masterful at it. Now, Tanner called one. It would be handled with the best of intentions behind it because he knew Marcel Fernandez and he didn't want him anywhere near his woman or *his* family.

## **About the Author**

Destiny Blaine is an erotic romance author. Living in East Tennessee with her husband and two teenagers, Destiny is an avid sports fan.

When she isn't writing, Destiny loves to read, play casino craps, and find a good ballgame to watch. For enjoyment, the family often travels to various sports venues across the country.

Centrally located to cities where many of her favorite NFL teams are found—Atlanta, Indianapolis, Cincinnati, Chicago, Nashville, and Charlotte; Destiny stays on the move when the NFL season rolls around. She finds plenty of inspiration watching from the sidelines and many of her short stories incorporate sports and casino gambling elements.

To find out more about Destiny, visit her website at [www.destinyblaine.com](http://www.destinyblaine.com) and watch for her in 2009 when she visits Melbourne, Australia for the 2009 Inaugural Australian Romance Readers Convention.

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## **Acknowledgements**

I want to thank my publisher, Dawn Carrington and my editor, Jane Bonander for once again believing in me and my work. I'm so fortunate to work with both of you.

A huge thank you to Lili Booth for being the last set of editorial eyes to see this manuscript. Thank you for everything you do—you're the best.

To those of you who read my work and take the time to send me your feedback—your words of encouragement and support are always appreciated!

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