

What Reviewers Are Saying...

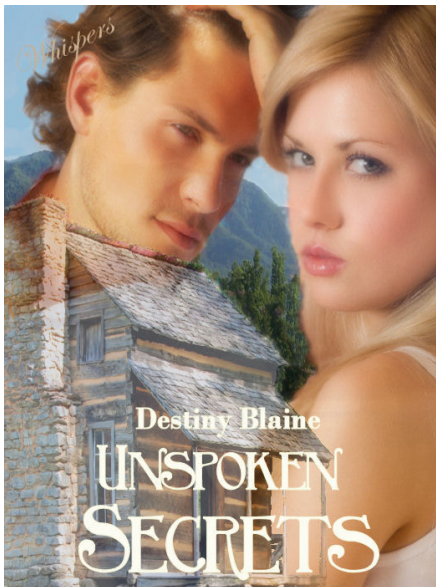
Two Lips Reviews gave Unspoken Truths Five Lips and Tina said, “**Destiny Blaine** has written another memorable winner with Unspoken Truths. I look forward to reading more about Ally and her family in the future.”

Destiny Blaine

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Unspoken Secrets



Unspoken Secrets
Destiny Blaine

Warning

This e-book contains sexually explicit scenes and adult language. This material is meant for mature audiences!

Destiny Blaine

Unspoken Secrets

A Whispers Publishing Publication

September 2008

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ISBN Not Assigned

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

Unspoken Secrets

Dedication

For the good old boys who reintroduced me to gambling on the riverboats of Mississippi many moons ago—you know who you are—you're the fellows I miss chatting with every now and again and especially on Sunday. May we one day meet on a craps table where the dice are hot and the drinks are forever cold.

Chapter One

“I think he’s trying to draw us out.” David rarely spoke but when he did, Tanner typically paid attention. His deadly eyes and cool demeanor proved him dangerous but his sharp mind saved them countless headaches—enough of them to guarantee he deserved the floor when he wanted it. When the man uttered the first syllable, Tanner hung on the words to follow.

Tanner walked across the living room and joined his buddies at the wet bar. Darren, usually the chatty one, didn’t have a lot to say. He was in deep thought with a distance about him. David just appeared angry as hell.

“Something else on your mind, David?” Tanner studied him.

“I can’t put my finger on it but something is off with Ally.”

“Have you seen her?” Excitement and concern drove his tone and he felt worry pinch his brow into a sudden frown.

“Here.” He handed him the manila envelope. Every time Tanner saw one of the long pouches, he knew what to expect underneath the flap. Pictures of his family, his girls, existed there.

He began to slowly move through the snapshots. David studied him and Darren nursed a beer like it might just be his last. The slight sound of shuffling paper and glossy photographs filled the room.

“I don’t understand.” Tanner’s eyes darted between the men in front of him. Ally’s brothers

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were his best friends and business partners but when it came to his relationship with their sister, they seldom made his life easy.

"It would appear, smart one," Darren paused and then continued, "Ally is going to marry the son-of-a-bitch."

"Over my dead body." Tanner tossed their so-called evidence and the pictures systematically spread across the marble-covered countertop.

"It may be if you don't get that temper in check." Darren pointed out the obvious while his older brother went back into his shell of silence. David's initial, never mind short, statement of wisdom was a contribution and beyond those few words, he didn't have a lot to offer.

"I'm not afraid of Marcel Fernandez," Tanner snapped. "He's a dirty Fed and one of these days, I'm going to expose him for the slime he is—count on it."

David drew a quick breath and released it. He slowly ran his hand across the base of his neck and he exchanged knowing glances with his brother before he walked out of the room.

Darren took the unspoken cue. "Tanner, you may not be afraid of him but you damn sure better fear what he can do to all of us."

"I'm not worried about us. I'm worried about Ally. She's marrying the sorry SOB? What the hell is she thinking?" Tanner crossed the room then and looked out over the back lawn.

"If I know my sister, she's thinking you will never allow it." Darren made a solid point. "Maybe

she's hoping our cameras will capture enough proof to send you into a tailspin. She probably knows if the birth of your girls didn't draw you out, the marriage to your enemy might."

"She's damn right then. It's bad enough she has the asshole living under the same roof with her, in *my* house, mind you." He paused, narrowed his eyes, and then went on without a second to spare. "When I left, I made sure she had everything. I gave her the opportunity to live in the lap of luxury and how does she repay me? She moves Fernandez in as soon as I turn my back."

Darren loved his sister and Tanner was smart enough to realize he'd defend her. No, he never wanted her with Tanner but he never wanted to see her miserable. He picked up one of the pictures and tossed it across the bar. "I don't think she's repaying you. David and I have talked about it. We think the whole thing is a setup and has been from the beginning. We believe Marcel intended to draw you out from the moment he moved there. He's using her to do it and make no mistake about it buddy, when you make your move, he'll be ready."

"Maybe." Tanner studied a lone sailboat floating, barely drifting really, out in the open sea. He nodded in its direction just to point it out, acknowledge it for some reason. "I didn't plan on going back."

"You'll go back now because if you don't, Marcel *will* marry her." He grinned and added a jab. "I can't imagine you standing by while he raises your girls and beds my sister."

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Tanner damn near came unglued. “Fuck you, Darren. You know and I know if he’s living there, that’s exactly what he’s doing now!”

“Then it’s about time to change things up. Go bring her home.” Darren patted him on the back. He then left him in his own misery. If he measured it out with a little honesty and weighed in with a lot of his hidden emotions, he would have to say plenty existed there. He just didn’t know what to do about it.

* * * *

“Ladies and Gentleman, we are now boarding Flight 329 to Knoxville, Tennessee. We ask those passengers traveling in First Class or with small children to go ahead and board now. On behalf of Strickland Airways, we thank you for traveling with us today.”

Ally grabbed her purse and clutched the book she planned to read. “That’s me.”

Marcel studied her closely. “Don’t worry about us. We’ll be fine.” He looked down at the two young ladies on either side of him. Their small hands looked so fragile in the large man’s palms.

“I know. Take care of them, okay?” She glanced at one of her daughters and then the other before she looked back over her shoulder as if she wanted someone, anyone to see her. She stooped down then and kissed her little girls on their rosy cheeks. “Mommy is going to go away for a couple of days but when I come back, we’ll have lots and lots of fun, okay?”

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Both of the cute darlings looked up at their mother and nodded. Their golden locks swirled down their back. They were dressed in plaid casual shorts and sandals, matching of course, and each had a beautiful bow to accent tousled ribbons.

"Take care of yourself." Marcel leaned in to kiss her and she turned her cheek.

"No one is here to take snapshots so let's give it a rest." She glared at him only for an instant before she leaned down and embraced her daughters one last time. "I'd better go."

"Yes, you should. See you Friday." His dark eyes moved over her. "Maybe the time away will do you some good. When you get back, we can start nailing down our final wedding plans."

"Friday." She repeated once and then backed away.

A few moments later, she boarded the plane and sank into her window seat. In the distance she saw Fernandez and her two children standing at a large bay window waving at the plane. *I've lost my ever-lovin' mind to let him watch my girls.* She leaned her head back and closed her eyes. She trusted Marcel with her children. The girls loved him. He was the only father figure they'd ever known and he'd helped her raise them. Only, now with marriage plans pending, she felt so indifferent. He was forcing her into a marriage she didn't want and in some ways, he used her girls to do it and she made it easy for him.

If Marcel thought for one second that he could draw Tanner out with the threat of wedding bells,

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then he was dumber than he looked. She shifted her shoulders and back against the upright position of her seat. Tanner didn't show up for the birth of his children, and he sure wouldn't chase her down the aisle to stop a marriage—or would he?

Chapter Two

“Either you’re bound and determined to piss me off or you have totally lost your mind.” Tanner flopped down in the seat next to her. He had on a disguise and the best way to describe him—obvious. His large frame looked pretty much the same but his phony mustache and creepy glasses just stood out as fake and unnatural. She imagined he put those on just for her.

Ally didn’t act impressed or surprised. “I guess shopping for wedding dresses proved a little much, huh?” Her neck rolled over to the side and the new angle allowed her to look at him but she didn’t move her head off of the rest supporting it.

Tanner’s lower chin quivered some as he fought to contain a smile. He looked like he wanted to laugh one minute or fight against his anger the next. And damn it all, he still looked good enough to eat. Three years did a lot to whet a woman’s appetite and her hunger for him grew with each passing day. She hated him for it—truly she did.

His six-foot-three frame didn’t do anything but call out to her from the moment he stepped on the plane. Yes, she knew the second he boarded because she heard the stewardess perk right up. Even in his silly disguise, the man commanded attention. Even under his stupid wig with curly bleach-blond hair, the man sent a few inspired chills to her nerve endings. Evidently, his smile did the same for the stewardess on the prowl for a rich

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husband. Damn him, no double-damn him. Even now, he projected confidence, wealth, and hell yeah, sex appeal.

He took a minute, only one, to get situated. He never bothered to look behind him or to the side. He most likely had the flight checked out thoroughly before he made his reservation. He probably felt fairly confident that the only threat of a Federal Agent happened to be seated to his left.

When he turned to face her, he took his glasses off but he didn't bother with the wig. "You look good enough to screw right here." He smirked.

"Fuck you Tanner."

"Do you want to? It worked out quite well for us the first time, didn't it? We have two beautiful little girls to show for it and a thriving relationship, from what I can tell." He moved closer. "Ready to go again?"

She swallowed hard and her gaze narrowed on him. Something was way off with Tanner Dorsey and she knew she was the pending problem behind his obvious current issues. Tanner was always light-hearted and a barrel of laughs. He was a lot of fun to be around and too immature to let life catch him by the balls and string him up by them. He just didn't give a shit and he never took himself or anything else too seriously. He lived for the party. Now, he seemed barely able to draw air and when he did, it proved a tortured breath he struggled to gain. His eyes scanned over her and where life once danced, the lights had dimmed. He looked sad and lonely, almost miserable.

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Ally stared out at the runway. They backed away from the terminal and she pointed. "Want to see them?"

"I've seen them. I walked right by them in the airport and it took all the strength I had not to pull out a gun, slide it up to Marcel's head and just pull the fucking trigger."

"I hope to hell you aren't armed."

"It's the only reason Fernandez is still among the living, Ally. I can promise you." He shifted his weight some and then glared at her. "They're beautiful."

"They're yours." She stated the obvious flatly.

"As if I wouldn't know my own children." A deeper sadness crept across his face. "The guys tailing you get a kick out of them." He reached in his coat pocket and brought out a cellular phone. He showed her the images he had captured on the screen.

"Yes, well, I always tell them to smile for the camera," she noted.

"You tell them to grin at Daddy."

She laughed. "So you know?"

"I know everything, Ally." He moved closer. "Remember?"

A sudden shiver warmed her rather than chilled her to the bone. She remembered his confession three years ago when she returned home to Tennessee. It was the last time she saw Tanner, her mother and her brothers. He confessed he'd never been able to leave her alone and one of the things he admitted stunned her then as much as it

irked her now. His men never stopped tailing her and because of them, he knew more about her life than she did, even intimate things a woman doesn't want a man to know.

"So you know I'm living with Fernandez." She chopped out the unneeded confession, hoping to sting him. Of course he knew.

"I know you're not sleeping with him." Curt words rang out in an angry growl.

Giggling, she taunted him. "You keep telling yourself that Tanner, you keep telling yourself whatever makes you feel all warm and cozy at night."

He quickly locked his palm with hers. She tried to pull away from him but he just held her there. "I know a sexually gratified woman when I see one, and you, my sweet woman, are anything but satisfied." His thumb began to stroke the bone on hers and her clammy palms all but gave away her true feelings for the man seated next to her.

Ally looked outside the window and all of the pain she'd felt over the past few years came rushing back. Emotions caught in her chest and she wanted to lash out. Now wasn't the time or the place. She wanted to scream and shout at him but the flight home was far too short to say everything she wanted to say. The plane took off and at the same time the pilot announced over the intercom something about the flight time and current weather conditions, but really—who the hell cared?

She took a deep breath and slowly released it. The only thing that was important now, all that ever really mattered was that Tanner came back to

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her. She held his hand only tighter and the first tear fell as she closed herself off from the pain.

While his left hand gripped hers, he moved around her and stroked her hair.

"I've missed you, Ally. Every single day, I've longed for you in a way I can't begin to understand."

"I can't do this now. I just can't." She turned to look at him and his lips curved as soon as he saw the tear. The pad of his fingers swiped the first one and remained close enough to wipe away the second and third too.

"Tell me about our girls." He leaned closer.

She smiled then as she thought of their daughters. She studied him closer as she thought of their dancing eyes, something they definitely inherited from their father. "They look and act like you."

"Then I take it they're perfect." He laughed.

"Yes, even when they're not."

A dimple formed in his cheek and his eye twitched. He must have caught her truer meaning and it was all she needed to warm her in places only he had traveled.

* * * *

Ally gathered her luggage at the terminal and quickly moved through the airport acting as if she'd never been on the plane at all with Tanner. Three years ago, they'd met for their first and only romp at the Alcoa Hilton right next to the runway. Today, she didn't ask him where they'd go because she didn't want to know and quite frankly she didn't want to go.

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Tanner ruined her for another man that particular day three years prior and the truth, if she wanted to be honest with herself, Tanner Dorsey always knew he was the only man for her. It pissed her off.

The love Ally held for Tanner ran deep. At twelve she met him, at fourteen she loved him, at eighteen she craved him and she finally held him in her arms at twenty-two. For one day, just a few short hours, he belonged to her.

Ally looked up at the sky. As she walked out onto the sidewalk, she released a deep sigh of relief. Fresh air never felt better. Her mind revisited her history with Tanner as she glared across the street at The Hilton. It was one day, one fuck, and one knock-up. She knew how to do things the right way. Truly, she did. She stared at the hotel where it all took place and mumbled a few choice words under her breath.

Her luggage rolled along behind her. She started to hail a cab when he pulled up and reached over the front seat. "Get in."

Her eyes narrowed. "No. Not this time. Tanner, I have a lot of unfinished business here. I swear I do. I don't have time to have you come in and screw up my life again. There are things I have to do. I only have two days before I have to head back and Marcel..."

"Don't you ever say his name in front of me again." Tanner slammed the Jeep in park and jumped out. He loaded up her luggage in the backseat and held the passenger door open for her.

“Get in or I’ll toss you in and I promise I don’t give a shit which way you prefer.”

Ally stood tall at five foot four and her petite little body didn’t quite tower over anything, but Tanner’s did. A solid strength in his own right, he hovered over her like a statue. His broad arms wrapping around her quickly proved he didn’t plan to waste a lot of time arguing the point of wills and matched wit.

He secured her in what most bystanders would have viewed as an affectionate embrace and all but tossed her into the front seat. He jogged around the vehicle and jumped inside before she had time to protest.

Ally’s lips quickly puckered into a formidable pout. “Damn you.” She kicked the dashboard and threw her head back. “I am here on business.” Even though her body lashed out, her voice concealed controlled anger.

“Then get in touch with whoever it is you need to call and tell them you missed a flight or you’re not feeling well. Get the hell out of it.” His face turned red as he watched and waited for a true fit of anger. She had it in her to throw a tantrum.

“I will not!” She kicked the glove compartment again and threw her fist into the side of the door this time. “I hate you!”

“Good, that’s a start. The controlled Ally on the plane just about pissed me off.” He wheeled out of the parking lot on two wheels. The speed they quickly reached sent them racing up Alcoa Highway and it proved he wanted to get wherever they were going fast.

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She shot him a look out of the corner of her eye and then glared straight ahead. "You are not going to come into my life and turn it inside out again. I refuse to let you." She turned on him then and screamed in his face. "Stop this car now!"

He slammed on the brakes. Hell, yeah, he did. Right in the middle of Alcoa Highway, the man just did not give a rat's ass about anything—except maybe Ally and his little daughters.

"Ally, you are going to sit over there and be quiet and listen to me." Cars blew their horns. He hit the emergency lights.

Shit. Now she knew she was in trouble. He didn't plan on moving from the middle of the road.

She put her hands over her ears and glared at him with a smirk. "Fine, oh bright one but let me remind you that there is a warrant for your arrest here so go ahead sit in the middle of the fucking highway. I don't give a damn. When you find the bright lights behind you, I will flash my badge and say I apprehended you."

As if her declaration hit home, he checked his rearview mirror, turned off the emergency blinking lights and hit the gearshift back into drive. "You're unreasonable," he noted.

"No, I'm just the fucking black sheep, remember?"

"White as snow is what you are and what you've always been to me." He happened to speak the truth with two separate meanings in one statement.

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Ally was the only one in her family who didn't have connections to Tanner's cartel. Her mother lived with her brothers and Tanner which made her a guilty party, as far as Ally was concerned. Ally worked for the FBI, hardly a black sheep but since her entire family wrapped themselves into a world of crime, the sparing differences became quite obvious.

Then there happened to be a much more significant meaning— she'd always belonged to Tanner. No other man ever touched her the way Tanner touched her. No other man gained her attention or earned her favor, to allow someone else the opportunity seemed like adultery and that in itself drove her to the edge of stark madness.

Chapter Three

They pulled up to a cabin and Tanner jumped out. He maintained a certain spring in his step. Ally recognized it well. It was the one he used when he had a noose around every female body part that ached for his touch. All of hers qualified.

"You're a bastard." She spat the words at him as he held the door open for her.

"Get out." He watched her with cold eyes. Those same eyes would later undress her and she damn well understood it.

"Go fuck yourself." She glanced around at their surroundings. The little cabin was nestled in the heart of a hidden alcove covered by trees and rocks. It was a romantic hideaway in the heart of The Great Smoky Mountains.

He ignored her as he moved to the backseat and grabbed her luggage and his. He seemed to swing all of it in one motion over his shoulder and under his arm while tugging another suitcase behind him. He tossed the luggage onto the porch and sat down on the front stoop.

The way he parked the Jeep when they first arrived, Ally only needed to look straight ahead to stare into his sexy-hot eyes. She narrowed her gaze. Even with his disguise, Tanner's intense focus seared every inch of her flesh.

"I'm waiting," he called out.

"I want to go back."

“Go back where, Ally?” He studied her then, really seemed to look *through her* more than *at her*. “There are a lot of things I’d do over again if I had the chance so how far back are we traveling here?”

“I want to go back and...” Where the hell *did* she mean? Now that she stopped to think about it, there were too many places she truly wanted to revisit. She wanted him to take her back to the airport where he found her. She wanted to be twelve years old again and hate him because he was her brother’s friend who pulled her pigtails. She wanted to be fourteen and chase him through the mall while he tried to steal a kiss from his latest arm ornament. Most of all, she wanted to love him with a passionate fire once again—the way she did the last time she saw him and the last time he held her.

She buried her face in her palms and screamed into her skin. “I hate this!” She looked up. “I despise you for the things you take away from me and the way you shrug it off and act like you have the right.”

He stood up then and held his hand out. *Arrogant ass*. What a true ass-hole. He had just enough confidence to believe she wanted to leap from the Jeep and what? Run into his arms?

The thought tempted her. Then, her phone rang.

“You should probably get that.” He was far too smug. He looked eager and almost fucking guilty—*of something*.

Yes indeed, she should probably answer it.

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“Agent Stephens.”

* * * *

He watched her as she listened and remarkably, he noted how calm she seemed.

“What? When?” She glared at him.

He shook his head and then looked at his watch and pointed to it reminding her of the time factor. The call could be traced, after all.

“Is he okay? Where are the girls now? You don’t know where my daughters are?” She’d started to scream but Tanner was there to reassure her. When she’d asked about Fernandez’s condition, he’d lifted his hands and shrugged. He felt the well earned smile tug at his lips.

“Easy come, easy go, Ally.” He chuckled.

Her eyes narrowed on him.

“Hang up the phone.” He whispered with a smile.

That’s when she caught it. Her little cheeks puffed and turned nearly blue bypassing the red tint of rage he thought he might originally see. Hell yeah, she recognized his tactics. He saw the recognition wash across her face. He realized right then and there that he made a slight error in judgment. He quickly reminded himself he knew how to handle her—or so he thought.

He moved his forefinger across his throat. “Cut the call *now!*”

She slapped the cellular device shut and jumped out of the Jeep. “You have them.”

“They’re my daughters. Of course, I have them.”

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Glaring at him, she swallowed hard and began to walk toward him slowly. "You son-of-a-bitch."

He had to hand it to her. She didn't have a lot of respect for his momma. First, he'd been called a bastard and now an SOB. *What next?* He took a deep breath and waited for the rage. He straightened his back, squared his shoulders and truly prepared.

"You sorry, self-serving, egotistical, fucking animal!"

Okay, so she still had a few names left in her. He crossed his arms and took a deep breath. Damn, he wished she'd use those lips for something more creative.

"Did the welfare of Holly and Molly ever occur to you? They will be terrified, you illiterate asshole!" She ran forward with her fist ready to strike. Horror in her eyes and true madness firing her spirit forward. "You are truly...pathetic."

Surely her extended vocabulary didn't stop with one final word. No, he felt certain she had one or two more. He moved back. "Is that the best you've got, baby?" he taunted her.

"Did you ever think about your own daughters? Hmmm?" She continued to rant and rave as tears streamed down her cheeks.

"Actually, thanks to you, they are very content."

"I doubt it." She glared at him. "They're probably very frightened."

"The phone call I received at the baggage terminal proved my theory correct."

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“What do you mean? I can barely wait to hear this.” She backed away from him, swiping at the tears still streaming down her face. Damn it. Why did she always have to cry around him?

“Thanks to you, every single time my photographer went around the kids, they grew up thinking their daddy was always around them. They were more than happy to see *Daddy* with the camera today. After Marcel, pretty much fell over, they ran to our photographer. Care to guess what they called him?” He was amused.

“You had this in mind from the beginning.”

“Not really but it worked out in the end.”

She shook her head. “Oh no, this is far from over. End, hell.”

He wanted to laugh outright because in truth, he hated Marcel Fernandez but since the man had been kind to his daughters, he’d spare her the hilarity he found in it. “Naturally, since they’ve watched our guy Bob behind the camera all of their lives, our little darlings felt safe when he collected them so you really have nothing to worry about at all.”

“You sorry prick.”

“That’s me.” He couldn’t help but feel proud. He’d thought of almost everything.

“So this is how it’s going to be now? You’re taking the girls from me?” She set her jaw.

“I want my family.” He nodded. “And—that includes you.” He moved closer to her. “But if I can’t have the trio, I’ll take the twins. Either way, they’re going to know their father.”

“You want me to give up my life, for yours?” She studied him. He fully expected a battle of words, he felt ready whenever she wanted to begin.

“Um, yeah. That’s pretty much the gist of it.” He nodded.

Rather than argue, she slumped down to the steps. “Why am I not surprised?”

He moved closer but remained out of striking distance.

Ally didn’t bother to look at him. She just stared off into the woods surrounding them. “You always do this. You screw up everything I want and then you do it with a smile like I should go along with it. Well, Tanner, I’m done. I’m not doing it anymore.” She swallowed hard. He watched her defy her tears then, fight to prove she maintained some element of self-control.

He knew better. When it came to him—she didn’t have power. She surrendered it.

A sarcastic moan fell from his lips. “I know what ya mean.” He rubbed the back of his neck and discarded the glasses and wig. His disguise all but gone, he reached out and moved his hand under her chin. When he brought her gaze to focus on him he continued, “I’m not either, Ally. This arrangement we have is not working for me. You’ve always been my girl and now you’re going to act like it.” He felt the flutter in his heart. Damnation, the woman made his heart beat faster.

“Oh fuck you, Tanner!” She moved quickly away from him and gave him the best go-to-hell

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glare she could muster. It didn't take a lot of effort.

"Oh yeah? Well I hope so, because baby, I gotta tell you, one time was not enough." He dropped a cell phone into her lap. "Hit redial and you'll get your mom or one of those handsome dudes you claim for brothers. You can check on the kids and then you can come in here and make good on a few of those fuck-you promises."

* * * *

Minutes later, she joined him. She slowly inched her way inside the cozy cabin. If circumstances were different, she might pay closer attention to the element of romance waiting there. He needed to point out the obvious.

"Why?" She stood in the center of the room with her arms hanging at her sides. She looked exactly as he'd imagined-exasperated, angry, and just too damn beautiful for words.

He stopped stacking beer in the fridge and glanced up at her. "Because I told you three years ago and I'll tell you now. Anything I do, Ally, I do because I can."

She walked closer. "You can't do this, Tanner. *Not this*. I'll do anything you ask but please, please don't take my girls from me."

He saw the fear in her eyes. The way it lingered with a haunting shadow of mixed emotions chained him to her forever. He wanted to protect her from himself and from any possible unpleasant occurrence in her life which made for complications because he also wanted to love her.

He closed the refrigerator and then moved closer to her. "You think I want to take the girls from you? Is that what you really believe?" He watched her.

"You did already! Momma confirmed they're there with her."

"They're visiting their uncles and grandma while I'm working on their mother." He smiled easily. "I've missed you, Ally."

"Missed me? How do you miss someone you only wanted to own but never quite possessed?"

He moved around the tidy cabin and closed the door behind her. He leaned up against it for a minute as he swept her in with one quiet visual once-over. "Oh I think you know I've possessed you in every way a man can, and I promise you, I can still feel you in all the right places." He shook off a growl but the groan came with a carnal hunger he only covered up with more chatter. "Damn, you look good. Better and better with age, like fine wine and all that."

"Still not one for words." She cocked her hip and rested her palm on her waist. Nervously, she changed her stance.

He was getting to her, the tone she used with him softened. Minutes now, mere seconds, and he'd try to steal a kiss, just the first one. It would lead to many more because he'd waited a long time to hold her in his arms again and the hard-on he wore around for her now proved he was nothing more than a missile on a mission.

“Why did you have to hurt Marcel?” She shifted her weight and crossed her thin arms. “He’s been good to the girls.”

Okay, so she screwed up his plans with the mention of the creep’s name.

“He’s not all bad,” she persisted.

“He’s not all good, either.” Tanner noted the obvious. “And he’s using you.”

“To bait you.” She delighted in telling him what he already realized.

“It worked and it—obviously didn’t.” He chuckled.

“I don’t even know you anymore.” She moved toward her luggage and then scooted it against the sofa.

“Oh, the bedroom is over there. You can have it.” He felt smug with the afterthought so he dared to add more. “We can share. You’ll like the concept.”

“The hell we can. We’ve never been able to meet on common ground before so why start now?” She went in for the kill. “There’s nothing between us to share.”

“Except two little girls, in case you forgot.”

“I didn’t forget.”

“Good, because I’m not unaware of how they got here.” He moved closer—hell yeah, he stalked her now because he was hungry for her and he planned to take her without another wasted minute spent between them.

Her hand went up. Maybe she meant to warn him off but he moved her manual obstacle out of his way and he didn’t stall for a second once he

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cleared his path. He swooped in and took those lips. He waited three years to claim them again and he fully intended to do it right this time.

Damn, did she ever taste good—until she ruined it with a slap straight across his left cheek.

* * * *

Why did she have to kiss him back? If she just kept her mouth off of his, then she wouldn't have to fight the passion, the loss of self-control. If he would stay in his space, she wouldn't have to raise a cruel hand to him. *Cruel hand?* She must be a loon—ready for the cuckoo bin and straight jacket. She used her palm to strike the skin of a common thug, a criminal with a record a mile long and she felt remorse? *Guilt, hell.*

“So, we play rough, do we?” He grabbed her wrist and practically tossed it over his shoulder before he pinned her other forearm firmly at his side. “I like a little turbulence and you damn well recognize when it's headed your way.” His eyes held hers on a dare, a wager she would never win—never.

“Don't, Tanner.”

“Don't tell me no because you and I both know you don't mean it. You never understood the definition or the way it can empower a woman, or a man. If you did, I swear you wouldn't have two little girls running around with my last name.”

“They don't have your last name.” She took pride in sparing no details then. “Would you like to know who has his name on the birth certificate?”

Unspoken Secrets

He was amused. "You are such a liar. I have their birth certificates." He grinned bigger. "Nice try, though."

"Bastard."

"Sexy."

"Son-of-a-bitch."

"Do you want me to say it? Because keep acting like one and we can name call all day." He held her tighter.

"Asshole."

His eyes focused on her mouth. "Beautiful. Stunning. Spectacular."

"Criminal. Thug. Monster." She rolled with it then.

"Grasping now, aren't you?" He felt his body meld to hers and he was ready, oh-so-ready. "You're all but fucked baby. In fact, I'm willing to bet you already feel me there." He moved to the *there* in question.

His declaration proved accurate because the heat he found once he moved his hand to check all but scorched him. "Good God woman, you've missed me." His lips went to her neck and he nuzzled the skin right below her earlobe.

"I hate you." She was lying, of course—she always lied to him when she tried to fight him in a word battle she would never win. At least, not with him.

"I love you." He moved his hand to cup her head. He wanted to look in her eyes when he said it because he damn well wanted her to believe it. He didn't come back to the States to go home empty handed.

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Her eyes wide, she focused on his mouth like she didn't believe that he finally said what he should've said years ago. He saw what his admission did. It calmed her and just those three little words all but won the war for him. *Damn it, she might as well bend over now.* He at least had the decency not to tell her what he thought right then. For once he kept his mouth shut and it proved beneficial—until he opened it for all the right intended purposes.

Chapter Four

His mouth moved trouble only closer. Damn if he didn't taste better than the potential for sex itself. She just wanted him to kiss her. Stay on her lips until the pain and hurt went away. Sure, he was the cause of her heartache yet he was the only one with a viable remedy.

She was breathless. She pushed him aside once, only to bring him right back as she grabbed the collar of his shirt and slammed against him with a hungry force. His hand moved between them as he worked to release the buttons from his polo. She wiggled out of hers just as fast only leaving his lips for a split second to tear the blouse over her head.

His stare locked on her chest as he licked his lips. The rise and fall of cleavage trying to gain some kind of material freedom made her stop to realize her own excitement teetered beyond the realm of any potential self-restraint. She lacked it and he most likely recognized it.

It pissed her off when he smirked then. It was as if he anticipated her sudden halt and then only pursued her more with a faster approach and forward hand. His fingers waltzed over the lace covering her breasts and quickly, before she stopped him, he moved one hand behind her and released the clasp.

With a firm hand flat against her chest in between the mounds his skillful tongue would certainly pamper, he moved his lips over her neck

and face before dropping his gape to the fallen material. “Fuck me.” She watched him swallow stiffly. “I forgot how—”

“Don’t.” She tried to escape one last time.

“Baby you should’ve thought of saying no and meaning it long before we went this far. Now, there’s no way in hell I won’t love you. I need you in my bed and I want you there—now.”

She tried to speak but the lump never moved beyond the back of her throat because he bent his knees just a bit, just enough to let her feel his erection in the vee of her intimate space. When he straightened his legs, he wrapped his arms under her and literally swept her off of her feet. He carried her off to bed with lust in his eyes and determination in his kiss.

“Tanner, please...”

“I plan to please. Count on it.” Before she protested again, his lips covered hers with the staunch passion they’d both lived without for far too long. His lips wasted away with hers needlessly consuming desires and animosities. They seemingly kissed away everything as he showered her with his affection.

Carefully, he made love to her mouth with a tongue aching to touch her places no other man’s tongue had the right to explore in such a carnal fashion. He stayed there, right around her mouth, kissing her until her body arched for him.

Oh yeah, she wanted more and her responses gave him the green light he wanted to receive. Everything was *a go* now.

Unspoken Secrets

Trained fingers rolled her nipple. One hand took on the full responsibility of tweaking her nubs to an upright and ready position. She needed his lips to leave her long enough to plant a few kisses there and as her hand played in his wavy hair, she more or less guided him lower.

“I don’t need any help.” He mumbled into her skin as he trailed down her neck and chest and then—damn him—bypassed the breasts she wanted him to devour. His tongue swirled down to her belly button and he circled it once or twice as he placed his tongue in and out of it before snickering and moving further south.

Once he found the waistband of her tight skirt, he took teasing to a whole new level. Carefully, he stroked the skin only the fabric once touched. He played for several minutes and made the seconds he spent there count.

She dripped with a fiery-hot need. The first bead of sweat formed on her brow just as he decided to be kind enough to rid her of the last barriers they had—her skirt, his pants, their shoes.

Breathing in and breathing out, it was hard not to notice the readiness she allowed him to see. Her nipples were peaked, throbbing for his undivided attention.

When he moved beside her once more, he started at her ankle and kissed his way up her inner thigh before stopping right outside of the sexual heat he chose to ignore—realizing it would only flame her fire. And it did.

“The prettiest woman in the world with a sexy little snatch to match.” He offered the compliment to her pussy, and her mouth fell open in anticipation as he spoke into her skin and moved again, up closer to her nipples. Her body trembled as his fingers skimmed over the roundness only to defy once more.

His mouth covered hers and then he drew back and resisted. “What’s wrong Ally? Is it need or is it want? Tell me which one.” He muttered the words with a rugged twinge of defiance.

“Both.” She arched and then tried to grind at empty air. It didn’t do a lot for her. Her own hand covered her mound and she almost, by instinct alone, moved her fingers closer to the clit demanding notice.

“Let me.” He moved his hand to her pussy and his mouth to her breast, and the slow show of affection began.

Her fingers moved out of his way, and her eyes slowly closed. She soaked in the pleasure, and he brought it—with it came the sudden change of heart. Damnation, she loved him and what he did to her with his lips and hands should’ve had her pleading and he would make her beg because Tanner was that kind of man.

After minutes of time passed, he finally dropped his head to the pool of desire he created simply by finger fucking her into a complete frenzy, a slick reminder of what his cock would do to her once his mouth moved out of the way. She arched higher as his lips kissed their way to her pussy. His mouth ran only a temporary interference, one she

wouldn't dare oppose even if he drove her to the brink of one orgasm after another—and he would.

He did.

Her hands felt numb as she gripped the bedspread under her. His tongue trailed along the contour of her intimate space before he applied just the right amount of pressure to her clit. He moved his tongue over it a couple of times with a swipe up and down. His mouth covered the little pearl and drew it in for an exhilarating taunt before releasing it long enough to tongue her entire core.

“Oh God Tanner. Don't stop, you can't...stop.” Her hips tingled but she rolled them forward and back with every move he allowed her to take.

A steady forearm held her thighs, pinned them against the mattress. That's when he slowly and very, very confidently pushed into her pussy with the intent to please and the precision to drive her from one earth moving orgasm to another.

* * * *

“Holy fucking world.” He looked down on her with the remains of her pleasure still providing a stain on his chin. He didn't care. He had to have her now whether she was ready for him or not and multiple orgasms from his tongue needed a more fulfilling encore.

Her wild eyes widened and damn it all, he had to stay locked in them while he fucked her. His knee pushed her legs apart and he fisted his cock before driving it into her tight, drenching wet space.

“Damn you Tanner.” A breathless sigh escaped. “You could’ve waited.”

“I’ve waited three years. It’s not an option now.” His cock proved his point. She’d already taken three orgasms. It was his turn.

His shaft moved into her with force. One stroke, maybe two—“Fuck me.” He breathed his request into her lips as his pace picked up. Her legs wrapped him tighter and tighter as she arched against him, braced for him. Fucking mercy, her calves alone were strong enough to put a choke hold around his back and her snug little snatch only offered his cock more of the same.

He bit his lower lip and pumped into her with harder thrusts. With a muscular arm, he moved one of her knees up and he held her there for a better angle and position.

She moaned. “Get there—with me. Now!”

“Not a problem,” he growled. His cock stroked her with a deliberate goal and a beautiful end result. “That’s it baby...come with me, let me feel you.” He released his build up as she met another orgasm right along with his.

Damn, the woman just knew how to rock a man’s world. His cock writhed inside of her, spinning out the last of pleasure’s best. Thank heavens, he was still the only man who understood just how good things could be when they came together and truly set things right. He buried his head in her neck. “Now, we’re back where we belong.”

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He heard her barely whimper but he was so exhausted he didn't bother to look at her then. He knew her tears fell and as he tried to resist one or two of his own, he held her closer to him, refusing to let her go down the trail of their broken hearts all on her own.

Chapter Five

The phone rang. It was three o'clock in the morning and someone wanted to know where she was. He grabbed it and looked at the caller identification. "Don't get it."

"You want me to ignore Marcel?" She sat up on one elbow.

"Damn straight." He set his jaw.

"That makes me look guilty."

"Too bad." He rubbed the back of his neck and rotated it in a clockwise fashion. "Maybe you're damned if you do and damned if you don't but the truth is Ally, once you had my children, you're guilty by association."

"You wanted me to terminate the pregnancy?"

In the dim light, she saw the wide-eyed look of shock. "Hell, no. It never crossed my mind. Never." He rolled out of bed and retrieved his pants. He had trouble zipping them. "Ever tried to zip up a hard-on?" He really wasn't asking her but rather making her notice he still had one, like she missed it.

"Can't say that I have. Is that all you ever think about?"

"Honestly?" He grinned and sat down on the bed moving his arm over to the other side of her hip so he could rest his palm flat against the bed. "I have to admit it, when you're around, it seems to be the norm so I guess I'm used to it after all of these years."

"I doubt that."

Unspoken Secrets

“It’s true. I can’t tell you how many cold showers I’ve endured because of you and never mind the personal hand jobs. Now *those* got old.”

“I doubt you suffered much. You always have the pick of the litter.” She didn’t want to think about it either. It made her jealous when she thought of the women Tanner took to his bed. She tossed back the sheet and started to move for her clothes. Once she stood, he let out a long whistle and pulled her back to him.

“I didn’t get the chance for a repeat performance the first time we were together but now, Ally, I want more. I want to wake up with you in my arms after falling fast asleep with you beside me. I want to hear you breathe and listen to your heartbeat next to mine. I want our girls to run in on Saturday morning and tell us all about the cartoons they’re watching as they beg for a boat ride or maybe just nag us to get up at the light of day. I want you, Ally and I don’t know how many ways I can say it.”

He pretty much said more than she ever expected. He stopped her heart with the way he looked at her, never mind the way he spoke to her then. Why she had to go and ruin a good thing was anyone’s guess but it was just the way they were when they were together. “I’m sure you can find a replacement or two. Plenty of women are capable of satisfying you. I know you told me once...”

His mouth covered hers before she moved the moment into an act of combat. His tongue found a brisk tempo as if to stimulate the act of sex while lavishing an unforgettable kiss straight into her

memory. He drew back to glare at her and what came next truly surprised her.

"I was a player. I know you realize it so why deny it, but after we were together, I..." He seemed unable to finish the sentence without looking away from her. "Let's just say I have a true understanding of the blue-balls concept and an intimate relationship with my left hand."

Her gaze held him for a split second before she leapt from the bed. "That's bullshit and you know it."

"What I know is that I haven't fucked another woman since I had the only woman I've ever wanted in my arms. To do it, to be with another woman while you were pregnant with my babies seemed—well, scratch it." He didn't go on and she didn't expect him to elaborate. The man had already spilled more than she ever expected from him.

At some point, she turned her back to him and he must've slid to the side of the bed so he could reach for her when he wanted to drive home a point. She held her clothing in her hands and was about to make her way to the bathroom when he placed his hands on both sides of her waist and brought her back to him. Standing behind her, his fingers trailed down her waist and hips. "Love me, Ally." He whispered in her ear. "Love me like you've always wanted to love me."

"I can't." She whispered back, just barely turning her head so she spoke the words over her shoulder.

"You can. Oh baby, I know you can."

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She faced him then. “Tanner, I have a career. I’m on the task force to bring you down. Do you understand this? I am paid to fight the very thing you stand for and I am an agent with the FBI. Doesn’t that mean anything to you?”

“You mean everything to me. I don’t care if you’re an agent with the FBI. I had you before they did.” He wrapped his arms around her and kissed her forehead before adding something more—one more statement to drive home a valid point. “And you need me more than you’ll ever need them.”

* * * *

Ally came out of the bathroom fully dressed. Tanner smirked as soon as he saw her. “You shouldn’t have bothered with clothes. Lose them.” His expression held nothing but raw ass rebellion. “Quickly.” He yanked the sheet back and nodded in the direction of hard evidence to prove why there was a sudden urgency.

“I have to take care of something so it’ll have to wait.” She looked around the cabin and then casually walked out the door. “Can I have the keys?”

“Why?”

“Dear God, Tanner. I’m not going to leave you here. I just need to run an errand.”

“I’ll take you.” He jumped up and slid into his pants with a loud moan. “Actually, we probably need to lay low.”

“Don’t you think I need to get out of here and go make a call to check on Marcel?”

“Nah, I don’t think he’ll be too interested in talking to you.” He seemed to exercise forced

restraint. “Besides, it’s time to choose, Ally. You know what waits for you with him and you have a pretty good idea of what I can give you.”

“What can you possibly give me that Marcel won’t?”

“For starters...” he studied her and she held her breath just waiting for it and he gave her precisely what she expected, “our girls.”

“You bastard.”

“You got it.”

“What happened to the man who promised he would never hurt me or take my children?”

“I wanted to reach a mutual understanding together but I’ll take them before I’ll let you take them back to Marcel.” He stared straight ahead for a second, looking beyond her just long enough to contemplate what he apparently wanted to say next.

He cleared his throat and even that seemed like a struggle. “I have to ask you something.”

She braced herself for it. She actually wondered what took him so long because she understood Tanner and knew he didn’t have the capacity to share her with another man.

“*Did* you sleep with him?” His eyes carefully scanned over her body. Perhaps he thought if he took the time to linger over her she would feel the power of his gaze and it would render her incapable of lying to him.

“Is that what you think?” She studied him this time. Damn, her heart just broke as she saw it in his eyes. He thought it might be a possibility.

“He lived with you.”

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“He lived with us.” She quipped.

Tanner shook his head. “When he moved in, I moved out.”

“What do you mean?”

“I couldn’t stand the thought of him touching you and since you had the stupid audacity to move the man into my house, I assumed you planned to fuck him silly and make me stand by and listen to every grunt and moan so my guys removed the bugs.”

Ally snorted with laughter then.

“What’s so funny?”

“I had the stupid audacity, huh?”

“Yeah, I worked hard to put you up in a nice home—one of the nicest, I might add and you thanked me by moving a man I loathe right in without thinking about how that might affect me.” He rubbed his chin. “Yeah, Ally. I call that dumb.”

Ally just loved the hell out of him right then. She didn’t know why but she did. He made her pulse race and never mind what he did to her female parts. Unlawful ideas crossed her dirty mind and she fought to push them aside. They needed to talk. Fucking all the time didn’t work out differences or solve problems. Although, it was a delicious start, she had to admit.

Moving closer to him, she pressed her open palm to his cheek. “Tanner, I’ve never been intimate with anyone but you.”

“Well, you know, I thought so and such but I had to know, you know—for sure.”

“You can bet on it.” She winked.

“I would but you know me, I don’t mix business with pleasure.” He grabbed her then and wrapped his arm around her waist. “I bet on everything but love, baby.”

“Tanner.” She paused, and then said, “Speaking of business, I really need to take care of something before I go.”

His eyes lit up. “You’re going to go back with me, aren’t you?”

“I’m not sure yet.” She really didn’t know. To go with Tanner meant to leave the FBI and the United States. To leave the States and flee with him to the Caribbean meant she would become an accessory, more or less, to everything her brothers and Tanner stood for and worked against. She had a hard time with their lifestyle and their business.

“What can I do to convince you?”

“Tell me you aren’t the man we’ve profiled.”

“I think you know I can’t do that.” He looked away from her.

Ally walked around to stand in front of him. “Don’t you dare turn away from me. If you’re this man I’ve read all about, then you be the kind of man your cartel seems to think you are. You stand up and tell me why and what drives you to become this monster. You can at least do that for me.”

“You’re right. Maybe it’s time you saw me for who I really am.” He walked over to the counter and retrieved his wallet. “Today is just as good as any other.”

Chapter Six

The helicopter began to descend and Ally stared out beyond the Andes Mountain. “Wow, I feel like I have the best seat in the world.”

Tanner tried to ignore the passing carnal thoughts even though various individual acts came to memory one at a time. “The best seat you have is right here.” He patted his manhood bringing her attention to the bulging package pushing through the material of his thin slacks.

He broadened his smile and her return gesture warmed his heart but at the same time tarnished his soul. He knew her smile would deteriorate almost immediately once they landed in Colombia. Still, she wanted to understand who he was and he was going to introduce her to the side of him she needed to meet. Only, he wasn’t the face of the cartel, like she thought but if she believed he was then protecting her from seeing her brothers for the forces behind their total madness might save them all.

Tanner watched the ground beneath them move closer and closer as the pilot prepared to land. He wished their lives were different now. He’d started out as a simple rogue really. A gambling man—a bookie for the working class. Somehow, it all got crazy and Ally’s brothers craved more.

Darren and David took their business places he really never wanted to go but he was forced to

carry some of the blame because he never turned away just because he was easy-going and laid back. Now, he was one of the most feared drug lords in the world and he wasn't even a drug lord. The brother duo owned the title more than he ever would. He still kept his hands in booking games and it brought in more money than he'd ever need in his lifetime.

They landed in the midst of armed guards. Tanner quickly moved his arm over her head to protect her from the blades slowing down above them and they rushed from the chopper to an awaiting truck.

Ally never showed an inch of fear and he felt somewhat relieved when he noticed it. Fear, even from the wives or significant others, showed weakness but of course many of his peers would perceive it as a relevant shortcoming when they discovered Tanner Dorsey brought a woman into Colombia.

"How far will we travel?" She asked.

"Not far." He snapped his reply before his eyes darted out the window. They were protected by a convoy of trucks but Tanner still felt uneasy whenever he came to Colombia, the nature of the business, he imagined.

A few short miles down a bumpy patch of terrain and the truck pulled up to a makeshift tent strategically located in front of rows upon rows of opium poppy crops. He saw the face of recognition—one of true disgust.

The vehicle stopped right in front of the tent and Tanner was immediately met by one of his

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employees. He was dressed as an American soldier. They made small talk and the man nodded in Ally's direction. His expression never changed—he wore not the mask of boredom but one of unchallenged despair.

Tanner directed Ally to the rear of the tent and there he waved his hand out as if to proudly introduce her to the other side of the law—the wrong side—the illegal throes of drug trade. He tried to make light of it when he finally found the right words. “So, you wanted to know who I am. Who I am isn't who you will ever see again standing in these fields but if you want to know the man I've become, on a business level, then I'm standing here among the very tools of my trade.”

Her eyes darted back and forth across the fields. “Heroin?”

“Yes.”

“What else?”

“You want more?”

“I know there is more. Remember, I profiled you before I realized who was behind this secret drug cartel.”

“You already know about the gambling and money laundering so what else do you want to know?” He already expected the worst because Ally had morals and somewhere deep inside of her, she wanted to believe he still possessed a few principles too.

“I want to know about the murder for hire.” She turned around and made a quick dash for the truck calling out over her back before she reached it. “And I want to go home—now!”

Destiny Blaine

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Ally never said the first word to Tanner until they landed back in Tennessee. They'd traveled for nearly thirty hours and very few words passed between them. They were both exhausted and she felt the need for sleep.

Once they were in the airport, she began to pick up her pace as they headed outside. She needed to put some space in between them and she needed to gain some distance from him fast.

"Ally?" His voice stopped her.

She spun around to face off with him. "Not here. Not now." She warned with her hand up in the air just long enough to prove a point and truly hold him at bay.

He caught up with her tossing the one duffle bag they had packed for an emergency, casually over his shoulder. "What now?"

"Right now, I'm going to call Marcel and have a private conversation with him and when I'm done, I'm going to trash my cell phone and decide what comes next. You can wait for me in the car."

"I don't like waiting for my women."

Ally shot him a knowing glance. "According to you, I'm the only woman for you so if that's true, get used to it—I'm worth the wait."

Tanner seemed to interpret the truer meaning behind her phrase and bent down to snap a kiss on her cheek. "I'll pull up to the front and pick you up."

She nodded and then backed away. She watched him through a haze of mixed emotions. He'd won again only this time, he'd only won part

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of his wager—not the entire gamble made. He had their girls. She felt confident he'd care for them and love them with everything he had to give. If she gave in and let him take her into his life, then she would lose everything she was and everything she ever hoped to become before her life spiraled out of control.

Watching him until he disappeared, Ally dialed Marcel. "It's me. I need help." By the time she disconnected the call, she'd already changed her mind again. She couldn't live without Tanner. She'd tried and failed. Now, she just had a few decisions to make and those wouldn't be easy.

* * * *

An agent with the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation just happened to be on Alcoa Highway and he picked her up and gave her a lift to Nashville where Ally later flew back to Florida. Once she was back in the sunshine state, her heart was where it could effectively shatter beyond repair but her mind was made up and it would take a force of nature to change it.

When Marcel picked her up at the airport, she sprinted into his arms and there she found the comfort she'd actually been seeking from Tanner. Marcel wasn't her lover but for a split second in time, she wished Marcel was the man she craved, just so he could love Tanner completely away from her heart and out of her soul. It would have been so much easier to care for Marcel or someone like him.

"I'm glad to see you." She whispered into his shirt. "And Marcel?" She looked up at him. "I'm really glad you're okay."

Taken by surprise, he kissed her forehead. "Ah. You know our Mr. Dorsey, I don't think he had any intention of killing me, he just wanted your girls. I took a nasty bump on the head and that's pretty much it."

Ally tried to gain a look of true bewilderment. "I don't think Tanner has *our girls*."

She emphasized '*our girls*' as in the daughters Marcel helped her raise without their biological father around to do the job. And she knew he read it precisely as she'd intended. His hard expression immediately softened.

A caring hand brushed her strawberry locks out of her eyes. "Ally, you look like you haven't slept for days." He rarely showed her compassion because Marcel wasn't willing to tag second for the man on first. In the beginning, Ally continually turned him down for sex and each time assured him there would never be any kind of emotional connection between them. Apparently, he believed her because he didn't push the issue. Even when he proposed marriage, he made sure he told her he remained on common ground and understood the platonic terms.

"I just want to go home." She purred the words against him and as she moved her arms away from his neck, she glanced beyond his shoulder and narrowed her eyes. There, in front of her was the very man who had nabbed her daughters. Snapping one shot after another, she didn't have the energy

to pose for him or to give out a cue since her daughters weren't around. She placed her mouth to Marcel's ear and quickly made promises she didn't plan to make good on but wanted him to believe if only for a captured show. A camera lens could translate many things and she wanted the translation to benefit her, at least for now.

"Once I get my girls back, I want us to talk about taking our relationship to the next level." She kissed his earlobe and gained the reaction she hoped she would—for Tanner's sake. "I missed you, Marcel." She added the last part to ensure the appropriate response and as if to drive home the point a bit more, her lower body melded to him in a firm sweep as she rolled her hips forward and mashed her breasts to his broad chest.

"You did?" He jolted to attention. His body came alive with the anticipation of sealed promises. "Since when?" He eyed her curiously.

"I just did. Don't make a big deal out of it." She didn't smile but instead her face tightened with the worry and concern she wanted him to translate as such. She needed to convince him that she didn't think Tanner had her daughters and if she could do it successfully, everything else would be much easier for her in the near future.

He gradually pulled away from her and studied her closely. Marcel wasn't an idiot and reading people well helped him nab the position he seemed to wear more like a medal of honor.

A supervisor with the FBI's Internal Affairs, his intelligence often mesmerized her even though his notorious good looks did very little to inspire her.

Most women craved his touch and thankfully, Ally wasn't one of them because it would've complicated things further. Marcel Fernandez despised Tanner and her brothers. For some reason, she had a sneaking suspicion that it went beyond what met the naked eye.

The reasons he'd stepped up to the plate for her when she found out she was pregnant held professional motive and nothing more. They'd been working on a special operation when Ally discovered, around the same time Marcel put the facts together with several other Special Agents, that the cartel they'd wanted to locate had a direct link to Ally—Tanner's cartel.

Marcel's notorious walk, or strut as most would call it, began then. He took a cigar out of his pocket so he could chew on it as they casually walked toward his car. "I hope you're serious Ally, because I know exactly what you need when we get home."

"I hope so because I could use a little TLC." She carried on the charade.

"Leave it to me." He opened her car door and ushered her inside. When he stood back away from her, he rubbed his hand over the front of his slacks. "Damn you Ally, I hope this isn't a game because I've waited a long time to have you in my bed and after dealing with your ex, I'm in no mood for uneventful foreplay."

Her breath hitched in her chest right as he slammed the car door. She hoped things played out like she wanted them to or else she would have to give Marcel the affection and attention he seemed

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to want. And if that happened, her plan would come completely apart at the seams.

He slid in behind the wheel and faced off with her then. "So are you going to tell me where the girls are?"

Her tears were well rehearsed and she allowed them to fall. "I don't know! I just know he doesn't have them."

The test of piercing eyes came next and when he glared at her, she understood what purpose he had. He wanted to read her mind and as if he did, he started the vehicle and patted her shoulder. "I'll get them back wherever they are. I'll pull out all the stops to do it."

He bit.

She slowly released a sigh and hoped he didn't hear her. She wanted to rest easy now because the plan she put in motion was well underway.

By the time they arrived at her home—the estate Tanner bought for her before he left the States—she was in a deep sleep. She remembered Marcel carrying her to the bed and his hands were certainly the hands that undressed her. She didn't even care that he lingered at her breasts for far longer than a gentleman would have and perhaps he gawked at her for far too long before he covered her bare skin with a comforter but even that didn't bother her. She'd been in and out of the country and across several states; she needed sleep. He could feel her up or down and she didn't have the faintest desire to move.

Chapter Seven

Tanner found breathing damn near impossible until he returned home. There, he found life again. Whatever he seemed destined to miss with Ally, he would find in his little girls. They were full of life—much like their mother or at least, the way she used to be before he stripped her of the ability to live her life to the fullest.

Much to Tanner's surprise, Molly and Holly took up with David more than anyone else. Ally's mother was older and spent most of her days in bed but she seemed to look better with her granddaughters toddling around. Her eyes danced with love as she watched them and the girls encouraged her to do things she didn't typically do.

Tanner crept up on them poolside. "Momma?" For years Tanner had referred to Mrs. Stephens as Mother or Momma because she'd been like a mother to him and he adored her. Since he'd been so distanced from Ally, he'd gone the extra mile to take care of her—for Ally.

She quickly jumped up from her seat and clasped her hands together ready to clap in celebration but once she read his expression, her eyes dropped and the excitement disappeared with the high tide just starting to wash inward. "She's not with you?" She looked out over the sea.

He shook his head.

"But she's coming, right?"

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"I don't think so." He shrugged off his despair and turned to watch his little angels as they played in the elaborate kiddie pool he had installed specifically for them.

"My daddy." They both chirped his name at the same time and pointed.

Mrs. Stephens smiled with delight. "It appears my daughter showed these two countless photographs because they are very familiar with their father. They've pointed you out in the pictures here without any trouble."

Tanner kicked his shoes off and rolled up his pants so he could go wade in the water with his little daughters. "Yes, that's right. I'm your daddy."

They both agreed again. "My daddy."

"Yes, I'm your daddy." He loved the sound of it.

One of the twins quickly showed him a boat while the other hit him on the shin with a plastic doll. "You must be Molly."

She giggled and hit him again. Ally told him she was an aggressive little tyke but she failed to tell him she could be rotten to the core. Mischief existed in her eyes and he just wanted to pick her up and squeeze her tightly but thought better of it.

David warned him then, too. "Watch it. Before you think those two are just eager to be held and loved, remember whose children they are and wait until they get to know you."

Molly cried then and held her hands up for David to pick her up. "I love these two but understand, I didn't sign on for kid duty." He

kicked his shoes off and held his arms out. "Come on. Come over here to Uncle David." He watched as the kid sat down with a splash right in the center of the pool. "What did I tell ya? Her mother's child through and through."

Tanner tousled her hair and started to lift her out of the water when her little hand reached up and smacked his cheek. He gently held her wrist. "No, Molly."

Her tears came in droves then as she squealed out and splashed around like crazy. She reached for David again.

"I don't think they've had a lot of discipline." He noted as he picked the little one up and wrapped her in a huge beach towel.

"Probably about as much as her mother had." Tanner smiled at Mrs. Stephens.

"Then she's had her backside paddled a few times."

"I doubt it." Tanner studied Holly—the quieter one.

"Would you like to swim with daddy?" He held his hands out and to his surprise, the little girl reached for him warming his heart in the same spot her mother had undoubtedly bruised.

* * * *

Hours later, the men met to discuss Tanner's royal fuck-up. He could hardly wait to hear the brutal butt-chewing he deserved.

Darren slammed his tumbler down on the bar. "You dumb fucking ass." He wheeled around to

face Tanner as he walked into the study with David right on his heels.

Tanner glared at the brothers. "She wanted to know who she was aligning herself with and I took her to Colombia."

Darren brought the glass to his lips again and gulped his drink before returning it to the bar again with one more forceful slam. "You're a stupid fuck, Tanner."

David rubbed his chin. "Are you just trying to send us all to prison?"

"I'm trying to get you off the hook. She thinks the entire cartel is mine. She doesn't know the two men she claims for brothers are the very men *she* profiled."

Darren's gaze narrowed. "Why would you do that? Why would you let her think you're the only one with dirty hands?"

David answered for him. "Because she would turn us in but she would never hand him over. Never." He seemed chilled by the realization. "Right, Tanner?"

"I took a chance that might be the case and I guess if she's going to come for any of us, she'll take me, but I admit it I don't think she'd ever roll over on me."

Studying him with a stern glare, Darren snapped out a reply. "I hope to hell and back that you're right."

The bottle of scotch called to all of them. Darren poured himself another. David followed suit and Tanner was right behind both of them. The men drank in silence. They consumed the whole

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bottle of single malt whiskey and left the room one by one.

Chapter Eight

Marcel left her a note on the kitchen counter along with a dozen long stem white roses. "I'll hold you to all those long overdue promises. Last night, you deserved sleep—but tonight, you'll never find it."

Ally glanced at the clock. She all but slept the day away. She had less than seven hours to get things together. Marcel typically worked ten hour days but he might come home early with the promise of sex lingering in the air.

Releasing a long sigh, she tried to pull her thoughts together and really plan out her escape. She wanted to leave Florida with as few loose ends as possible—if it was even a remote possibility.

She missed her girls and she longed for more time with Tanner. The thought of them kept her eyes moist with tears. They were somewhere waiting for her but if she wanted to make a clean break, she needed to do this without leading someone straight to them. She went out to her car and opened up the glove compartment. She retrieved a cell phone no one knew she had and she dialed her brother's number. She'd committed it to memory and promised to only dial it in case of an emergency.

Immediately, David's voice mail picked up. "I'm taking the long way home," she promised in codes. "I'll see you when I see you. Tell Tanner. I'll be out in six, close it down here." She thought back

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to the words Tanner once used when he fled Knoxville and tried to use their lingo. They would know she wouldn't have time to do everything the right way so they would transfer her money and make her transition smooth once they got the message and with any luck, they'd know where to find her.

Taking a deep breath, she shoved the phone back in the glove compartment and simply spoke to the empty garage. "It's time to find out where my heart really belongs."

* * * *

Ally walked into the Alcoa Hilton alone. She looked up at the rooms overlooking the open atrium and released a tortured sigh. She hoped like hell someone knew where she headed when she left Florida but she had absolutely no way of being sure. She'd left one message for David and she'd made sure to drive slowly to the airport in case Tanner's tails were following her. For once, she hoped they were on her like glue.

When she approached the airline ticket counter, she'd made her request known by loudly requesting a flight to Knoxville, Tennessee just in case one of his men stood close enough to listen. She'd acted like a raging lunatic checking over her shoulder, speaking to everyone and yet no one in particular. Now, she'd reached her destination. Her no end situation started there, in a sense and it would begin there once more if Tanner came for her and he would, if he knew where to find her.

She stepped onto the elevator and rode it to floor number five. She stepped out and looked

down over the same atrium she once occupied. She found her room, the one she once shared with Tanner. Her hand moved to her purse and reached in for the key. She heard it click before the arrow connected with the magnetic latch or whatever the hell the keycards did to unlock the door. On instinct, she reached for her gun, forgetting she hadn't packed one in her belt.

Her mind raced and her heart pounded. Her forehead went to the door, right above the peephole and she let out a sigh of relief. "You're here. I can already feel you."

"Liar. You just heard the latch and knew I was the only one charming enough to convince housekeeping to let me in." He opened the door wide and with a quick yank, grabbed a firm hold on her forearm and pulled her inside.

* * * *

"Damn you Tanner. You could've met me downstairs or called me at the airport or..."

His mouth covered hers and his hands quickly went to her waistband. He pushed her pants down in one sleek move and helped her step out of her panties at the same time her khakis fell to her ankles. He all but knocked her luggage from her hand and then kicked her loafers off before stepping out of his. His shirt came off with her help and he wasted little time in returning the favor.

They were, without a doubt, suddenly undressed and wickedly nude with evidence of their unspent passion demanding attention. After everything, she'd weighed out in her mind—the good, the bad, the sinfully delicious, and yes—the

love—she couldn't wait to start her life with Tanner.

Backing up to the bed, her knees met the mattress and she motioned for him with a crooked finger. "Come here."

Shaking his head, he pulled her to him in record time. "Not a chance. After you left me here last time, I plan to wear your ass out, in more ways than one."

"You'll have to catch me first!" Playfully, she swung a pillow in his direction and he caught her with ease as soon as she tried to jump past him.

His moan proved hungry. His growl proved dominant and the hand he raised promised her that he meant every word he said. He planned to spank her and she arched her back anticipating the first strike.

Before his hand came down on her bottom, he playfully bit her butt cheek. "I should fuck you first just to settle down my growing problem. It would take the ache away."

"I doubt it," she called to him over her shoulder. "But I'd love to find out." She flipped over and stared up at him.

He brushed a curl away from her brow. "Marry me." He seemed shocked he'd even said the words.

Opening her mouth, she started to speak but nothing came immediately to mind. She was too afraid to form words and almost scared of what she might say. She might try to talk him out of it. She felt her jaw drop and her lips part.

He slid his tongue in like he fully thought she invited the kiss. He sealed it off with a wild

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promise. “You’ll never be bored and I’ll make it worth your trouble. Every day of your life I’ll make up for the hours you spent loving enough for both of us.” His hand started to move across her belly, the once perfectly taut stomach was somewhat spoiled by his seed but the two daughters they created made it well worth the imperfection of slightly flawed skin. Only a tiny stretch mark served as a reminder of any children born.

She’d waited a lifetime to hear him propose never fully expecting to hear permanent words of endearment. Now, she wasn’t entirely sure what she wanted to do about them.

Anxious eyes burned through her. He wanted an answer and since she didn’t have one, she slid her hand down to stroke the one distraction she knew how to provoke. Up and down, she pulled at him until his desire left nothing to the imagination and everything to chance.

* * * *

He gritted his teeth and stilled his focus against tight little nipples beaded to perfection. She wasn’t going to answer so he would paddle her little ass until she knew what it felt like to be so sexually aroused that the need factor truly outweighed the want factor. He moved his hand under her and with pressure applied to the small of her back, he helped her turn over—flat against his bended knees.

Her full breasts mashed against his flesh and with his hands nearly burning just to touch her, he moved one open palm to cover the entire surface of her round behind. He snapped his wrist, almost

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popped it really, and delivered the first of several slaps across her rear. She made more moaning sounds followed by one or two oohs and ahs but he never once heard her complain.

The fact that she didn't whine or whimper only drove his desire; he needed to feed on hers and knew precisely where he'd start. His hand moved over her ass and down her right thigh. Fisting his cock, he moved it along her leg just enough to let her feel the strength of his need—he wanted her to know the true desire of a hardened man. Hell yeah, she didn't have any doubt. His hand moved to her pussy. Fuck him silly, that she would. She was ready and he was able.

Moving down to pet her head, he stroked her hair back as he gently spoke directly into her ear and somehow, he hoped to reach her heart.

* * * *

“You'll love me until you die, Ally. And that's the only reason, the lone excuse I have for leading you away from the life you've always known. If you don't follow me, you'll never lose me but you'll lose a bit of yourself each day because you can survive without me but with me—with me baby—you'll thrive because I'll make sure you do. You'll have everything you want. Everything you need and you'll always, always have me.” He stroked her back then. First with his hand and then with his kiss and that's when she heard her own voice make the promises he wanted to help her keep.

“Yes.” Her voice cracked at first and as if she wanted to be sure he heard her, she repeated herself again and again. “Yes.” She said the word a

few more times and he kissed her deeply just to shut her up, or so she imagined.

“Yes?” He kissed the reply into her skin, right below her ear. “What took you so damn long to answer?” His hands worked at a sensual massage as he brought her over to straddle him. With her body towering over him, he remained in a seated position as she kissed him with both palms against his face.

The kiss in itself proved love could be made with two tongues as much as two slapping bodies because once he slid beyond her slit and his stroke came hard and deep, they came together as one and without the cock massage most women needed to get them there. They were ready for each other simply because of the undeniable love and lust lingering between them. The impact of the sudden penetration felt incredible but it wasn’t needed to bring on the heat already existing there. They rode on wondrous waves of ecstasy and with shouts of pleasure, fell back onto the bed almost immediately.

His hand never stopped moving over her back. “Now then, now you can rest easy.” He kissed the top of her head and closed his eyes.

Suddenly, as if she thought of something, she sat straight up in the bed. “How long have you been here?”

He smirked. “Why?”

“Tanner Dorsey, answer me. I want to know. Did you even go home?”

Before he answered, she saw what he didn’t even have to put into words. “I did.”

She crossed her legs Indian style and her knees hit his side as he gazed into her eyes. "They're beautiful aren't they?"

He dropped his focus to her chest and licked his lips all too slowly. "You'd better believe it. The best set I've ever laid eyes on and that's a solemn promise. Why do you think I want to marry you?"

She used one knee to gouge him in the ribs. "Not my breasts, damn you."

Snickering, he moved up the bed and propped himself up against the back headboard. "They are perfect. Just like their mother." He grabbed her wrist and brought her to him and his lips lavished her with a few more kisses. Soft and light, just enough to peck some affection into a mouth seemingly ready for more.

"Did you spend some time with them?"

"I did." His smile spread into one of pure pride. "Molly is like her mother and damn it all, she's going to be crazy about your brother."

"Really? Darren and Molly bonded?" She seemed to like the idea.

"Nope. She's taken up with David. Follows him around like he's her playmate and she's driving him a little nuts."

"I'll be darned." A southern expression fell from her lips and she grinned even more. "I never expected David to take an interest in children."

Tanner winked. "Molly didn't ask for permission, she just decided she liked him best and she follows him everywhere. Your mother said she's slept in his room since she's been there. She starts out in her room but at some point during the night,

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she ends up on his floor as close to the bed as she can get.”

“I would’ve never thought they would’ve been a likely pair.” Ally’s eyes narrowed.

His darkened.

“What is it?”

Tanner swallowed hard and as if to change the subject, he moved his finger down the front of her chest in between perfectly rounded breasts. “I want you happy. That’s all.”

“We’ll get through this and we’ll be happy.”

She nodded her head in agreement but she wasn’t entirely sure. She loved the FBI and loved working on the right side of the law but now it seemed she’d made a swap for the sake of love.

“Ally, you know what we are and after our little trip to Colombia, I think you know what we represent.”

The thud in her chest wasn’t her beating heart but rather a dagger chiseling straight through it. She changed the subject back to her original question. “You never answered me. How long have you been here?”

His hand wrapped around the nape of her neck and he brought her closer. “How long do you think?”

“I think you went home, wherever home is now, and you played with the girls. Then, I think you waited for the call and once you had it, you came back here.”

“What call?” He questioned her with concern rapidly settling on his cheeks. “I didn’t get a call.”

“The one from your photographer?” she said solemnly. “Bob, I guess. The same one that is always on us.”

Tanner narrowed his eyes and focused on her completely then. “Bob is with the twins. He hasn’t left them since he brought them to us because he was a familiar person they recognized and we didn’t want them to feel like they were surrounded by complete strangers.”

“Well, I guess I just had him mixed up with one of your other tails, then.”

Tanner started to say something but stopped short of it. Worry set in his expression and an anxious twitch moved his chin and jaw.

She caught it. “So Bob didn’t make the call but you got one, right? Otherwise you wouldn’t have known to come back here, right?”

“Baby, I know you so well that I knew when I walked out of that airport to get the car that you weren’t going to be waiting on the sidewalk when I pulled back around. It’s why I never looked back when I walked away from you. I came back here with the full expectation of waiting on you whether I waited a day, a week or a month. I knew when you were ready, you’d come back here. I took a gamble that you were sentimental enough to check into the same room where I tamed this pretty little pussy of yours.” He grinned.

Her mouth dropped. “Tame?” Her hand went to his cock and worked it into an upright and appreciative stance. “You didn’t *tame* anything.” She moved his hand to her mound and his fingers found their place just as her palm found him ready

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for anything—unlimited pleasures, carnal sins, and a wild ride worth remembering.

Chapter Nine

Whatever he saw in her eyes, he tried to push aside as he stole a lingering kiss. His lips melded with hers and while she closed her eyes to indulge in the flavor of it, he refused to let his lids shut her out of view.

He nearly fed on her mouth as he nipped and tugged her with a new hunger. She intended to leave her life behind but what he offered her, what he could give her wouldn't be enough and he understood it now more than ever before. When she left the FBI, when all ties were cut, she would make a full leap to the other side.

The thought alone scared the hell out of him. She needed the adventure and she would find it because she craved the adrenaline and the rush his lifestyle brought would be the closest things in comparison to what she left behind.

He moved her over him then and kissed down her stomach to the place where he rightfully belonged, if for no other reason than to lap up the juices of disturbance. A tight pussy closed him off at first but he had her, oh hell yeah he had her, just as soon as he stretched her with another probing finger.

A hungry mouth guided a famished tongue to cover her starving pussy lips. Her inner core nearly pulsed with the excitement he wanted to bring. His tongue worked into her intimate space calling out on demand for entry.

He lapped. She moaned and whimpered. He thrust. She pulled at his hair and wrapped a shaking leg around the back of his neck. He indulged. Heaven help him, did he ever—and she rode out one orgasm and then another.

He didn't complain—but she would. He kissed her clit and deserted her only to reenter her with a thrust of cock and intent to fuck her to the other side of the day. The sunset would allow him to leave her under the cover of night but before he said good-bye this time, he wanted to fuck her as long as he had the right initiative to do it. By the looks of things, he wouldn't have to worry. She felt so damn good, so fucking hot and his cock just fit snugly, perfectly, in between her legs.

"Tanner..." She watched him as he struggled with a release.

"Don't move." He growled as his arms wrapped her tighter to his chest. His back rose from the mattress and he sat up with her. Instantly, her hips shifted and her feet braced against his lower back as she sat across his lap.

He never left her. "You're so fucking wet, baby." He mumbled the words into her neck as he pushed harder, and forced himself deeper inside. His hips rose from the mattress and dipped beyond the folds of comprehensible intimacy.

Still, he couldn't get there.

Minutes passed and he fucked and fucked but his mind was providing such a mental barrier that it proved difficult to let go of the release. He moved with her again, this time he stood and his hands latched under her ass assuring he never left her.

His cock stayed buried in place and he hurt. God, did he ache for her even though she was right there with him.

“Tanner, please....” She swallowed tightly and he saw the fear in her eyes.

Good fucking mercy it was heaven. Just the sight of wild eyes moving across him with question backed him up a step. He nearly lost his balance then. Moving three steps forward, he held her back against the wall and that’s when he fucked her like they would never have tomorrow.

His cock moved in and out and up and down with such fierce passion driving him. His ass cheeks clenched and released as his chin dropped down right above her left breast. She arched. Sweet mercy she needed him to suck her nipple and she would surely come again if he did but he wasn’t sure he could drop his mouth to take her. Right now—right fucking now—he just needed to come!

“Tanner!” She called out for him to stop more than to let him know her climax rode in to claim her. “Come with me.” She mumbled and cried. “Now Tanner! Damn it to hell, right now!”

His thighs bunched and her legs wrapped tighter and pow! Holy hell, did he ever explode. His cock pulsed with semen and he pushed his way into the best damn orgasm he’d ever had in his life.

When he finished what must’ve been the longest fucking experience he’d ever had, he wilted, and with his arm against her back they fell to the floor and his mouth immediately covered hers. “I’m—I’m sorry. I don’t know what got into me.”

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Her head rested on his shoulder. "Sorry hell, that was..."

"The best sex I've ever had," he finished for her.

After a few minutes, she took a deep breath and released it. "And now you're going to go, aren't you?"

"Yeah, Ally. I am."

* * * *

He carried her back to bed before he jumped in the shower. He left her a stack of cash on the dresser and instructions on where he'd meet her. He had every intention of waking her up but after he had all but abused her body, he just didn't have the heart.

Before he left, he sat down on the edge of the bed and studied her. His eyes traced every inch of her perfection and while he whispered sweet nothings to her, he felt confident she was so out of it that she would never hear the first thing he said. In fact, he didn't think too much about it.

"I've loved you Ally. I've loved you since I was nothing more than a boy walking around with a hard-on. I never took one woman to my bed that I didn't wish she were you instead."

She stirred and he thought he saw a shudder. Damnation, it was but a sin to cover up a body like hers. He still forced his hand to draw the sheet up over her ass. The tits were out of the question. If she still felt a chill in the air, she could draw the coverlet closer after he was gone. For now, he wanted to look at her.

The buxom blonde had everything. She had personality and looks and a body just meant for fucking—only, he didn't want to think about it right now. To think about having her again would drive him only harder than the last time. He took a deep breath and sighed, he almost felt her on his cock right then and he forced himself to look away long enough to gain some kind of sensible control once again.

"Someday, you'll know. Someday, you'll realize why I never wanted you to know the truth. I never changed, baby." He whispered his truths to the wide open room. "They did but I didn't." He wanted her to know he was still a good person, at least, better than the monster she seemed to think he'd become but if he told her the whole truth, could she handle it? He didn't think so because then she would see her brothers and her mother in an entirely different light.

He cleared his throat and he stroked her belly, right where the tiny little stretch mark existed. The one he put there when he planted his seed and helped them both straight into parenthood. His finger trailed along the line. She squirmed and he withdrew his hand.

"I would never kill a soul. I'm not the murderer you think I am because I would never harm another unless of course, you were in danger and then I would kill and I would die just to save your life." He felt his eyes water and he looked away from her. "It was just easier for you to believe what you wanted to believe. Then, you didn't have to see all of us for what we allowed ourselves to become."

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He rose from the bed then and watched as her arm bent above her head. Perfect breasts all but invited him back to bed but she still slept, her heavy breathing proved she needed to rest.

“I love you. I’ll send for you in a few days. I promise.” He opened the door and slipped out into the hallway leaving behind the one true love of his life.

Chapter Ten

Ally sat up as soon as the door closed behind him. She heard every word of his confession and her heart broke into a zillion little pieces. He wasn't the murderer she'd thought. He wasn't the common thug that he portrayed. He was nothing more than the front man, apparently, for her family.

She glared at the stacks of cash spread out across the dresser. She was so used to seeing cash that she knew right off the bat that he'd left her at least thirty grand. On instinct, she rose from the bed and moved closer, fully expecting to see a note there. Sure enough, he left one behind.

Pulling a sheet from the bed, she wrapped it around her nude body and quickly ran to the window overlooking the parking lot of the Hilton. The hotel connected to the airport and she realized Tanner would be headed across the sidewalk to board a plane. A sickening feeling surged through her body and she needed to see him then.

Yanking the curtains out of the way, she scanned the area below. New pavement and concrete seemed to run together and because of the convention the hotel hosted, people were everywhere. She looked to the left and then the right before she saw him. His ridiculous summertime disguise all but made her laugh.

He had on what she referred to as old-man headgear. A rounded top straw hat stood out but

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the bright yellow Bermuda shirt provided such a blinding effect that she imagined most would look away from him to save their vision, if for no other reason. She laughed out loud and her hand went to the glass.

"I love you, Tanner." She spoke to the window but as if he realized eyes were on him, he stopped midway up the sidewalk and slowly turned around. He glared back at the fifth floor window and tilted the rim of his hat. She blew a kiss in his direction and before he likely saw her, he turned around and confidently walked toward the airport terminal. She would see him soon but first, she had a lot to take care of and if she knew Tanner, she had a lot to do in a short period of time.

* * * *

"Thank you for meeting me." Ally took swift steps toward Special Agent Steve Whitehead. She started to pat his arm as she took a seat at the Atrium bar but he moved it out of reach as he nursed his beer.

"You look good, Ally." His eyes drifted across the hotel lobby and then back to her.

"We're not alone, are we?" She looked over his shoulder and then back into the eyes of the one man she almost had a relationship with before Tanner claimed her for his own once and for all.

"That depends. Is Dorsey still trailing you or do you have the ability to go outside for a stroll without his crew of goons nearby?" His elbows rested on the bar and his body language seemed suggestive of a man sitting at the bar drowning his

sorrows. Maybe in a sense, he wanted her to believe he was that man.

Ignoring the pun, Ally pressed forward. "What if I told you Dorsey wasn't our guy?"

"*Our guy?*" He turned then to face her and took his time undressing her with his eyes. His gaze stayed at her crotch and at her chest for longing moments and she could've bet on a low groan leaving his chest. "Darlin', I think you forgot something here, you gave your notice, or rather you just more or less walked away. What happened, Ally? Did you have a sudden change of heart?" His eyes narrowed on her chest again.

"Steve, listen to me..."

"No, you listen to me!" He took her arm and the bartender approached fast.

"Is there a problem here?"

Ally waved him away. "A lover's disagreement, that's all." She smiled politely and then turned back to him. "Follow me. I'm not doing this here." She stood up and then led him through the hotel lobby and stepped onto the elevator. He stayed right behind her. They glared at one another until the elevator halted on her floor.

"This is me." She stepped off and he quickly followed her.

Once they entered her room, he stormed across the room and opened the curtains. He eyed the cash on the dresser. Damn she should've thought to put the money up rather than flaunt it.

"You've already sold out to him?"

"I haven't sold out to anyone," she snapped.

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“Fernandez seemed to think he was going to make an honest woman out of you.” His voice dropped and he added, “I always thought if you settled for anyone, I’d have the opportunity first, not that I wanted to play second string to a common criminal.” He moved closer.

Ally hated to admit it but at one time, she would’ve used Steve for the very purpose of filling a void but now, she didn’t need him or Fernandez—at least not in the way they both would’ve liked. “Steve...”

“Don’t Ally, don’t make excuses now. Just tell me why you needed to see me.”

“You were still in Knoxville and I know...” She paused as she thought of her best approach. “I think I can count on you.”

He sat down on the edge of the bed. She took her seat in a chair across the room. He seemed to torture himself with what ifs and possible scenarios. He glared at the bed and she stared at the wall. He was drawing conclusions while she relived memories.

“Tanner Dorsey is our guy. You may have a problem accepting it but I can assure you, I won’t stop until I put him away. He’ll show his face here again and when he does, I intend to be here waiting and I think you know the same goes for your brothers.”

“Tanner’s not our killer.”

“Maybe not, but he’s operating outside the confines of the law and he *is* our man behind the cartel.”

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“What if he isn’t?”

Steve studied her then he looked back at the bed. “You’ve seen him?”

She nodded. “I have.”

“You’ve spent time with him?” He was asking for confirmation for something more than time, or so she suspected.

“Yes.”

“Here?”

Ally saw little reason to throw salt in the wound so she just simply ignored the last question.

“He’s not guilty of what you’d like to think.”

Steve stood up and went to the dresser. “Do you know how this looks?” He rippled through the cash before he set it back down in neat stacks, just the way he found it.

Their eyes locked. Maybe she dared him to offer to help. Maybe she’d pay him if he did.

“Let me ask you something, Ally.” He walked closer and a few more steps and he could’ve easily stood in between her legs, not that she would’ve parted them to allow it.

“Sure.”

“See, I’ve read the files on this unknown and unnamed American cartel and I have a question for you because I think it’s one you’d better stop long enough to ask yourself. If Tanner Dorsey isn’t our guy, which one of your brothers fits the bill?” His eyes narrowed then. The little bomb he dropped was the one she’d waited for because she guessed as much. She was the only one in the whole damn bureau who evidently failed to put the two

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together until Tanner's near-silent confession revealed all of their unspoken secrets.

On a personal dare, she asked the question she needed answered. "What if we've been way off since the very beginning? What if..."

Steve pulled her up to him and with pure hell-hot anger in his eyes. He shook her before screaming at her. "Ally, I've been here investigating while you've been dashing about the country trying to find yourself or chasing Tanner or locating your girls or whatever the hell it is you've been doing. I know who and what we're dealing with here and I am, without any reservations, going to tell you the facts as I know them." He drew a breath and pushed away from her then. Maybe he couldn't look into her eyes as he brought down the gavel.

She felt her lungs threaten to collapse against the rapid beats of her heart. She waited for him to tell her what she wanted to know and probably needed to hear from him.

"If Tanner Dorsey isn't our guy then that leaves Darren and David and we believe one is just as guilty as the other. In fact, if there's a tainted path leading anywhere, the bloody hands we'll find at the end of it could just as easily belong to David or Darren as much as Tanner."

"You're wrong." She stood up and marched to the door. She opened it without a second thought.

Pursing his lips, he turned around to face her then. "I'm right." He strode across the same path she'd taken and stepped outside of her room. "And the sad thing is, Special Agent Ally Stephens knows

it but the woman inside of the agent will never own up to it.” He glared at her then as he went in for the kill. “My question is for the woman you used to be—how much of your blood is already tainted by those men you like to refer to as your family? I’m willing to bet it’s damn near close to one hundred percent, no thanks to Dorsey.”

They locked eyes and with a knowing smile, he quickly added. “I think it would be better if we never met like this again. From what I can see, you’ve already made up your mind and because of what decisions you’ve reached, I believe we may be standing on the opposite sides of the fence. You don’t like it on my side and I’m not stupid enough to cross over to yours. Best of luck, Ally. You’re going to need it.”

Before she responded, he turned his back and really, what reply did she hope to offer? She didn’t have one he’d understand and their meeting offered her enough information.

Her brothers were the cartel. Tanner was the front man. Either way, they were all guilty of breaking the law and she would be seen as an accomplice and perhaps the title fit. After all, she went to extraordinary lengths to find out just what the FBI knew about Tanner and her brothers. What would she be willing to do for them once she joined them?

Chapter Eleven

The call came in around two o'clock in the morning. She rolled over and glared at the bedside table before she focused on the digits staring back at her. That's when it hit her. *Tanner*.

She jumped up and retrieved her cell. "Tanner? Tanner is that you?" It had been two weeks and no word. She was going stir crazy without her girls and desperately missed him and her family. Without the FBI to keep her busy, she was bored. Sure, she had a lot of loose ends to tie up but they were all but knotted now, she was ready to move the hell on and the sooner, the better.

"Well, well, well. I was told you'd skipped the country but apparently, our Mr. Dorsey didn't see fit to take you with him."

The cool demeanor of Marcel Fernandez came through the phone without any real effort. He was the man she once feared—the one she lured in just so she could work him over while he used her to get closer to her family. He wouldn't make the same mistake twice. Neither would she—he damn sure didn't call her phone as a courtesy.

"Marcel." She stated his name as she tried to gather her thoughts.

"Honey, you ran off so fast that you missed the main event. I had champagne on ice, steaks to grill, and oh yeah, big plans—*huge plans* for our evening together. I guess Dorsey had better things in store. Of course, on what I make, I guess a guy like me

needs to accept the fact that money does the talking to broads who look like you.”

“Marcel...”

“Shut the fuck up, Stephens. I want you back here ASAP. You aren’t just going to take off and walk away from your responsibilities with the FBI. It doesn’t work like that and you damn well know it.”

“I wrote a letter of resignation. I gave my notice.”

“Notice?” He seemed to laugh at the hilarity of the implied. “How many hours notice did you give exactly?”

“I don’t owe you anything.”

“You owe me more than you think and you may owe me more than you’ll ever be able to repay if you don’t get your ass on the first plane to Miami.” Ally stared at the clock and then slammed the phone shut. He could’ve traced it. Traced it hell, Steve wouldn’t feel obligated to protect her now and friendship or not, he was an agent first.

The phone rang right back. “Ally? Ally?”

“Tanner, is that you?”

“Yes, baby, it’s me. We can’t wait to get you out of there. We have to get you out of there tonight—*right now*. David’s going to meet you in Miami.”

“Tanner, I can’t—Miami isn’t...”

“Listen to me. We don’t have time. Go to the front desk now. We have a package waiting for you there and instructions for you until you make it to Miami. Once you’re there, David will meet you at the gate. If he isn’t there, you sit there until he

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arrives. Wait for him if you have to wait half the day. From there, he'll bring you home to me."

"Miami isn't good." She flatly stated her objection and fully intended to explain.

"Ally, do you love me?"

"Tanner..."

"Do you love me?" He demanded an answer.

"Of course, I ..."

"Then you'll love me enough to marry me when you get here. I'll see you on the other side of the sea. Don't keep me waiting."

The phone went dead as she began to scream over and over again. "Miami isn't good! Miami will never work!"

Dialing him back wouldn't work and the emergency phone call she made to David when she first left Marcel was a one shot-one call deal. Another emergency number had yet to be established. She looked around her room helplessly before she straightened her back. "Damn it, Pull it together." She cursed herself. "You're an agent with the FBI." She kicked her luggage and began to pack her bags. "Or at least you were—until you decided to jump ship and swim to *the other side*." She cursed again. "I hate you Tanner!"

Tears burned her eyes and as she sat on the bed staring at the wall where he'd ravaged her body and permanently stole her mind and heart, she screamed out her truths once more. "I hate you for making me love you Tanner Dorsey!" And she did, she truly, truly did.

* * * *

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Ally waited at the gate for over three hours. She'd been lost in a good mystery novel and hardly noticed the agents who joined her in the waiting area. She should've recognized one of them instantly but she wasn't sure about the other two—only her suspicions led her to believe she pegged them as FBI Agents. She took a deep breath and stood up. She didn't know how in the hell she was going to get out of this but she imagined David had already been there and left. Maybe he knew she was being watched or perhaps he thought she was trying to deceive him.

After she quickly gathered her duffle bag and her purse, she headed to the ladies room; at least there she could find solace and peace without being under the watchful eye of federal agents. She couldn't wait to see Tanner and her brothers, she would ream them all a new one for such lame plans. Placing her in this situation bordered despicable.

She was forced to choose sides and now the agents watching her seemed to think they had it all figured out. They likely dubbed her a criminal and soon, very soon, Marcel would be there. Most likely, he'd already arrived and she almost felt his eyes on her.

She entered the crowded bathroom and went into the rear stall. She almost shut the door when a man poorly disguised as an old woman pushed her to the back of it. He quickly covered her mouth as he slammed the door behind her.

"It's me," he told her.

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She nodded as she watched him and he released his hand from her mouth just long enough for her to start a little lip action—and release a true blood-curdling scream.

Epilogue

Tanner felt like the luckiest man in the world. He had his little girls on either side of him and he stood erect with pride as he waited for Ally. A smile settled on his cheeks and by God, he was a happy man.

Darren nudged him slightly. "You've been waiting for this moment for as long as I can remember."

"Yeah buddy, I have and if you and David hadn't been such pigheaded lugs, I would've heard wedding bells long before now—I promise you."

He stood a little taller as his bright eyed twins began to squirm. The guests rose to their feet and the wedding music began to play.

"Shew, I gotta tell you man, I love the romance in the air." He glanced around at the limited number of guests and nodded at one of his guards giving him two-thumbs up gesture.

Darren chuckled. "Who the hell are you kidding? How quickly you forget who you're talking to here. I think the honeymoon is what you're most interested in at this point."

Tanner had to admit, he was looking forward to having Ally back in his arms again. The honeymoon was just part of what he looked forward to but there was so much more too. "I'm just ready for the happily ever after." He nervously shifted his weight and looked across the lawn at the patio doors.

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He glanced at Darren and then looked around for David. "Where's David?"

Darren slapped him on the back. "I imagine he's with our sister. Remember, he's giving her away and I'm giving you the final shove. He'll be here."

Tanner nearly doubled over then in pain. The truth hit him with a weapon all too sharp with invisible blade of anguish. He swallowed hard. "They're not coming."

Darren reassured him. "*They'll be here.* David made it to Miami and met up with her in the ladies room. They ran into a snag or two but I'm telling you, they'll be here. He probably wanted you to have a few wedding jitters."

Tanner shook his head adamantly. "This is the hell I have with Ally. I feel her pain and her anger as much as her happiness and something is off. Something is wrong. She's not coming if they're not here yet."

Darren turned to look down at the docks as a boat damn near banked it as it landed nearby. Tanner's gaze followed his. The speedboat pulled up at the same time a few helicopters flew overhead.

Everything else seemed to happen quickly yet unfold in slow motion.

"Mama!" Darren turned to find his mother in the small crowd of islanders who gathered for the wedding. She seemed to understand as she stood up on wobbly knees.

Tanner grabbed the girls. One on each side, he hurried them inside as David rushed up from the

docks. Tanner could see a machine gun swinging from his side. A few rounds of ammunition were shot across the grounds tearing up the perfectly set stage for a simple island wedding.

Everyone hurried across the patio and inside as Tanner and Darren rushed about to grab cash and jewels from a nearby wall safe. Glass broke out of the front windows as gunshots were fired into the home in repetition. David jumped over furniture as he hovered around the girls ushering them out the side door leading to an underground tunnel.

The Stephens boys and their mother, Tanner and his girls and several of the house staff and guards hurried through the hidden passage. When they reached the end of it, words were not exchanged; they knew what they had to do.

Reluctantly, Tanner handed Molly off to David and she immediately clung to him. He kissed Mrs. Stephens good-bye and buried Holly's fragile little head against his shoulder. He nodded to Darren and the stone was moved out of the way.

Guards stepped out first and prepared to offer protection, if any was needed. Rifles were held firmly against solid shoulders and all eyes pierced into the open area surrounding them. They all quickly made their way to the small airplanes waiting for them. "Bermuda." He called out over his shoulder loud enough for David to hear him.

"I'll see you there." He shouted back. Holly and Molly seemed to lock eyes but they each clung to the caretaker they wanted most without crying out from the fear two small children must've felt.

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“David!” As Tanner loaded Holly into the plane with Darren, he screamed across the open field trying to gain his future brother-in-law’s attention. “David! What about Ally?”

The man’s cold eyes spoke volumes and he wasn’t sure he had the capacity to imagine what his expressions meant. They could be translated into varying dimensions. “She’ll find her way back to you, man. She always does.” He seemed to leave him with a forced smile as he backed into the plane.

Tanner locked his focus on Holly. “Momma?” The little girl asked for her mother and he couldn’t help but go to her quickly. He held her head against his shoulder and rocked her back and forth as Darren prepared the plane for take-off.

“You’re momma will be back with us soon. I promise you.” He whispered his words as a meaningful swear to the daughter he and Ally brought into the world together. He made the vow to his little girl as much as to himself because it was then he realized the solemn truth—he didn’t want to live unless Ally was by his side. He didn’t think it was remotely possible and a life without Ally was one without purpose. He’d find her again or he’d die trying.

Destiny Blaine

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 watch a good ballgame. 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 and watch for her in 2009 when she visits Melbourne, Australia for the 2009 Inaugural Australian Romance Readers Convention.

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