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Tactically Yours

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~J.C. Wilder

Tactically Yours, Men of SWAT

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There were times when she didn't think it would ever get any easier. Tonight was one of those nights.

Miranda Stephens stared out the kitchen window as she washed the dishes. It was almost nine o'clock on Christmas Eve and a blizzard had descended upon Haven, Ohio. Blizzards weren't unheard of in this part of the state, but it was very unusual to have one this early in the season. Then again, the weather had been bitterly cold since the first of November.

"And some people *still* don't think global warming exists."

The wailing of the wind could be heard over the stereo playing Christmas Carols. It was lonely, cold sound.

You should come over tonight, Randa. No one should be alone on Christmas Eve.

Ro's voice echoed through her mind. Her sister failed to realize that even when Johnny was working, Miranda wasn't alone. She ran her hand over the bulge of her very pregnant belly. She was days away from delivering her first child, whom she'd named Peanut, and her offspring was being far from patient.

Randa couldn't remember the last time she'd slept more than four hours in a row. The moment she'd get comfortable then the baby would decide it was time to run and jump in the womb.

It has to be a boy; a girl could never be this active.

"Just like his daddy," she murmured.

Plunging her hands into the warm, sudsy water, warmth touched her cheeks whenever she thought of her husband, Johnny. She'd never forget the first time she'd laid eyes on her future husband. She and her sister, Ro, had taken over their aunt's diner located next to the police station. Miranda took over the dining room as Ro wasn't exactly known for her sunny disposition.

Then again, she wasn't too sure Ro didn't give in so easily because all of handsome men in uniform intimidated her. Her sister wouldn't hesitate to take off after a robber but she balked in the face of a handsome man in uniform.

She was such a faker.

Their first week in business and everything that could go wrong did. The stove had died so their menu consisted of salads, cold cut sandwiches and coffee. The syrup for the soda machine had run down and it was only then they'd realized none had been ordered. She'd managed to shut the cash register drawer with the key still in the tray and Ro was forced to take a screwdriver to it just so they'd be able to make change for what few customers who'd dared to come in the door.

Then, to add insult to injury, she'd been waiting on a young mother whose child was armed with a fresh sippy cup of milk. Right as the bell over the door sounded, the little girl decided to wave her drink over her head. Without warning the lid came off and Miranda was doused in ice cold milk. Seconds later Johnny Stephens stood by her side and all coherent thought flew out of her head.

"I think you could use these."

Stunned, Miranda stared at the handful of napkins he held. Her cheeks heated and she ducked her head. She felt about three inches tall.

"Thanks," she mumbled.

"You're welcome."

Then he smiled and Randa fell in love.

Johnny Stephens was possibly the sexiest man she'd ever seen. At just over six-foot tall, with his bold features, straight nose and sharply etched cheekbones, only a

dead woman could ignore this man. His eyes were the darkest of blue and piercing in their intensity-the kind of eyes that caught people's attention. His dark hair was shaped into a military cut that accentuated his strong features.

In one word, the man was HOT!

"I just dropped in for a black coffee to go," he said.

"I'll get that for you-"

It happened so fast that later she couldn't say what exactly happened. She stepped toward the counter and the next thing she knew she was falling.

Johnny's face went from smiling to alarm and he lunged for her but it was too late. She landed on her back and took him with her. The feel of his long, hard body against hers was undeniably pleasurable. He was hard where she was soft and his gun belt dug into her belly.

But it wasn't his gun that got her attention. It was something lower. A certain part of his anatomy that was very happy to see her.

"Jeez, Johnny, the least you could do was buy the lady lunch before you flipped her on her back."

Now, years later, Miranda could only laugh at the memory. Johnny liked to tell their friends that she'd fallen for him first. Her response was that she'd swept him off his feet.

Releasing the stopper on the sink, the warm water started draining out.

She'd fought hard to stay away from him. Johnny's reputation as a man who could charm the panties off a nun didn't do anything to help the situation. She didn't want to be known as the Stephens flavor of the month; little did she know he'd saved the best for last.

A splash of water against her ankle caught her attention. Shocked, she looked down. Just yesterday Johnny had fixed the leaky sink and now it had given way again. She frowned, this water wasn't soapy dishwater.

"Oh my God, I think my water just broke."

Sargeant John Stevens, senior SWAT officer and father-to-be, was pissed as hell.

Not only was it Christmas Eve and he was working...

Not only was it supposed to be his night off...

Not only was it freezing cold and the snow had severely handicapped his sight, but some asshole nutjob had shot at him.

"What kind of jackass would shoot at an officer of the law?" he muttered under his breath.

"You won't take me alive!" The shooter's voice was barely discernable over the wail of the wind.

"What is it about the holidays that brings the psychos out in people?" Jay Barnes' voice sounded in the tiny earpiece in Johnny's ear.

"Just lucky I guess." John hissed. "Is he still in the trailer?"

"Affirm. He hasn't moved." Jay's drawl was even. "How you holding up man?"

"I'm freezing my balls off."

"Hell son, your wife is ready to drop any minute isn't she? You're going to need to hand those balls over in a few weeks anyway because she isn't going to let you near her with them." Picasso's southwestern accent flowed through the transmitter like liquid honey.

Jay laughed and Johnny's stomach flopped. Every time he thought of the impending birth he felt the same mix of fear and exhilaration. His wife, Miranda, was the

love of his life and he'd known he would marry her from the first time they met. Unfortunately it had taken a while to convince her of that.

"I need a favor."

Miranda White, the object of his most heated fantasies, stood on the other side of the counter. Dressed in a bright pink polyester uniform, her short and very curvy figure had an invigorating effect upon a certain portion of his anatomy. Her dress covered her from neck to knee but that didn't stop him from some very indecent daydreams.

With those curves and her smart mouth, Miranda was walking, talking sex on two spectacular legs. He'd let his imagination run riot with images of releasing each one to expose the pink flesh of her bountiful breasts. How many times had he dreamed of kissing his way down her body, taking time to find and arouse her most sensitive areas. Her nipples, her belly, the soft, wet flesh between her thighs...

He cleared his throat and pushed away the arousing images of Randa naked. He had to be on duty in less than an hour and he didn't want to issue tickets with a raging hard-on.

"What do you need, babe?" he asked.

"How well do you know, Picasso?"

"Well, he's a bit of loner so I don't think anyone can say they know him well-

"I'm thinking of asking Picasso to take me to the retirement dinner next week."

Stunned, John sat back. She wanted to what? Her attention was fixed on the saltshaker she was now cleaning and her cheeks were even pinker than before.

Miranda, the woman he'd been chasing for months, wanted to date Picasso?

He glanced down the length of the counter at the other man whose attention was glued to his book and who was shoveling pancakes into his mouth, oblivious to the stir he'd caused.

Over John's dead body would he allow her to date Picasso. Johnny Stephens was the only man in Haven that could make Miranda a happy woman. Now he needed to convince her of it.

Little did he know that Miranda was the only woman who could make him a happy man?

"-the last time you used your dick anyway?" Fresh was speaking. "Well, with a girl in the same room that is."

"Last night when I fucked your old lady," Picasso's voice was steady. "Sloppy seconds for you old man."

"Shit, Emma would kick Picasso's ass." Fresh's voice came through the transmitter.

The guys chuckled and Johnny could only grit his teeth. He'd been lying in the snow for more than three hours now and his limbs were slowly going numb. While he was dressed for the weather, layers of thermal clothing could only keep a man warm for so long, especially when they were lying in the snow with some asshole firing over their head.

"What's this guy's damage?" Jay spoke.

"Wife left him and took the kids." Fresh said. "Hell, I keep trying to get my wife to go away."

"Shitty time to be alone at this time of year." Jay commented.

Johnny flexed his numb fingers. He was a sniper for the team but at this point he wasn't convinced that he'd be able to hit anything. The snow was falling so fast he could barely see more than three feet away.

"Hey, Fresh, can you see this bastard t-t-through your scope?" His teeth began to chatter. There were at least fifteen other officers on the scene but he knew his only hope of not being shot was due to the ability of the second sniper.

“Well enough. I have a shadow in my sight and that’s all I need.” He popped his gum. “Why don’t you kick back, Saint Stephens? You might as well take a nap while the boys handle this.”

“No way you’d be able to get the shot anyway,” Picasso said. “You’re too cold and your visibility must be crap from that angle.”

“No shit,” Johnny muttered.

What he hated most about this situation was not being in control. It wasn’t the first time he’d had to place his life into the hands of his team, and he could only hope it wouldn’t be the last.

Don’t panic, Miranda. Johnny will be at home in any minute...

Even as the thought drifted through her mind she knew it might not be the case. When the tactical team had a callout he could be gone for an hour or a week. There was no time table when it came to calling in the Calvary and she was on her own this time.

The phone was disabled and her cellphone couldn’t pick up a signal and retain it long enough to make a call. She’d managed to send a text message to her baby distribution list, which included half of the tactical team and her sister, but she doubted it actually went through. Before the send message came up the cell lost signal.

With the car buried in the snow and the nearest neighbor three miles away it wasn’t exactly the kind of trip for a woman in full labor.

Another contraction hit her hard and she staggered. Grabbing the kitchen counter, she used it to prop herself up. Concentrating on her breathing, Miranda didn’t know how much time passed before the pain began to ease. Damn her stubbornness for not going to stay with Ro. If she had then she wouldn’t be alone, terrified and in labor.

Well, she’d probably be in labor and she’d still be afraid but at least she wouldn’t be alone.

Forcing herself away from the counter, she hobbled into the living room. Several hours had passed since her water broke and she’d been a busy girl. They’d just moved into the house a few weeks ago and everything was in disarray. Their bed was in the living room surrounded in sea of boxes. She’d already draped a painters’ drop cloths on the bed to protect the new mattresses and now she had to add some sheets and a comforter.

Her makeshift birthing kit was on the bed in a basket. She’d tried to gather everything she thought she might need if she had to give birth at home. Clean blankets, towels, a sharp knife, twine, gallons of fresh water, latex gloves, bulb syringe to clean the baby’s nose and mouth, warm baby clothing including a cap and a bottle of iodine. The only thing missing was her husband...and a hospital...and drugs, lots and lots of drugs.

The pains were coming faster now. Concentrating on putting one foot in front of another, she waddled over to the fireplace. She should’ve known she was in labor early this morning. Back pain had awoken her around four in the morning so she’d gotten up quietly leaving her husband asleep. He’d been working such long hours in the past few weeks to wrack up some overtime cash and he needed the rest. Now that she wasn’t working they were living on a cop’s salary and while Haven did pay well, the overtime cash came in handy with a baby on the way.

Picking up a log, she carefully added it to the fire.

Maybe they shouldn’t have bought this grand old farm house. They’d both fallen in love with it, sagging porch at all. and they’d bought it on a whim. At the time the house hadn’t even been for sale until the owner, a widower. had learned she was expecting their first child. Literally overnight he’d decided he’d be happier living in Arizona with his kids and thirty days later they’d moved in.

Taking the poker, she shifted the logs around.

It was a happy place, with good bones and mellowed plaster walls. She and Johnny would have a good life here, raising their children, entertaining friends and family.

She replaced the poker in the holder then turned. The large Christmas tree stood before the picture window, the colored lights casting sparks of light off the myriad of ornaments and tinsel. A smile curved her mouth. Yes, this house was going to be a very happy-

Another contraction hit her so hard that she was taken by surprise. The floor raced up to meet her and she cracked her head on the floor. The crack rang through her skull as a scream was torn from her lips.

"Johnny, I need you!"

"How are you doing Saint Stephens? Answer me, boy." Fresh's strident voice jerked Johnny back to reality. "Don't you fall asleep on me, son."

"You need to make a move now, guys." Johnny's voice was faint even to his own ears. "I'm not going to last much longer out here. I can't feel my arms or legs."

"Fuck," Jay muttered. "Let's shoot this bastard and get our guy out of the snow."

"Naw, too much paperwork." Picasso's voice was soft. "You hang in their Stephens, you've got that beautiful wife waiting for you and your first kid on the way."

Despite his icy skin beneath the tactical hood, he smiled. Miranda's face floated in front of his eyes. With her cap of dark brown hair and wide smile, she was the most beautiful thing he'd ever seen. Even with her big belly, swollen ankles and abnormally cranky disposition he still couldn't take his eyes off her.

He'd never forget the moment when they'd learned she was pregnant. She'd mentioned a missed period and he'd raced out to buy ten different pregnancy tests. The next morning she'd used every one of them and all of them said the same thing.

Pregnant.

He'd called in to work and they spent the rest of the day making love. The moment he put his ring on her finger he'd finally known true happiness. The guys had teased him mercilessly about marrying Miranda because she was 'one of the guys'. Working at Fitzy's she was their friend, advisor, drinking buddy and little sister. Secretly he was pretty sure they were jealous.

And she'd chosen him and he was the one lucky enough to call her wife.

"-getting you out, Saint Stephens. Your wife is in labor." The urgency in Jay's voice was unmistakable. "Just hang on and don't move."

Labor? Johnny frowned. Surely he hadn't heard right as Miranda wasn't due for another two weeks...

"Left, Barnes. Cover me from the west."

Picasso sounded winded as if he were running. What the hell was going on? Slowly, Johnny raised his head and the night exploded with gunfire.

Miranda bit on the knotted washcloth and screamed against her clenched teeth. The pains were coming barely a minute apart and she was soaked with sweat. She'd originally changed into a light cotton nightgown but even that was too hot. It lay in a sodden heap on the floor.

Nude, she was sprawled in her nest of pillows with her legs splayed and her heels braced against the mattress. The contraction finally eased and she spat the cloth out of her mouth.

“Oh, Peanut,” she panted. “You’re going to be so mad at me giving birth to you on Christmas. You’re going to feel cheated because your birthday and Christmas is on the same day.”

Running her hands over her slick belly, she let her head drop back against the pillows. It wouldn’t be long now. If she was right and her labor had started last night then she was about twenty hours into it.

Another contraction began.

Oh yeah, there was no turning back now.

Bearing down, she tried to keep her breathing on target only to give up. Her belly contracted hard and she pushed. A scream was torn from her soul and every muscle in her body tensed to push her baby into the world.

It seemed like hours later when the contraction eased. Panting like an out of shape sprinter, her eyes slid closed. She was so tired and all she wanted was to sleep but she wasn’t done yet. Peanut was determined to make his or her first appearance on Christmas and Mama was only along for the ride.

Another contraction hit hard and without thinking she bore down. Gripping her slick thighs, her fingers dug into the flesh. She felt something give and a warm rush of fluid.

Opening her mouth, she screamed for all she was worth.

Johnny, Jay and Picasso were breaking a path to the front door when the unholy scream sounded from inside house. Johnny hit the door so hard the frame disintegrated and it flew open, catapulting him into the house. With the others on his heels, he came to a skidding halt in the living room entry and the other two slamming into him like a bad cartoon.

All three men, decorated police officers, trained in tactical assault, weaponry and entry tactics, went pale at the sight of a nude Miranda in full labor.

“Don’t just stand there you stupid son of a bitches,” she shrieked. “Boil water or something.”

“Go sit with your wife, Saint Stephens.” Picasso smacked Johnny on the back then took off at a run for the kitchen with Jay at his heels. “I need to wash my hands.”

Johnny ran to her side. Climbing onto the bed, he pushed the pillows out of the way so he could hold her from behind. Leaning against the headboard with his laboring wife in his arms, Johnny knew he was home.

“Hey now,” his voice was shaky. “Advanced warning would’ve been nice.”

“Tell me about it.” Her eyes were wide and she looked utterly terrified. “I’m scared, Johnny. I-I-I’m so glad you’re home.”

“Me too, baby.” He kissed her forehead. Any lingering fear melted away with her words and a sense of calm descended over him. “Now Randa, let’s bring our baby into the world.”

Hours later the storm had slowed and the sky was much lighter. Miranda lay propped against her sleeping husband and their baby was wrapped in a blanket cuddled to her chest. Johnny was sound asleep with one arm around her and the other hand lay protectively across the warm sleeping bundle in her arms. Even though she was utterly exhausted she still couldn’t sleep.

She was too happy.

Looking down at the perfect daughter in her arms it felt like her heart would burst with happiness. Thankfully for them, Picasso had trained as an EMT in the Marines and he delivered their little Sophie with a minimum of fuss. With Jay as her cheering section had Johnny by her side, she couldn’t imagine a more perfect Christmas.

Author Biography

J.C. Wilder left the world of big business to carry on conversations with the people who live in her mind, fictional characters that is. In her past she has worked as a software tester, traveled with an alternative rock band and currently volunteers for her local police department as a photographer. She lives in Central Ohio with 6,000 books and an impressive collection of dust bunnies.

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