



On the Loose (Steele Street, Book 7)

By Tara Janzen

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He's a special agent who never loses his cool.

She's the heat-seeking missile headed straight for his heart.

Keeping cool under pressure is the credo C. Smith Rydell lives by. That's why he was handpicked by the Special Defense Forces for a mission few men survive. So why has the ex-DEA superstar been reassigned to Panama City, playing bodyguard to a blond in a black string bikini? Except Honey York isn't your average pampered socialite. She's the woman Rydell caught smuggling cash into El Salvador four months ago. And now she wants him to take her back.

All Honey has to do is find the guerrilla camp, deliver the goods, and get the hell out of the jungle—all in forty-eight hours. Only one man is up for the job. But sharing an unforgettable one-night stand was nothing next to being stranded with Rydell on some third world mountaintop. And with bullets flying and all hell breaking loose, now is not the time for passion. As if these two could possibly resist it....

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Editorial Review

About the Author

Tara Janzen lives in Colorado where she is at work on her next novel.

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Chapter One

One day later, the Blake Hotel, Panama City, Panama

Unbelievable.

Smith stood stock-still at the edge of the hotel's pool deck, staring at the bikini-clad blonde testing the water with the perfectly polished toes of her right foot.

Tilting his head slightly to one side, he sized her up from a different angle, not that it made any difference. She was perfect from every angle, absolutely perfect. Geezus. His life couldn't possibly be this complicated, this crazy. He should be with the guys at Joint Ops Central, hot on the trail of two traitors, a notorious drug runner with global connections, and a plane the DEA analysts were still drooling over. He shouldn't have been roused out of his hotel room in the middle of the night and shoved on a flight leaving Lima before dawn, and he sure as hell shouldn't have been reassigned to a lousy Personal Security Detail, a PSD, not for any reason—but especially not for this reason.

Panama City, hell.

Standing next to him, a State Department flack rattled on about being held personally responsible for any mishaps or screwups, of which there had better be absolutely none, zero, or Smith was going to get his ass handed to him on a platter. The stakes were high, the flack said; Rydell was being tagged for a job that he no way in hell deserved, and he damn well better remember it.

Yeah, yeah. Smith had heard it all before, and like everyone else who'd ever tried to sell that line, the State guy had it ass-backward. Guys like him never got tagged for jobs they didn't deserve. They got tagged for the jobs nobody else could do or the jobs nobody else wanted. Neither reason of which actually applied to the current situation, he silently admitted. Every guy in the world wanted this job. Guys dreamed about a PSD like this one, fantasized about them, and there were hundreds of badass knuckle-draggers out there who could do it at least as well as he could, and probably a few who could do it better, because at fifty feet he was already going down in flames.

Honey York.

Unbelievable.

She stepped down into the pool, bent over—sweet geezus—and splashed some water on her arms. He reached up and loosened his tie.

Fuck.

Yeah. Right. They'd done that, and seeing her again only proved what he'd done a pretty damn good job of denying for the last four months: Once had not been enough.

Not even close.

And it pissed him off.

He didn't need this.

"Ms. York's safety and comfort are going to be your top priority for the next two days," the flack was saying. "Nothing, and I mean nothing, is going to come between you, and absolutely nothing is going to happen between you, so get those thoughts out of your head, and if you bring her back here with so much as a single hair out of place, you will find yourself back at the bottom of the food chain. Do I make myself clear, Mr. Rydell?"

"Crystal." The single word was cold, succinct, and in no way indicative of his current internal condition, which was hot under the collar and veering toward some sort of epiphany he was sure he didn't want to have.

But, dammit, strings had been pulled somewhere to get him taken off the Peruvian mission, and those same damn strings had to have been bought, sold, and horse-traded in dark alleys in order to get his butt landed on the pool deck of the most exclusive hotel in Panama City for a baby-sitting job—strings a whole helluva lot bigger than the ones holding Honey's bikini together.

String bikini.

Black bikini.

An if-there-were-a-hundred-and-four-square-inches-of-material-in-the-whole-damn-thing-he'd-eat-his-hat bikini.

And he couldn't take his eyes off it or the curves it did absolutely nothing to contain—which wasn't doing a damn thing to improve his mood.

"The itinerary for Ms. York's tour is in your portfolio, including all departures and arrivals and the names of every major coffee grower in the highlands. She's especially keen on meeting the plantation owners."

Smith slanted a glance down through his Ray-Bans at the shrimp-sized flack in his bespoke suit and handmade leather shoes. Brett Jenkins III had Yale written all over him, and asshole written all over that.

"Coffee? Tour?" Nobody had said anything about coffee to him. Nobody had used the word "tour." High-priority personal security detail was what he'd been told, orders straight from the top, code red, a full-court press requiring the utmost discretion and a covert operator from SDF.

He let his gaze stray back to the woman leaning over the side of the pool and taking a sip from a pi—a colada with enough fruit in it to qualify as a side dish.

Discretion, his ass.

There was nothing discreet about Honoria York-Lytton in a black string bikini, nothing discreet about the

huge pair of rhinestone-studded black sunglasses perched on her nose, nothing discreet about the hundred and one shades of blond hair she'd twisted up into a perfectly disheveled pile of wild curls on top of her head.

A hair out of place? Give him a break. She didn't have a hair in place. What she did have was a tiny black cocktail umbrella tucked in her wild blond curls. When she took the pink umbrella out of her pi—a colada and stuck it in her hair, too, the picture was complete: bimbo, party girl, five feet two inches of pure plaything.

He wasn't fooled for a second.

If she'd taught him one thing in San Luis, El Salvador, it was to never underestimate a woman in platform heels and a polka-dot dress—especially if that woman's family had come over on the Mayflower and her father and two uncles had been United States ambassadors, especially if that woman held an advanced degree from Harvard and her dating pool started on Madison Avenue in Manhattan and ended at the State Department in Washington, D.C.

She was connected, all right, and he hadn't called her, not once since the wild night they'd hooked up in the old Hotel Palacio in San Luis. He'd had Skeeter, one of his SDF teammates, track her all the way home to Washington, D.C., and confirm her safe arrival, and then he'd done his best to put her out of his mind. He hadn't written her, except once, but never sent the letter. He hadn't sent flowers, though he'd been damn tempted to more times than he wanted to admit, and he hadn't returned her panties.

Nope. The panties were still his, still in his possession, still in his rucksack, the sheerest, prettiest, most expensive piece of lingerie he'd ever seen, ever touched, ever whatevered.

Perfect. He had her silk underwear, and she'd sicced the State Department on him. Oh, hell no, this was no accident.

". . . limo will be here in about forty-five minutes to take you to the air base to catch a flight scheduled to leave in two hours and arrive at Ilopango International Airport this afternoon. From there, you'll be taking a private vehicle up into the mountains of—"

"Ilopango?" Smith interrupted, his attention and his gaze snapping back to Jenkins. "Ilopango is in El Salvador." And no way in hell had anybody said any damn thing about the mission being in El Salvador.

"And so are the coffee plantations Ms. York is scheduled to visit in Morazan Province along the Honduran border, near the Torola River. Ambassador Hasbert himself has arranged the introductions." Smith's eyebrows arched above the curve of his Ray-Bans. The Torola? Jenkins had to be kidding. Didn't the man know what in the hell was going on up in the hills of Morazan? Hadn't he done any goddamn research on this PSD at all?

Obviously not.

Smith's gaze shot back to Honey, and he swore silently to himself. She knew, so help him God. She had to know, or she wouldn't have needed him, because, dammit, there was only one reason for there to be any connection whatsoever between the pampered, pedicured, and pedigreed Washington, D.C., socialite and a Third World backwater in the Salvadoran highlands. Only one, goddammit, and it was nothing but the kind of trouble somebody should have stopped before it got to the point of him staring at her bikinied bottom in Panama City.

Geezus. Just how the hell much trouble had her sister gotten herself into this time? And who in the hell had Hasbert arranged to introduce her to? The Salvadoran government-sanctioned coffee growers, or the rebel leader trying to blow them off the map, Diego Garcia, because, frankly, Ms. York didn't need an introduction to Diego Garcia. She and the guerrilla captain had met in San Luis the same night Smith had met her, four months ago, in a church, over a table piled high with the quarter of a million dollars Honey had smuggled into El Salvador and had been handing over to a dissident priest who hadn't wasted a second in handing it over to Garcia—U.S. cash, all in fifties bundled together by rubber bands into two-inch stacks.

Mission of mercy, she'd called it, a mission of mercy for her sister, a trust-fund-baby bride of Christ who was sacrificing her life as an impoverished nun in El Salvador. But all hell had broken out on the border in the last four months, and more times than he cared to remember, Smith had wondered if he should have stopped the illegal cash transaction in the sacristy when he'd had the chance.

Not that he'd had much of a chance. The money had been on the table by the time he'd gotten to the church, and he'd been a little low on firepower and authority. One .45 cartridge, that's all he'd had for the ancient pistol he'd been packing. One lousy cartridge for one old gun, because Honey had stolen his Sig Sauer, his extra magazines, and about half his brains by then.

And there she was, sipping a pi-a colada and cooling her cute ass in the pool, waiting for him to take her back into El Salvador.

Smith cleared his throat before he spoke.

"Has Ms. York been advised of the guerrilla activity on the Salvadoran side of the border, specifically along the Torola River?"

"Thoroughly advised," Jenkins said, his narrow jaw firming up. "That's why you're here."

Perfect.

Smith checked his watch and wondered if the Peruvian transport he'd come in on was still at the airport, and whether or not he could get his butt back on it. His work with the DEA was damned important, and he'd like to get back to it, just as soon as he nipped this circus in the bud and got Honey York headed in the right direction. Which was north. Way north. Much farther north than El Salvador. Closer to Canada was what he had in mind.

"All you have to worry about is doing your job, Mr. Rydell," Jenkins continued. "You can rest assured that I am doing mine."

No, he wasn't. Not if Honoria York-Lytton was traveling into the mountains of El Salvador.

"I think we need to speak with Ambassador Hasbert," Smith said. And anybody else who'd been in on this deal. A personal security detail in Panama wasn't exactly a vacation, but in Morazan, it was combat duty, and Honey had no business going into combat. Somebody had to know better than to let this thing fly, and he needed to find that someone. If it wasn't Hasbert, then he was going straight to General Grant. Honey had jerked somebody's chain to get him assigned as her personal bodyguard, and Grant was the guy who could jerk back.

Because this was crazy.

"Ambassador Hasbert will not return to Panama and be in residence again until the end of the month," Jenkins said. "Until then, I am in charge and have personally verified Ms. York's itinerary."

Okay, it was worse than crazy. It was dangerously crazy—Honey heading into Salvadoran guerrilla territory, and the idiot in charge of the embassy in Panama facilitating the trip.

"You know this is wrong," Smith said. Anybody could see how wrong it was, allowing her anywhere near the Torola, coffee plantations or no coffee plantations, and he wasn't buying for a minute that the damn fiasco had anything to do with coffee, not with Diego Garcia in the area.

No. This disaster had Sister Julia's fingerprints all over it.

Jenkins's jaw firmed up even more. "What I know, Mr. Rydell, and what you apparently still need to learn, is that it is in everyone's best interests to follow the orders they are given. Mine are to turn Ms. York over to you, and yours are to guarantee her safety while she is in your care, at the sacrifice of your own life, if necessary."

The tight little smile Jenkins gave with his summation of the situation made it clear that, for his money, the quicker Smith could arrange to sacrifice his life, the better. Unfortunately, given the situation, Smith could see the odds on that were heading exactly where Jenkins wanted them to head.

Or not.

He glanced at Honey again, and this time, she was looking back. A frisson of something or another skittered through him, hitting places he was trained to ignore, and ignore them was what he did. Steeling himself, he stepped past Jenkins and headed for the swimming pool. He was the professional here, the guy they'd called for help. Taking charge was what he did for a living, and he was damn good at it.

He crossed the pool deck with long, sure strides. If the State Department pencil pusher didn't have the brains to stop this thing before it blew up in his face, or the guts to stand up to a five-foot-and-next-to-nothing blonde, Smith was going to do it for him.

Kee-rist. Irena Polchenko was alive and on the loose, running drugs for the Cali cartel. That was about all the bad news Smith could handle this week. Honey York needed to get her butt back home—and he was just the guy to tell her.

Chapter Two

Smith didn't look happy.

Honey took another long sip of her pi—a colada, then slowly stirred the drink with her straw, watching Mr. Determination and Coolness Under Pressure bear down on her from behind the safety of her sunglasses. Oh, no, he didn't look happy at all.

She didn't blame him. She wasn't very damn happy with the situation, either. Lifting the glass to her lips, she licked a bit of sugar off the rim and let it melt on her tongue. He did look good in a suit, though.

Damn good.

Dove gray, tailored to perfection, crisp white shirt, robin's egg blue tie striped in pink and gold, the Windsor knot a little loose around his neck. He looked very GQ, very tropical . . . and cold, even in this heat. Cold, calculating, and in control, she noted; hard, unforgiving, and dangerous.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

James Donovan:

A lot of people always spent their particular free time to vacation or even go to the outside with them household or their friend. Were you aware? Many a lot of people spent these people free time just watching TV, or playing video games all day long. If you need to try to find a new activity that's look different you can read a new book. It is really fun to suit your needs. If you enjoy the book which you read you can spent all day every day to reading a reserve. The book On the Loose (Steele Street, Book 7) it is very good to read. There are a lot of people that recommended this book. These folks were enjoying reading this book. In the event you did not have enough space to create this book you can buy the e-book. You can m0ore quickly to read this book from your smart phone. The price is not to fund but this book features high quality.

Laverne Jackson:

The book untitled On the Loose (Steele Street, Book 7) contain a lot of information on it. The writer explains the girl idea with easy method. The language is very easy to understand all the people, so do definitely not worry, you can easy to read the item. The book was authored by famous author. The author provides you in the new era of literary works. It is easy to read this book because you can continue reading your smart phone, or model, so you can read the book with anywhere and anytime. In a situation you wish to purchase the e-book, you can open up their official web-site in addition to order it. Have a nice examine.

Lisa Bates:

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