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*Romance
Divas*

E-BOOK CHALLENGE

NOT FOR SALE

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*Dedicated to my parents, who are proud of their smutty
daughter. This one I'll let you read.*

*Thank you for being amazing—I know it's not easy, but
somehow, you manage.*

HOLDING ON

BY

KB Alan

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When the opening notes of Hotel California eased from the radio, Becky turned the volume up and sang along at the top of her lungs. One of the benefits of driving alone at—she glanced at the clock on the car’s dash—just after one in the morning, was being able to sing like a maniac without witnesses. She was almost home and should be pulling into her driveway well before one-thirty. Perfect. Her brother’s wedding had been beautiful, but she was damn tired and ready to fall into bed.

She’d intentionally made zero plans for the next day. Unless you counted sleeping in as a plan. That was definitely on the agenda. Likely to be followed by not bothering to change out of her sweats, unless she decided to go out for a walk around the neighborhood. Maybe she’d treat herself to an ice cream since she no longer had to worry about fitting into the bridesmaid gown.

Being Valentine’s Day, and a Sunday, most of her friends would be occupied with their significant others. A tiny part of her wished she had someone important to spend the day with, but she’d gotten her dose of romance watching her brother marry Sara—had even cried during the ceremony and teared up more than once at the reception. A day alone with no expectation other than relaxation would be perfect, even if it was romance-free.

The freeway was relatively empty for Los Angeles, only a dozen or so cars around her. She kept to the middle lane, cruise control set so her lead foot didn’t get away from her and attract the attentions of Highway Patrol. The song gave way to commercials and she reached for the button to chase down more music. Movement caught her eye and she brought her hand back to the wheel as her attention darted between her rearview mirror and her front windshield.

Idiots. She shook her head in amazement. Two low-slung cars raced in and out of the traffic which might be light but was still moving at a decent clip. She checked to make sure there was plenty of room around her, even though part of her wanted to purposefully block their path, make them slow down. Resisting temptation, she watched them pass. Shaking her head again, she stabbed at the radio’s buttons until she hit music.

More movement had her checking the mirror again. Headlights neared and passed her at an amazing speed. Racing buddies, probably. She considered fishing her cell phone out of her purse and calling the police. If they’d passed her going that fast, they had to be doing at least—

The squeal of brakes had her holding her breath, but the sight of the Honda that had sped past her now spinning to her left brought the adrenaline racing through her system. She checked

her mirrors and let up on the accelerator. *Shit, shit, shit.* She began to brake. An SUV tried to avoid the spinning Honda but clipped another car and *flipped over*. It landed on its side and skid down the center of the freeway.

She wrenched her eyes from the drama to make sure her way was clear. Braking hard she swerved across the slow lane, lurching to a stop on the shoulder. It took her a whole confused second to remember where the button for the hazard lights was. She punched it then grabbed her purse, spilling the contents onto the seat rather than fumbling through to find her phone.

Connecting the call, she turned in her seat as it rang. The yellow Honda was smashed into the center dividing wall. His racing friends were long gone. The SUV had come to a halt on its side. Something had stopped it, probably another vehicle. A large pickup truck was stopped on the left side shoulder. She couldn't tell if it had pulled over, like her, or been involved.

The crisp tones of the 911 operator brought a rush of relief and she tried not to babble like an idiot as she reported the accident.

“Are there any injuries?” he asked.

“I haven't gone to look yet, but I'm sure there are. One car's smashed into the divider, another is flipped to its side.” Her voice was shaky as she watched what was happening and tried to concentrate on the questions.

He assured her help was on its way. She got out of the car, tucking the phone into her pocket. Thank God she'd taken the time to change into jeans, a sweater and boots.

A couple more cars had stopped, but most were inching past. She caught the attention of one driver who braked to let her dart in front of him. She eyed the Honda but made her way to the SUV instead. Maybe it was spite, but the truck had been completely innocent while the Honda had been responsible. She'd see if she could help at the truck, first.

When she got closer she saw that the truck had been stopped by hitting a van. The van was a bit crumpled, but the driver forced the door open and climbed out shakily.

Her heart was pounding and her hearing felt fuzzy but it wasn't enough to distract her from the distinct wail of a child. A man stood at the side of the SUV, which was really its undercarriage, leaning over so he could peer down into the driver's side window. She could hear him talking but couldn't make out the words. He looked up and caught sight of her approach.

His fast scan of her somehow managed to convey authority and competence. She swallowed hard. “What can I do?” she asked.

He gave a quick nod and motioned her forward. “If I boost you up so you can see inside, will you talk to the kid? I can’t get a response from him to see if he’s hurt.”

A nod was all he needed before stripping off his jacket and handing it to her.

“Brush off the glass and put this down.” He gave her no more time before grasping her hips and lifting her up. She braced one hand on the truck and used the jacket to swipe an area clean before laying it out. As soon as she set her other hand down he lifted her higher and she was able to bring a knee up and scramble onto the jacket.

She peered into the window toward the screaming child. Maybe three, he was fastened into a car-seat, arms and legs dangling as gravity pulled him away from her. With the window gone she was able to reach in and touch his face. His cries hiccupped as he looked at her with fear and confusion.

“Hi there, sweetie. Are you hurt?” Her hands brushed away pebbled safety glass as she searched for blood. Only a couple of small spots, thank God. The man helping her had given up trying to open the driver’s door, and partially climbed in through the window, trying to reach the woman who dangled down toward the center console. Sirens approached and she prayed they would arrive quickly.

“He’s not bleeding and he seems to be moving around okay,” she said. “He’s strapped in good.”

“All right. This woman’s head is bleeding pretty badly. Can you come hold pressure on the wound? I need to get a better look at her leg.”

The little boy started crying again as soon as she let go of him, but he wasn’t screaming and she forced herself away. The man moved back, giving her room to join him. She focused on the crying child, the sirens, and doing what he’d asked. *Not* on his torso which was now bare of any clothing. Pushing the jacket in front of her, she lay across the battered door and squeezed into the narrow space between his arm and the window frame. She placed her hand over his where he held his t-shirt to the woman’s head. The shirt was already soaked in blood and the woman made no movement.

Something jagged was sticking out of the woman’s leg, surrounded by a lot of blood. Becky’s stomach churned and she looked away. The man’s large hand slipped out from under hers, returning her attention to the head wound. “Don’t be afraid to hold it as tightly as you can.” His sure voice gave her confidence.

“All right.” The sirens were very close now. She could hold on.

He shifted around, trying to get both of his arms through the window. She wished she could see him, but he was behind and somewhat on top of her. Even though she wasn't cold, she felt better absorbing the heat of his body.

“So,” he said. “You come here often?”

It surprised a short laugh from her. “Every so often. My name's Becky.”

He grunted with some effort she couldn't see. “I'm Sam. How're you doing?”

“Fine.” Mostly. Getting a bit light-headed, but that wasn't really a problem.

His weight on her increased a little, but she wasn't about to complain. “This leg isn't as bad as it looked,” he said.

She let out a breath. “I wish she'd come around. And that we could get the baby out.”

The child chose that moment to let out an extra fierce wail, but it wasn't enough to drown out the sirens that were now very close. Sam moved back and she bit back a request for him to return.

“So,” he asked as he made a ripping sound that had her blinking. What clothes could he be removing now? “What had you out this time of night?”

“My brother's wedding. You?”

He grunted and more cloth tore. Probably the woman's pants. Damn.

“Blind date.”

Well, that was...interesting. Meant he was single, right? Unless—

“How did it go?”

“She cried.”

Her eyes popped wide. “Cried?” The shirt under her hand was now thoroughly soaked in blood, but she wasn't going to think about that. Instead, she'd think about blind dates with tears.

“She's been widowed a year. And tomorrow's Valentine's Day. *Not* my idea, I'll point out, but I was sort of stuck. I called her best friend, my sister, who told me to bring her to the house. They made me stay while we watched some movie that had them both crying and hugging.”

The abrupt end of the sirens reassured her that help was finally there.

“Wow, how fun for you. And then you get to end your evening here.”

“Yeah, things are looking up.” He shuffled around and his hand came down to rest on

hers. She didn't move. "Firemen are here. Let me take over with this and they can help you down."

"All right." She did want to leave. She just didn't want to do it alone. Pulling free, she scooted back a bit, then stopped when a hand landed on her leg and gave a gentle squeeze. With no further warning, strong arms snaked under her waist and lifted her up. Before she realized it she was handed down to another set of arms. She blinked as the firefighter set her on her feet and brushed his hands over her.

"You okay?"

"Fine." Her word of the night was beginning to sound shaky. She cleared her throat and tried again. "I'm fine." She looked over her shoulder to check on Sam, but was gently propelled forward. Her head swam from hanging upside down, so she had to focus on where the fireman was leading her instead. He escorted her to an ambulance and she sat down gratefully. An EMT pronounced her fit but put a blanket over her shoulders anyway and handed her a bottle of water. Her heart finally slowed as she took a gulp and surveyed the scene.

Immediately she found Sam. He was talking to a paramedic on the other side of the freeway, next to the truck she'd seen parked there. He leaned in and pulled out a jacket, shrugging it on. The truck looked like what he'd drive, big and tough. She shook her head. Already had him figured out, did she? The pair talked for a minute before Sam turned and started walking toward her. He didn't look as exhausted as she felt. How much time had actually passed?

He lifted a hand to his short brown hair, brushing through it, probably looking for glass pebbles. The move opened the jacket up, inviting her gaze to his fascinatingly well developed bare chest and abs. Exhausted though she may be, Becky wasn't dead, so she took the opportunity to ogle the body of a man who obviously took great care of himself.

He was almost to her before she returned her attention to his face and found his green eyes twinkling. She blinked and pretended to be in a shocky daze, oblivious to what was before her. But what was before her was just as fascinating as his chest had been. His strong face was softened perfectly by lips that begged for...wait, she wasn't supposed to be staring. Again she forced her eyes to his as those lips jerked up into a grin.

She blinked again, letting her numbness and exhaustion fool him into believing she hadn't been staring and drooling. Only, he didn't look like a fool.

“Hi, Sam.” There, that sounded nonchalant.

“Becky. You okay?” He reached past her for a bottle of water offered by an EMT.

She nodded. “I left your jacket there.” Okay, so maybe she was still dazed, if she was spouting crap like that.

He only nodded, turning to sit next to her.

“You need a phone to call someone? Let them know where you are?” he asked.

“Oh. No, no one’s waiting. Thanks.” The reminder of a phone made her aware of her own poking at her from her jeans pocket. She stood up to retrieve it, Sam following suit. She stared at the phone for a second, not sure what to do with it, then looked back toward her car.

“I should get my purse.”

“I’m sure it can wait.” Sam sat back down.

It seemed important though. She didn’t think anyone would take anything but still, a girl didn’t just leave her purse with all its contents strewn about. She started to walk to her car.

“Why don’t I come with you? Here, have some more water.” Sam was suddenly at her side again. He lifted her arm to remind her she was holding a bottle and she drank obediently. Then he readjusted the blanket around her shoulders.

“I’m all right.”

“Okay.”

They reached her car and she set the bottle down on top and began shoveling items into the bag, including her cell phone. When she turned around Sam was talking to a police officer who held a notebook. She waited, not sure if she should interrupt, but not sure she should leave, either. They spoke for another minute, then Sam brought the officer over to her.

“Ma’am, Officer Hayes says you witnessed the accident. We can take your report here, but it might be a while. Officer Hayes said he’d take you to the station, get it over with a bit faster, if you like. You’re not hurt?”

“Officer Hayes?”

“That would be me,” Sam told her.

“Oh. Right. Okay.”

They both just looked at her.

“You’re not hurt, Ma’am?” the uniformed officer persisted.

“Oh. No, I’m fine. Thanks.” Sam adjusted her blanket again as she repeated her broken

record routine.

“Well, if you don’t mind sticking with Officer Hayes here, we’ll have a black and white take you to the station in a few minutes so we can take your statements.”

She nodded and hefted her purse, prompting Sam to work on the blanket again.

“Come on, we can wait in the car. It’ll be warmer.”

He led her to a police car and they climbed into the back seat, leaving the doors open slightly.

Hugging the blanket around her, she leaned her head back against the seat and closed her eyes.

“How many people were in the Honda?” she asked.

When he didn’t answer right away she opened her eyes and rolled her head to look at him. He was watching her— looking for what, she didn’t know. She didn’t have the energy to try to figure it out either, so she just took the opportunity to look back.

Reaching over he lifted a curl that had fallen over her face and tucked it behind her ear. The contact was brief but had her heart rate speeding up.

“Just the driver. Teenage boy.”

The way he said it warned her not to ask, but she couldn’t stop herself.

“He didn’t make it?”

“No.”

“The baby and his mother?”

“Boy’s fine, Mother came to. They’re on their way to the hospital. Her leg’s broken, maybe a concussion, but probably nothing worse than that.”

She didn’t say anything else, just faced forward. The impulse to scoot over and lay her head on his shoulder was enormous and embarrassing.

“You were great tonight. Thanks for helping,” he said.

“I didn’t do much. You were the one who was great.”

“You did enough. You stopped. You helped.”

A police officer came to collect their car keys, then returned to drive them to the station. Even though she knew it was coming, she startled when the engine turned over. Sam reached out and carefully pried her hand from the blanket, held it in his own.

The emotion that had begun to choke her up changed direction that quickly. She glanced

at him and he gave her a small smile before turning his attention to the driver who'd asked him a question.

She closed her eyes and concentrated her whole self on her hand, the feel of his skin warm against hers, letting everything else fall away.

* * * * *

Becky stepped out of the police station an hour later and willed herself to hold on, just for a little while longer. Melting down could commence when she walked through her front door, but not a minute before. From where she stood, she could just make out the lot across the street where her car should be waiting. The officer who'd returned it had given her the keys as she finally finished with her statement.

It was ridiculous to be worried about driving. She hadn't been hit, hadn't hit anyone else, hadn't been hurt. Squaring her shoulders against exhaustion, she forced her feet in the direction of the parking lot. All she wanted to do was be home so she could crawl into bed. Being home meant driving, so she was just going to have to suck it up.

Starting down the stairs, she heard the door open behind her. Somehow, she knew. It was Sam. She'd never met him before tonight, had barely spoken to him, but none of that mattered. In the car on the way to the police station his silent presence had helped her relax. His hand on hers had centered her.

"Becky." His quiet voice had her stopping to close her eyes and take a deep breath, just so she wouldn't turn around and beg him to hold her. She really was at the end of her rope.

She felt, more than heard, him come to stand beside her. Opening her eyes she turned to him. His dark good looks didn't help her resistance, but she managed to hold herself still. Her throat tightened, but she succeeded in keeping her eyes clear.

"Let me drive you home." He put his hand on her back, giving her an almost hug.

Oh, God, how did he know she needed that? But, no. If she let him take her home, she'd be that much more scared to drive tomorrow. And there was a big chance she'd say something ridiculous to him and embarrass both of them.

His warm hand slid up her back to cup the nape of her neck. How could something so simple make her feel so safe and comforted? Again, she swallowed hard, but this time she was sure her eyes were bright and wet.

“Please,” he added when she didn’t respond. “I’ll bring you back to your car later, after you’ve gotten some rest. It’ll be better then, I promise.”

He hadn’t steered her wrong yet and she really didn’t want to drive home. Her small nod was all he needed. His thumb gave a tiny caress on her neck before he slid his hand back down to guide her forward.

They walked to the truck she’d seen him with before, and he opened the passenger door for her. She gave him basic directions and they were quiet as the traffic report on the radio came on. There was a brief mention of the accident, to announce that all lanes had been reopened.

“I’m sorry you got stuck at the station,” he said after a few minutes. “It probably would have been just as fast to stay at the scene.”

She shrugged. “It wasn’t so bad. And warmer than sitting in a car. I wish I had more information to give about the car that didn’t stop, though. Besides, you were stuck there too.”

“Yeah, but I’m used to that kind of thing. Although, I’ll admit it was a little weird being on the other side.”

“I’m glad you were there tonight. I don’t know what I would have done if you hadn’t been. I wanted to help, but…” She waved her hand in a useless gesture.

“I’m glad I was there, too.”

She relaxed into the seat and tried to fight her closing eyes, but gave it up and let sleep wash over her. The car stopping didn’t wake her but strong arms picking her up roused her briefly. It felt so good, though, so comfortable and safe, that she just snuggled in deeper without really coming awake.

* * * * *

Becky woke up feeling warm and content. The arms holding her tightened as she lifted her head and blinked her eyes into focus. She was in her living room, sitting on the big, cushy chair she loved to read on. Well, actually she was sitting on Sam, who was sitting on the big cushy chair. He’d taken his shoes off and his sock clad feet were stretched out on the ottoman. She was in his lap, curled up on her side, resting against his wide chest.

Looking up into his face, she found him watching her.

“Feeling better?” he asked.

“Much, thanks. I’m sorry you got stuck as my mattress.”

His lips twitched. "My pleasure."

She looked out the window and saw the sun was shining brightly. A quick twist of Sam's wrist brought his watch into view. It was almost nine.

"Wow." She had no desire to move a single inch and since he wasn't making any moves either, she laid her head back down.

"By the way." There was an extra rumble in his voice since her head was against his chest, sending a delicious shiver racing through her. "Happy Valentine's Day."

Her head popped up at that. She'd completely forgotten.

"Oh, you probably have somewhere you need to be, or something. Or at least someone you need to call."

"Just my mother and she'd kill me if I called before ten." His smile was infectious and she laughed.

"Aww, that's so sweet." Suddenly spending the day alone didn't sound so great.

"I was thinking," Sam said. "I could go home and change, then come back and take you to get your car. Then, maybe we could have lunch."

She swallowed, watching the heat as it built in his eyes. Their faces were only inches apart and she suddenly found it difficult to concentrate on anything but the distance between them. Her mouth had gone dry and she licked her lips.

Sam growled and dipped down, tracing her lips with his tongue as she had just done. She parted them without conscious thought but he took his time before sliding inside.

She should be worried about morning breath. She should be worried about not knowing this man who was kissing her. She should be...ah, what the hell. She kissed him back with a little growl of her own that would have embarrassed her if she hadn't been too busy tasting and exploring.

Finally, he pulled back, eyes heavy lidded, lips swollen, and looked at her.

"Lunch. Then maybe coffee. Then dinner."

"Okay." She nodded, then pouted her lips, pleased when his eyes narrowed and focused on them. "But what about kisses?"

"I'll leave some of it a surprise, but I think you can count on more of those."

She smiled and looped her arms around his neck, leaning forward so their lips almost touched. "I'll hold you to that." And then she kissed him.

AUTHOR BIO

KB ALAN lives the single life in Southern California. She acknowledges that she should probably turn off the computer and leave the house once in a while in order to find her own happily ever after, but for now she's content to delude herself with the theory that Mr. Right is bound to come knocking on her door through no real effort of her own. Please refrain from pointing out the many flaws in this system. Other comments, however, are happily received through her email at kb@kbalan.com or you can visit her website at www.kbalan.com.

BOOK LIST

Perfect Formation

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Friends for much longer than they've been lovers, Taryn and Richard enjoy each other's company while looking for "Mr. Right". When the darkly handsome Caleb walks into their lives, the sexual attraction is instant and mutual—for all three. Caleb wines and dines them then shows them how good it can be if they trust him to lead the way. One night is all it takes to prove that the three of them are a perfect match, at least in the bedroom.

Taryn has to decide if explosive sex and the feelings quickly overtaking her are worth the risk of losing it all—again. Richard sees Caleb and Taryn as the perfect couple but isn't so sure there will always be room for him in their *ménage a trois*. Sexual dominant Caleb has to suppress his urge to tie them to the bed until they understand that they both belong with him—forever. But if they don't come around soon, he'll be pulling those ropes out after all.

Alpha Turned

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Not all men are bad...

Strong, independent, and happy on her own, Hillary has grown from the naïve person she was four years ago, after a brutal rape turned her into a werewolf. The normal life she's made for herself is only upset when the moon calls to her and she has an uncontrollable urge to turn furry and chase small creatures. And she doesn't need a man for that...until she finally meets another werewolf, this one a gorgeous, sexy guy who is determined to change her mind about one furry man in particular—him.

No, some men are very, very good...

The minute Zach scents Hillary he knows she's the mate he's been searching for. Though both the wolf and the man are itching to claim her, first he has to convince her that he's one of the good guys, and that there are certain benefits to being an alpha werewolf. And there's no better way of making Hillary see that than giving her himself—body, mind and soul.